

# Evolving Urban Landscape: Colonial Influences and Selective Modernity in Sam Phraeng Shophouses and Aristocratic Palaces During King Rama V's Reign

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Received 2023-11-01; Revised 2024-09-29; Accepted 2024-10-24

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the architectural and urban transformation of Sam Phraeng, a historic Bangkok precinct, during King Rama V's reign (1868-1910). Employing Maurizio Peleggi's concept of 'Selective Modernity' and Iderlina B. Mateo-Babiano's work on urban space transformation, the research investigates modernity in an area near the Grand Palace considering historical restrictions on foreign residences.

The study notes that Western-style architecture near the Grand Palace was primarily limited to government offices, contrasting with areas like Northern Charoen Krung Road, which was developed as a foreign residential and commercial district since the late King Rama IV's reign. Against this backdrop, it explores Sam Phraeng's unique development through historical document analysis, architectural typology, comparative analysis, and socio-economic context examination.

The research reveals Sam Phraeng's evolution from a royal enclave to a vibrant commercial and cultural hub, reflecting broader societal changes while maintaining proximity to traditional power centers. The architectural landscape, particularly shophouses in Phraeng Nara and Phraeng Phuthon, showcases a blend of colonial design elements with local techniques and aesthetics.

This study contributes to understanding how non-colonized nations like Siam navigated the pressures of modernity, selectively adopting foreign elements while preserving cultural identity. Sam Phraeng's architectural and urban evolution offers insights into the complex processes of engagement with modernity, urbanization, and cultural adaptation in late 19th-century Siam, highlighting nuanced development approaches near traditional power seats.

**Keywords:** Sam Phraeng, King Rama V era, colonial-influenced architecture, urban transformation, selective modernity

## INTRODUCTION

The Sam Phraeng precinct, a historic area spanning approximately 42 rai (16.8 acres) in Bangkok's Phra Nakhon district, offers a unique lens through which to examine the concept of 'Selective Modernity' in late 19th-century Siam. Located east of the Grand Palace and bounded by Tanao Road, Atsadang Road, the Tiger God Shrine (Sala Chao Pho Suea), and Bamrung Mueang Road (Figure 1), Sam Phraeng underwent significant transformation during the reign of King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) from 1868 to 1910. (Wirasinchai, 2004)

Originally an agricultural landscape, Sam Phraeng evolved through three distinct phases: the Royal Enclave (1782-1851), the Commercial and Cultural Hub (1851-1910), and the period of Adaptation and Conservation (1910-present).

This study focuses on the second phase, coinciding with King Rama V's reign, which was characterized by rapid modernization and a shift from a noble residential area to a vibrant commercial and cultural center.

The precinct derives its name from three roads - Phraeng Phuthon, Phraeng Nara, and Phraeng Sapphasat - each named after sons of King Rama IV. These princes, with their varying ranks and roles, significantly influenced the area's architectural and urban development, exemplifying the process of selective modernity in their palaces and business ventures.

King Rama V's reign saw several modernization efforts that directly impacted Sam Phraeng, including infrastructure improvements, new transportation systems, land use changes, cultural developments, economic reforms, and

**Figure 1**

*The 1887 Bangkok Map Shows the Sam Phraeng Area's Significance as a Community District Near the Grand Palace, Bounded by Khlong Rop Krung and Khlong Lot*



*Note. Adapted from the Distance learning online educational media system project in honor of her royal highness princess maha chakri sirindhorn on the occasion of her 5th cycle (60th) birthday anniversary, April 2, 2015, developed to provide open access educational resources, by Likhitpornawan, T., 2019 (<https://oer.learn.in.th/d/116102>). Copyright 2019 by a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.*

influenced by the Bowring Treaty of 1855 (Bowring, 1977) which opened Siam to international commerce and set the stage for sweeping reforms.

The architectural landscape of Sam Phraeng during this era is particularly noteworthy. Two distinct styles emerged: the "Colonial Style" architecture, characterized by two-story shophouses with decorative facades, and the aristocratic palaces style, which blended traditional Thai architectural elements with colonial influences. These styles reflected the broader changes occurring in Bangkok during this period of rapid modernization and cultural adaptation.

This research aims to contribute to the understanding of how 'Selective Modernity' shaped the architectural and urban landscape of Sam Phraeng during King Rama V's reign. It examines the area's evolution as a commercial hub and explores how architectural features served as markers of social status and 'civilization' for the Siamese elite. The study focuses on three main research questions:

1. How did the concept of 'Selective Modernity' shape the architectural and urban development of Sam Phraeng during King Rama V's reign?
2. In what ways did the architectural features of Sam Phraeng shophouses and Aristocratic palaces serve as markers of social status and 'civilization' for the Siamese elite?
3. How did the development of Sam Phraeng as a commercial hub reflect the changing economic dynamics and urban planning strategies of Bangkok during King Rama V's reign?

The location of Sam Phraeng close to the Grand Palace and its mix of royal and commercial architecture make it a unique case study. The area provides an opportunity to examine how modernization efforts manifested in a space geographically and culturally close to the heart of traditional Siamese power, yet were still subject to the transformative forces reshaping Bangkok in the late 19th century. This research investigates Sam Phraeng's distinctive development, considering the historical context where, by old Siamese law, foreigners were required to build their houses at least 200 sen (approximately 8 kilometers) away from the Grand Palace (Sanitwong, 1963).

The study notes that colonial-style architecture near the Grand Palace was primarily limited to government offices, such as the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense. In contrast to areas like Northern Charoen Krung Road, which was developed as a residential and commercial district for foreigners since the late reign of King Rama IV and exhibited more pronounced foreign architectural influences (Jheamaneechotechai, 2022), Sam Phraeng represents a unique case of urban evolution.

By analyzing the architectural designs comparatively, both within Thailand and against international examples, this study aims to highlight Sam Phraeng's distinctive features and its place within global colonial and modernizing trends. It explores how proximity to the Grand Palace and modern amenities fostered urban community development, considering social, economic, and cultural factors. The research examines how Sam Phraeng architectural and urban development reflects the careful negotiation between modernity, traditional power structures, and cultural preservation in late 19th-century Bangkok, distinct from both the strictly regulated foreign areas and the government-focused colonial-style buildings near the palace.

This research contributes to the broader understanding of how non-colonized nations like Siam navigated the pressures of modernity and colonial influence, selectively adopting and adapting foreign elements while maintaining their cultural identity. The study of Sam Phraeng's architectural and urban evolution provides valuable insights into the complex processes of engaging with modernity, urbanization, and cultural adaptation in late 19th-century Siam.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the existing scholarship on Sam Phraeng's architectural and urban development, with a particular focus on the area's transformation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The review aims to situate the current research within the broader context of studies on Bangkok urban evolution, colonial influences on Siamese architecture, and the concept of selective modernity.

Sam Phraeng, an area where historical values have endured and evolved, has attracted diverse academic studies offering varied perspectives. Aleena Pongnapa Kohen's 'Sam Phraeng from Old Days to Today: Changes and Adaptations Among Urbanization' (2019) examines social changes and community adaptations within the precinct (Kohen, 2019). Popsook Tadtong, Apiradee Kasemsuk, and Pimolsiri Prajongsan's study 'Representative of in-between space upfront row houses: case study of Phraeng Phuthon' explores the use of objects to claim space in front of shophouses (Tadtong et al., 2021).

A significant contribution to the field is Wannapha Kaewmontha's 'Studying History Through Sam Phraeng Architecture'. This work analyzes architectural patterns from the mid-19th to early 20th century CE (reigns of King Rama IV and V) to reflect on historical community scenes. Kaewmontha's research provides valuable insights into the architectural changes in Sam Phraeng during the reign of King Rama V, which occurred due to the desire to engage with modernity and progress in ways similar to the West (Kaewmontha, 2013).

However, the current research diverges from Kaewmontha's work in two significant ways. Firstly, it emphasizes King Rama V's architectural identity in the Sam Phraeng neighborhood, contextualizing it within its relationship to foreign art. Secondly, the methodology employs a detailed comparison between Thai and Western architecture of the same period to explore artistic identity.

This research article challenges two prevailing concepts in the existing literature:

1. The notion that architectural changes were solely for the purpose of national development. This research argues that personal reasons, particularly the changing status of the king and upper class in the face of Western concepts, also played a significant role.
2. The idea that Singaporean architecture served as an authentic model of colonial art. This study contends that colonial architecture was often adapted to local conditions and frequently executed by non-professional architects, including soldiers and local craftsmen.

To address these gaps and provide a new perspective, this research incorporates Maurizio Peleggi's concept of 'Selective Modernity' from 'Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image' (2023). Peleggi's framework offers a lens through which to analyze the incorporation of colonial architectural elements in Sam Phraeng, particularly in aristocratic buildings. This approach helps elucidate how architectural choices reflected broader strategies of engaging with modernity in Siam, balancing Western influences with traditional Thai elements (Peleggi, 2023).

Furthermore, this study draws upon Iderlina B. Mateo-Babiano's work on Bangkok's urban spaces to understand Sam Phraeng transformation from a riverside locale to an urban hub. Mateo-Babiano's analysis of urban space transformation and the interplay between urban design and public life offers insights into how architectural changes in Sam Phraeng influenced community dynamics and reflected broader societal shifts (Mateo-Babiano, 2012).

While previous studies have extensively examined Western architectural influences in areas like Charoen Krung and Sampheng, Sam Phraeng offers a unique case study that has been relatively overlooked. Its proximity to the Grand Palace, combined with its evolution into a commercial hub, provides an opportunity to examine how colonial influences and efforts to engage with modernity manifested in an area closely tied to traditional Siamese power structures.

By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives and focusing on Sam Phraeng, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature regarding the nuanced ways in which selective engagement with modernity occurred in spaces that straddled both royal and commercial interests. It proposes that Sam Phraeng represents a unique case of 'negotiated modernity' in urban development. This concept suggests that the area's evolution was a continuous process of negotiation between traditional Thai urban forms, colonial influences, royal prerogatives, and the practical needs of a changing society.

In conclusion, this literature review reveals a significant gap in the study of Sam Phraeng's architectural and urban development, particularly in relation to the concept of selective modernity

during King Rama V's reign. By integrating Peleggi's concept of selective modernity and Mateo-Babiano's work on urban space transformation with a focused study of Sam Phraeng, this research aims to provide new insights into the nuanced process of negotiated modernity in urban development. This approach not only contributes to our understanding of Sam Phraeng's specific architectural evolution but also offers a fresh perspective on the broader dynamics of cultural adaptation and engagement with modernity in non-Western urban contexts during periods of rapid change.

## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a multi-faceted approach to analyze the architectural and urban development of Sam Phraeng during King Rama V's reign, focusing on the concept of 'selective modernity' and its manifestation in the area built environment. The methodology combines historical research, architectural analysis, and comparative studies to address the research questions.

### Historical Document Analysis:

- Examination of primary sources from the National Archives of Thailand, including royal decrees, official correspondence, and urban planning documents from the Fifth Reign.
- Review of secondary sources, including academic literature on Bangkok's urban development, Siam's engagement with modernity, and architectural history.
- Analysis of historical maps, particularly the 1887 Bangkok Map, to trace the physical evolution of Sam Phraeng.

### Architectural Typology of Sam Phraeng:

- Detailed documentation of existing structures in Sam Phraeng, focusing on shophouses and remaining aristocratic palaces.
- Photographic documentation and architectural drawings of key buildings, noting their stylistic features, construction techniques, and any modifications over time.
- Particular attention to the shophouses in Phraeng Nara and Phraeng Phuthon,

documenting their dimensions, materials, and decorative elements.

### Comparative Analysis:

- Comparison of Sam Phraeng architecture with contemporaneous buildings in other parts of Bangkok, particularly areas with strong colonial influences like Charoen Krung.
- International comparisons with shophouse architecture in other Southeast Asian cities, such as Singapore's Telok Ayer district, to identify similarities and unique local adaptations.
- Analysis of the aristocratic palace style in Sam Phraeng in relation to other royal residences in Bangkok and Colonial-influenced palaces in other non-colonized Asian countries.

### Visual Analysis of Decorative Elements:

- Detailed study of ornamental features, including gingerbread designs, stucco work, and wooden carvings.
- Analysis of the integration of traditional Thai motifs (such as 'lai kanok') with Western-inspired decorative elements.

### Spatial and Urban Planning Analysis:

- Examination of Sam Phraeng's urban layout, including road networks, plot divisions, and the relationship between residential and commercial spaces.
- Analysis of how infrastructure developments (such as road widening and tram lines) influenced the area architectural and economic development.

### Socio-economic Context Analysis:

- Investigation of land ownership patterns and changes during the study period.
- Examination of business records and commercial directories to understand the economic transformation of Sam Phraeng.
- Analysis of demographic data to trace changes in the area's social composition.

### Theoretical Framework Application:

- Application of Maurizio Peleggi's concept of 'selective modernity' to interpret architectural and urban planning choices.
- Utilization of Iderlina B. Mateo-Babiano's work on Bangkok's urban spaces to contextualize Sam

Phraeng's development within broader urban trends.

reflecting broader changes in Siamese society and urban planning. (Sangha, 2002)

### **Interdisciplinary Integration:**

- Synthesis of architectural, historical, and socio-economic data to form a comprehensive understanding of Sam Phraeng's transformation.
- Interpretation of architectural features as reflections of broader social, cultural, and economic changes in Siamese society.

This multi-method approach allows for a comprehensive examination of Sam Phraeng's architectural and urban evolution, situating it within the broader context of Siam engagement with modernity and the concept of 'selective modernity'. By combining rigorous historical research with detailed architectural analysis and theoretical interpretation, this methodology aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how colonial influences, local traditions, and efforts to engage with modernity interacted to shape the unique urban landscape of Sam Phraeng during King Rama V's reign.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Alchemy: The Transformation of Sam Phraeng from Royal Enclave to Urban Microcosm during King Rama V's Reign**

Sam Phraeng evolution from an agricultural landscape to a vibrant urban precinct is deeply intertwined with Bangkok development as the Siamese capital. The area transformation can be traced through three distinct phases, each

### **Royal Enclave (1782-1851)**

Sam Phraeng's rise to prominence began during the early Rattanakosin period. Initially serving as a boundary of Bangkok, the area was marked by rice fields typical of the city's early agricultural landscape. Nang Loeng is another example of a historic community that developed during this period (Marome et al., 2023). A significant transformation began during King Taksin's reign with the excavation of Klong Ku Muang Derm (Ku Muang Derm canal), enhancing the area's defining role. (Bunnag et. al., 1981) This initial development was further expanded during King Rama I's reign with the digging of Khlong Rob Krung and Khlong Lot (Rob Krung canal and Lot canal), extending the urban boundaries and transitioning Sam Phraeng from a suburban agricultural area to an increasingly urban locale (Thiphakorawong, 1980).

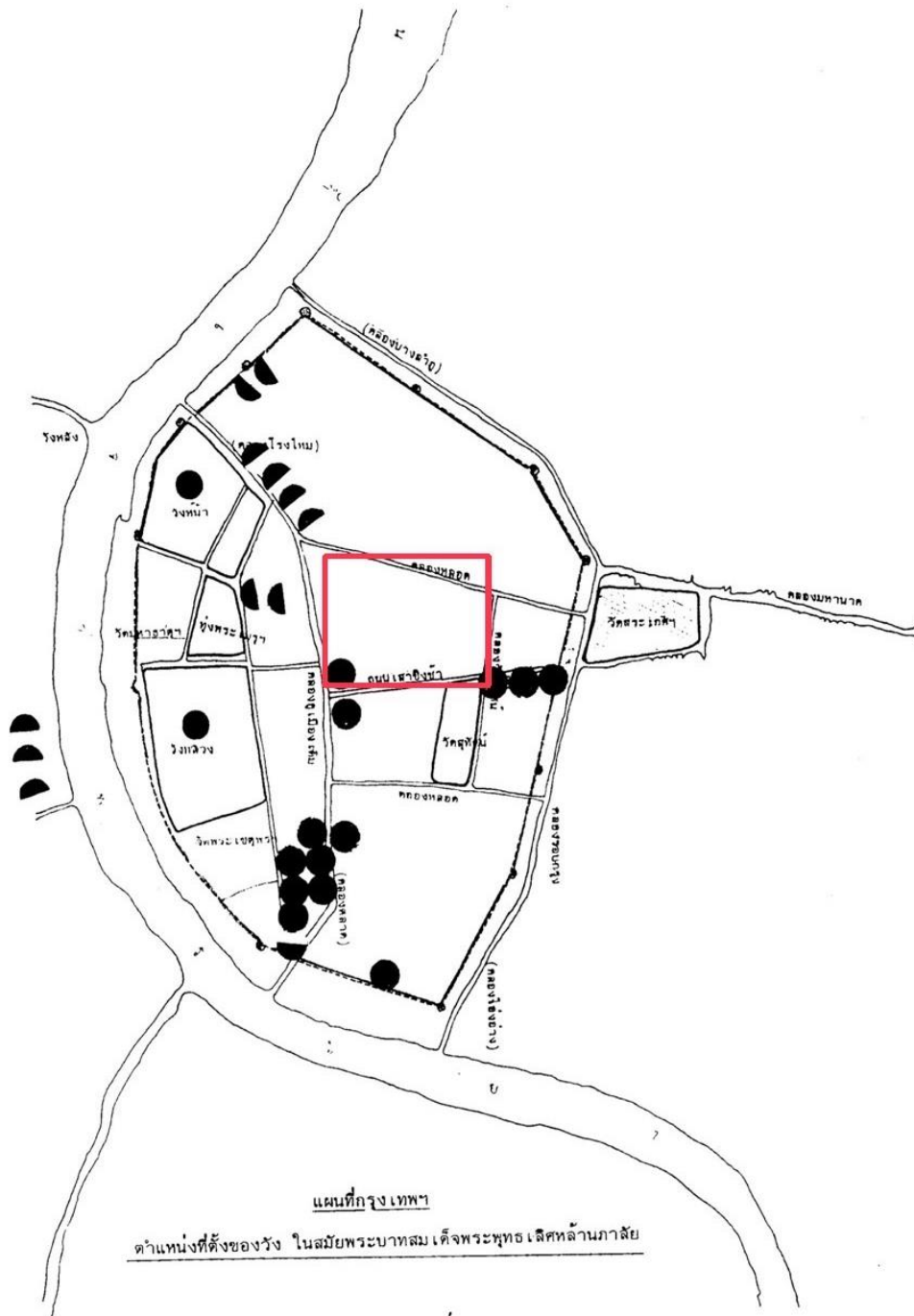
The area's proximity to the Grand Palace made it an attractive settlement for people. Before the initiation of public road construction during King Rama IV's reign, these canals served as the main thoroughfares, facilitating transportation and commerce. Homes and residences were logically established alongside palace construction from King Rama II's reign onwards (Suksri et al., 1982).

A pivotal moment in this phase was King Rama II's (King Phra Buddha Lertla Naphalai) order to construct "Saphan Chang Rong Si Palace Wang Nuea (The northern Chang Rong Si Palace)," situated inside present-day Phraeng Phuthon (Figure 2). This palace was built for his son with Chao Chom Manda Tim, further solidifying Sam Phraeng's transition from a peripheral area to a prestigious residential district within Bangkok's expanding urban core (Suksri et al., 1982, p.19).



### Figure 2

Map showing the location of Saphan Chang Rong Si Wang Nuea (The northern Chang Rong Si Palace), built during King Rama II's reign. This illustrates the early Sam Phraeng community, before its transformation into a new urban area with Prince Krom Muen Phutharet Thamrongsak's palace in King Rama V's era



*Note.* Saphan Chang Rong Si Wang Nuea built during King Rama II's reign. This illustrates the early Sam Phraeng community, before its transformation into a new urban area with Prince Krom Muen Phutharet Thamrongsak's palace in King Rama V's era. Adapted from *Palaces and royal residences in Bangkok (1782 A.D. – 1982 A.D.)*, by Suksri N, Kittikakul N., & Kaewmuang D., 1982, The Research Affairs office, Chulalongkorn University, p.250. Copyright 1982 by Suksri N., Kittikakul N., & Kaewmuang D.

### Commercial and Cultural Hub (1851-1910)

The reign of King Rama IV marked the beginning of significant changes in Sam Phraeng. He decided to establish a palace for Prince Krom Muen Phutharet Thamrongsak, commanding the demolition and renovation of Saphan Chang Rong Si Palace Wang Nuea (the Northern Chang Rong Si Palace), which remained until the prince's passing.

However, it was during King Rama V's reign (1868-1910) that Sam Phraeng underwent its most dramatic transformation. This period coincided with Siam's rapid engagement with modernity following the Bowring Treaty of 1855, which opened the country to international commerce (Bowring, 1977).

Key developments during this era included:

a) Infrastructure Improvements: King Rama V ordered the expansion and renovation of major roads. In 1870, Bamrung Mueang Road was widened to 6-9 meters, becoming a main

thoroughfare (Figure 3). In 1896, Atsadang Road (formerly Khlong Ku Muang Derm Road) was renovated, creating a crossroad with Tanao Road (National Archives of Thailand, R.S.127, YT.9/108; Figure 4). These improvements contributed to Sam Phraeng's growth as a commercial area near the Grand Palace. However, it's important to note that Sam Phraeng was a smaller commercial hub compared to the adjacent Sao Ching Cha area, which was located further along Bamrung Mueang Road. (Boonma, 2014)

While Sao Ching Cha was developed into a larger and more significant commercial center, Sam Phraeng's development was notable for its proximity to the palace and its direct benefit from King Rama V's infrastructure projects.

b) New Transportation: In 1888, King Rama V granted permission for the Siam Tramway Company to operate a tram line passing through Sam Phraeng along Tanao Road (Figure 5). This development significantly increased mobility and stimulated commercial activity in the area (Wirasinchai, 2004).

### Figure 3

*King Rama V renovated Bamrung Mueang Road, widening and realigning it. Shophouses were rebuilt uniformly and a new Sao Ching Cha market added. This urban renewal project would influence Sam Phraeng's future development*



*Note.* Shophouses were rebuilt uniformly and a new Sao Ching Cha market added. This urban renewal project would influence Sam Phraeng's future development. From *Uniformly rebuilt shophouses and new Sao Ching Cha market* [Photograph], by Crown Property Bureau. Copyright 2023 by Crown Property Bureau Archives.



**Figure 4**

*Atsadang Road in 1870*



*Note.* In 1870, Atsadang Road was modernized from a narrow dirt path to resemble Singapore's canal-side roads. This improvement prompted owners of three nearby palaces to create connecting streets to Atsadang Road, giving rise to the name 'Sam Phraeng' (Three Alleys) area, which is still used today. From *Atsadang road in 1870* [Photograph], by National Archives of Thailand. Copyright 2023 by National Archives of Thailand.

**Figure 5**

*The Red Tram Line Through Sam Phraeng*



*Note.* The red tram line through Sam Phraeng, owned by Prince Narathip Praphanphong's Thai Tram Company, reflected the area's evolution from waterways to roads, and from rice field to urban commercial zones. From *The red tram line* [Photograph], by National Archives of Thailand. Copyright 2023 by National Archives of Thailand.

c) Land Use Changes: King Rama V developed a keen interest in real estate, particularly in renting out properties to both local and foreign traders. King Rama V commanded the Office of the Privy Purse to purchase the palace from the heir and adaptively construct long parallel shophouses along Phraeng Phuthon Road, encircling the palace, which now houses the Thai RedCross Health Station and "Phutaret Space" for local activities (Wirasinchai, 2004; Figure 6).

d) Cultural Developments: Sam Phraeng became a hub for modern Thai culture. In 1896, Prince Narathip Praphanphong established the Preedalai Theater on Phraeng Nara Road, introducing Western-style opera and plays to Thai audiences (Wirasinchai, 2004).

e) Economic Reforms: The king's policies, including the transition from a feudal system to a more capitalist economy, allowed for increased commercial activity. This enabled both Thai and foreign merchants to establish businesses in Sam Phraeng (Ingram, 1971).

f) Administrative Reforms: The establishment of new governmental ministries in nearby areas brought an influx of civil servants to Sam Phraeng, further changing its character and demographics (Noranitpadungkarn, 1963).

### Adaptation and Conservation (1910-present)

This period saw the repurposing of royal properties and demographic shifts with an influx of Chinese immigrants (Kohen, 2019). Later, community-led conservation efforts began to preserve the area's unique architectural and cultural heritage.

### Architectural Evolution

The architectural landscape of Sam Phraeng during King Rama V's reign is particularly noteworthy. Two distinct styles emerged:

1. "Colonial Style" Architecture: This style is characterized by two-story shophouses with decorative facades, featuring elements such as arched windows, intricate stucco work, and ornate cornices. The ground floors typically served commercial purposes, while the upper floors were residential, reflecting the area's dual nature as both a living and trading space.

Aristocratic Palace Style: This style blended traditional Thai architectural elements with colonial influences. It often featured a unique half-concrete, half-wood construction, typically including verandas and adorned with intricate gingerbread ornamentations. However, they maintained distinctly Thai characteristics through

**Figure 6**

*The Former Palace of Prince Krom Muen Phutharet Thamrongsak*



*Note.* The former palace is now the location of Thai Red Cross Health Station 2 (Sukhuman Anamai). This transformation reflects the current development and use of space in the Sam Phraeng community.

2. the incorporation of traditional 'lai kanok' (ลายนก) flame-like motifs in their wooden carvings.

The architectural styles of these structures, blending traditional Thai elements with Colonial influences, exemplify the transformation of traditional architecture through Siam's selective engagement with modernity. They stand as tangible evidence of Sam Phraeng's unique position in Bangkok urban development, reflecting both its royal heritage and its evolution into a commercial and cultural hub during the transformative reign of King Rama V.

## **Negotiating Modernity: Sam Phraeng Architectural Metamorphosis as a Microcosm of Siam's Selective Engagement with Modernity**

Maurizio Peleggi's concept of 'selective modernity' from "Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image" (2023) provides an insightful framework for understanding the architectural evolution of Sam Phraeng during King Rama V's reign. This concept is vividly illustrated in the shophouses of Phraeng Nara and Phraeng Phuthon, constructed in the mid-reign of King Rama V. These shophouses, totaling 119 units in Phraeng Nara and 121 in Phraeng Phuthon (Office of Archaeology, 1978, p.192, p.229), exemplify the selective adoption of Colonial architectural elements while maintaining local adaptations. The basic two-story structure, with dimensions of 2.80-3 meters wide, 11-12 meters long, and 10-11 meters high, was inspired by Colonial shophouses (Figure 7).

However, the use of large hardwood components as the primary framework and thick brick masonry walls demonstrates a blend of Western design with local building techniques and materials. The incorporation of fire walls extending beyond the roofline every 2-3 units is a prime example of Peleggi's 'selective modernity' (Figure 8). This feature, adopted from Singaporean shophouses, was introduced after King Rama V explored Singapore and Penang in 1870 (Chungsiriarak, 2016). It addressed local

fire safety concerns, particularly relevant given the frequent conflagrations during King Rama IV's reign, such as the major fire in the Sampheng district (Tiptus, 2002).

The decorative elements of these shophouses further illustrate this selective approach. The gingerbread architectural style, characterized by ornate and often whimsical decorative elements, originated in England before spreading across Europe during the 19th and early 20th centuries. This style, sometimes called "Victorian," features intricate wood carvings resembling curling ginger roots, with designs typically including tulip motifs (Figure 9), geometric patterns, scrollwork, and naturalistic elements (Phanthuphakon & Tanyaphirom, 2004).

In Siam (now Thailand), the gingerbread style reached the peak of its popularity during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This period coincided with Siam's selective engagement with modernity and increased interaction with Western culture (Arkarapoti Wong, 2021), resulting in a unique hybridization of Western and Thai architectural elements. This cultural synthesis is evident in the gingerbread designs adorning structures from this era, such as the shophouses in Phraeng Phuthon, the prestigious Wang Worawana (Worawana Palace), and Wang Krom Phra Sommot Amoraphan (Palace of Prince Sommot Amoraphan).

In Phraeng Phuthon, craftsmen employed a technique of carving designs on entire wooden panels, creating large-scale patterns resembling kanok (flame-like) motifs. However, due to their size, the specific details of these motifs are less distinct. (Figure 10) Conversely, Wang Worawana exhibits more intricate designs, using two carving techniques: one similar to Phraeng Phuthon's approach, and another creating hollow patterns, resulting in more detailed ornamentation.

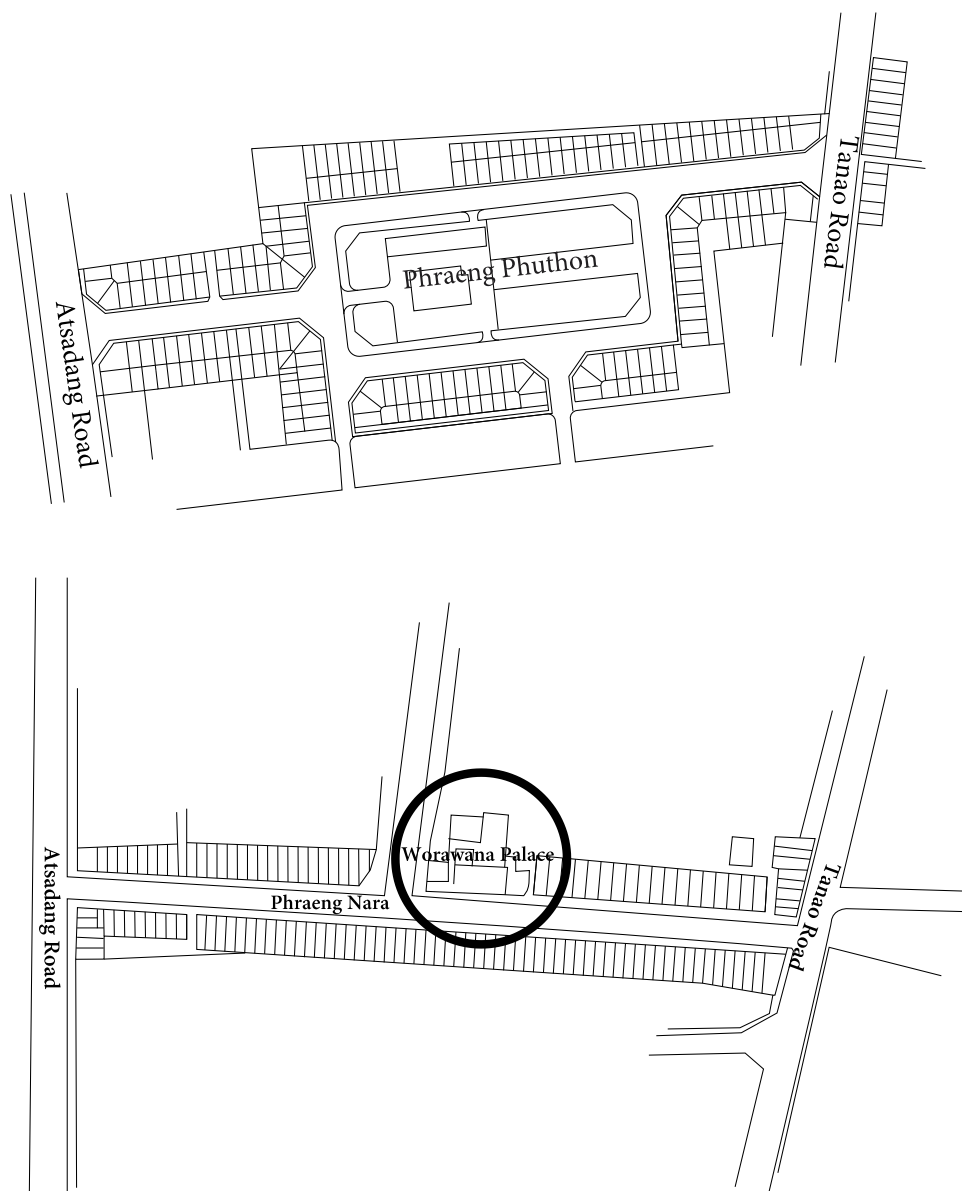
Interestingly, Wang Krom Phra Sommot Amoraphan (Palace of Prince Sommot Amoraphan), built around 1884, presents a middle ground in this stylistic spectrum. The gingerbread designs found in the transom windows of Prince Sommot Amoraphan's residence within this palace compound feature large-scale patterns similar to those in Phraeng

Phuthon, yet with a level of detail that approaches that of Wang Worawana (Worawana Palace; Figure 11). This suggests that while the preference for larger motifs was prevalent during

King Rama V's era, the execution of these designs could vary in intricacy depending on the building's prestige and the skills of the craftsmen employed.

### Figure 7

*Layout of Wang Worawana (Worawana Palace) and Layout of Shophouses in Phraeng Phuthon*



*Note.* (Top) Layout of Wang Worawana (Worawana Palace) surrounded by shophouses in Phraeng Nara, and (Bottom) Layout of shophouses in Phraeng Phuthon. These illustrate the royal elite's interest in investing in rental shophouse real estate during King Rama V's reign. Adapted From *Layout of Wang Worawana (Worawana palace) and layout of shophouses in Phraeng Phuthon* [Photograph], by Crown Property Bureau, Copyright 2023 by Crown Property Bureau Archives.



**Figure 8**

*An Example of a Shophouse Design in Phraeng Phuthon*



*Note.* Showing a construction method with fire walls installed every 3 units. This feature was common in Singapore shophouses to prevent fire from spreading to neighboring units in case of a blaze.

**Figure 9**

*An Example of a Vertical Tulip-Shaped Gingerbread Trim Found at Wang Worawana (Worawana Palace) in Phraeng Nara*



*Note.* This demonstrates the influence of Victorian colonial art in Siam during King Rama V's reign.



**Figure 10**

*The Carved Kanok (Flame-Like) Pattern Above the Windows of Shophouses in Phraeng Phuthon*



*Note.* Showcases a distinctive characteristic of the gingerbread trim found here. The pattern is less intricate, though the kanok outline is not clearly visible. It displays less refinement compared to the wooden fretwork found at Wang Worawana.

**Figure 11**

*Comparing the Size of (Left) the Gingerbread Fretwork Above the Windows of Wang Khrom Phra Sommot Amornphan With That of (Right) Wang Worawana*



*Note.* We can see that the patterns are similarly large. This demonstrates a characteristic feature of gingerbread designs during King Rama V's reign.

The difference in intricacy among these structures may be attributed to factors such as the size of available wood panels, varying craftsmen skill levels due to the buildings' differing importance, and the prevailing style during King Rama V's era that favored larger patterns. Wang Worawana designs particularly showcase this cultural blending, incorporating traditional Thai elements like kanok (flame-like) motifs and four-petal flower designs (Figure 12), while also adapting Western gingerbread techniques. This fusion resulted in a unique architectural style that maintained Thai aesthetic

principles while embracing new decorative methods introduced from the West.

However, these gingerbread designs were part of a broader architectural fusion seen in Sam Phraeng, which also incorporated other Western elements like rustication and pilasters. Rustication, a technique of contrasting stone textures popular in Renaissance architecture, was simulated using cement rendering. Pilasters, another classical element, were adapted to frame windows and doors, often featuring local decorative motifs (Chungsiriarak, 2016; Figure 13).

**Figure 12**

*The Elephant Ear-Shaped Bracket of Wang Worawana and the balcony Railing Displays*



*Note.* (Left) The elephant ear-shaped bracket supporting the balcony of Wang Worawana showcases wooden fretwork that combines Thai kanok patterns with Western floral designs. (Right) The balcony railing displays fretwork patterns resembling Thai four-petal flower designs.

**Figure 13**

*An Example of Western-Style in the Shophouses of Phraeng Phuthon.*



*Note.* An example of Western-style engaged columns with grooves imitating stonework, used to separate individual units in the shophouses of Phraeng Phuthon. The arched doorways also demonstrate Western influence. These features illustrate the impact of Renaissance art, which revived classical styles, becoming popular during King Rama V's reign.

This eclectic mix of styles in Sam Phraeng mirrors similar architectural trends in other parts of Southeast Asia. In places like Telok Ayer in Singapore or Penang, Malaysia, shophouses from 1900-1930/40 exhibit a mix of local, Chinese, and Western elements (Li, 2007). These buildings incorporate features such as fretwork, bat wing frames, and columns, showcasing a rich tapestry of cultural influences (Figure 14).

The resulting architectural landscape in Phraeng Phuthon and the broader Sam Phraeng area serves as a tangible representation of the cultural exchanges and selective modernization taking place in Siam during this pivotal period.

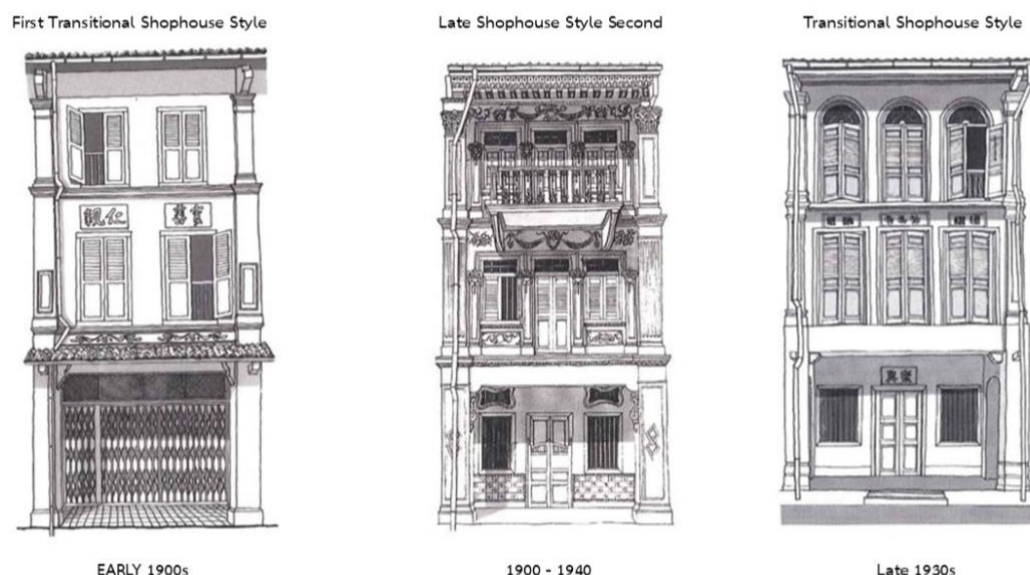
This adaptation reflects not only aesthetic preferences but also practical considerations, such as the size of available wooden panels and the varying expertise of local craftsmen. Peleggi's theory also helps explain the social implications of these architectural choices. The adoption of Western-style buildings by the Thai elite served as a means of projecting an image of 'civilization'

and modernity. This can be observed in the development of status markers from traditional Thai architecture, such as the number of roof tiers (Suksri et al., 1982) to Western-inspired elements like the scale of buildings, intricate façade ornamentation, and the presence of projecting porches.

The establishment of the Predalai Theater further exemplifies this trend, serving as a showcase of the nobility's role in introducing 'civilized' culture. Iderlina B. Mateo-Babiano's work on Bangkok's urban spaces provides additional insight into Sam Phraeng's development as a commercial hub. Her research emphasizes the importance of understanding urban development in the context of changing social and economic dynamics. The presence of royal palaces overseeing new business ventures – such as shophouse rentals, theater operations, and tram concessions – was crucial in shaping the area's development. Mateo-Babiano's work helps explain why Sam Phraeng became a significant commercial center despite not being on major routes like Bamrung

**Figure 14**

*Singapore's Shophouse facade Styles*



*Note.* Show Western colonial influence evolving over time. Early styles blended with local Chinese elements. The Late Shophouse style distinctively combined Chinese, Western, and local styles. Ornamentation decreased in the Second Transitional period, before Art Deco replaced Neoclassical influences. Adapted from *Singapore's shophouse facade styles*, by Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2023 (<https://www.ur.gov.sg/>). Copyright 2024 by Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Mueang Road. The royal presence attracted investment and development, while new infrastructure facilitated accessibility and commerce. This is evident in the strategic connections of Tanao Road, which links the three alleys to main thoroughfares like Bamrung Mueang Road and Ratchadamnoen Road.

Furthermore, Mateo-Babiano's emphasis on the transition from water-based to land-based urban development aligns with Bangkok's urban planning history as described. The development of Sam Phraeng, with its grid-like street pattern and shophouses, represents the second phase of Bangkok's urban evolution, marked by the introduction of Western-style streets, tramways, and railways (Heng et al., 2010).

The selective nature of this urbanization process is evident in how early road construction prioritized land allocation for real estate investment over transportation utility. This is exemplified by the simultaneous improvement of Bamrung Mueang Road, the construction of new row houses, and the Royal Treasury's negotiations to reduce the width of Sampeng Road to allow for deeper shophouses (National Archives of Thailand, R.S. 120, R.5 N.5 8/40 Document No. 1/1439).

In conclusion, the architectural and urban development of Sam Phraeng, as seen through the lenses of Peleggi's 'selective modernity' and Mateo-Babiano's urban space analysis, reveals a complex process of adaptation and negotiation. The Thai elite, through their architectural and urban planning choices, were actively shaping a modern Thai identity that balanced colonial influences with local traditions and needs. This resulted in a unique urban landscape that reflected Thailand's position at the crossroads of tradition and modernity during a crucial period of its history.

## CONCLUSION

The architectural and urban metamorphosis of Sam Phraeng during King Rama V's reign serves as a microcosm of Siam's selective modernity process. This study has demonstrated how the concept of 'selective modernity' shaped the precinct's development, manifesting in unique architectural forms that blended colonial

influences with Thai traditions. The shophouses of Phraeng Nara and Phraeng Phuthon, with their colonial-inspired structure yet locally adapted features, stand as tangible evidence of this negotiation between tradition and modernity.

The research has revealed that architectural features in Sam Phraeng served as powerful markers of social status and 'civilization' for the Siamese elite. The evolution from traditional Thai architectural status symbols to Western-inspired elements reflects the changing perceptions of modernity and prestige in late 19th-century Siam. The establishment of cultural institutions like the Predalai Theater further underscores the role of architecture in projecting an image of civilization and progress.

Furthermore, this study has illuminated how Sam Phraeng's development as a commercial hub mirrored the changing economic dynamics and urban planning strategies of Bangkok. The transition from water-based to land-based urban development, the strategic road constructions, and the influx of commercial activities all point to a broader shift in Siam's urban landscape and economic structure.

In conclusion, Sam Phraeng's transformation encapsulates the complex process of negotiated modernity that characterized Siam's engagement with colonial influences during this pivotal period. It demonstrates how architectural and urban development can reflect broader societal changes, serving as a physical manifestation of a nation's efforts to engage with modernity while maintaining its cultural identity. This research contributes to our understanding of urbanization processes in non-colonized contexts and offers insights into the nuanced ways in which societies navigate the pressures of globalization and selectively engage with modernity.

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