

Rearticulating Authority: Hybridity, Power, and the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall in Thai Statecraft

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the ideological function of hybridity in modern Thai architecture through a postcolonial lens, focusing on the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall, completed in 1974 and serving as Thailand's National Assembly for forty-four years, as a case study. As one of the country's most significant political buildings during the Cold War, the Assembly Hall embodied the military government's effort to project a modern national identity while consolidating state authority. While Thailand was never formally colonized, its cultural and architectural development was deeply shaped by indirect Western imperial influences, a condition scholars have described as crypto-colonialism. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity and Néstor García Canclini's concept of *mestizaje*, this study argues that Thai architectural modernity emerged not through passive imitation but through a calculated process of cultural appropriation, ambivalence, and elite political self-fashioning. Using parliamentary records, committee minutes, and government documents, as well as architectural analysis of the building's spatial organization, form, and symbolic composition, the paper demonstrates how modernist forms were selectively combined with Thai architectural and iconographic elements to articulate both national identity and political legitimacy. Rather than merely reflecting foreign influence, the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall functioned as an instrument of Thai statecraft, enabling the state to negotiate its dual position as both a formally sovereign nation and a participant within Western-led Cold War order. Ultimately, the paper contributes to broader debates in postcolonial architectural history by demonstrating how modern Thai architecture should be understood as a negotiated form of hybrid modernity rather than an exceptional case of uncolonized independence.

Keywords: hybridity, Mestizaje, crypto-colonialism, Modern Thai Architecture, postcolonial theory

INTRODUCTION

“... all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and un-monolithic” in *Culture and Imperialism* (Said, 1993, p. xxix)

In dominant narratives of colonialism, Siam (modern-day Thailand) is frequently overlooked because of its ostensibly “unique” status as the only nation in Southeast Asia to have avoided formal colonization. However, while Siam was never officially colonized, it was by no means immune to Western imperial influence (Prachukul, 2001). Like many of its neighboring nations, Siam engaged with successive global orders—first under British, then American hegemony—functioning as a politically sovereign yet economically and culturally subordinated state. Its ruling elites strategically aligned with metropolitan powers to consolidate authority over a multiethnic population (Jackson, 2010a). Consequently, scholarly interpretations of Western influence in Siam/Thailand have ranged from narratives of extensive Westernization to those emphasizing the persistence of Thai cultural identity.

Postcolonial theory provides a productive framework for examining how Western dominance reshapes identity, culture, and knowledge in geopolitically subordinated societies (Jackson, 2010b). Accordingly, it has gained increasing attention within Thai Studies, particularly scholarship examining the country’s complex processes of cultural adaptation, elite self-fashioning, and encounters with Western modernity. Yet postcolonial theory remains unevenly applied in the Thai context because nationalist historiography has long regarded postcolonial theory as inapplicable to a nation that retained formal political independence. As Jackson (2010b) argues, this assumption overlooks the fact that juridical sovereignty did not preclude enduring forms of economic, cultural, and geopolitical subordination. Herzfeld (2002) introduced the concept of *crypto-colonialism* to describe states that formally escaped colonial rule but remained subject to indirect Western domination through cultural prestige, economic dependence, and political influence. Jackson (2010b) similarly employs the concept of *semi-colonialism* to characterize Thailand’s condition of juridical sovereignty

coupled with persistent subordination to successive Western hegemonic powers. Together, these concepts suggest that Thailand’s modern experience cannot be adequately understood through the conventional colonizer–colonized binary. Scholars including Craig Reynolds, Thongchai Winichakul, and Herzfeld therefore argue that Thailand is better understood as a formally independent state that selectively appropriated Western forms of knowledge and power while simultaneously reproducing its own internal hierarchies.

Despite its political independence, Thailand shares many structural characteristics with formerly colonized societies. The nation underwent successive transformations in governance, education, and the built environment under changing global hegemonies, producing complex processes of cultural negotiation rather than simple imitation or resistance. Concepts such as hybridity, interstitiality, and the in-between therefore offer productive analytical tools for understanding Thai modernity, while notions of semi-colonialism and crypto-colonialism illuminate forms of indirect imperial entanglement (Hallward, 2001; Jackson, 2010b; Loos, 2010). Building upon these insights, this article draws upon Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity and Néstor García Canclini’s concept of *mestizaje*. Together, these complementary frameworks move beyond binary models of domination by emphasizing cultural negotiation, selective appropriation, and elite agency. Rather than treating hybridity as evidence of cultural dilution, this article argues that it reveals the strategic processes through which Thai elites negotiated both international expectations and domestic political authority.

Among the most influential contributions to postcolonial theory is Homi Bhabha’s concept of cultural hybridity. Bhabha reconceptualized colonial encounters not merely as acts of domination but as ongoing sites of cultural negotiation. His theory has been widely applied in Thai Studies to interpret the complex cultural practices of the Siamese elite—not as passive imitations of the West, but as strategic engagements with global modernity. In particular, scholars have used Bhabha’s work to examine how the ruling class selectively appropriated Western aesthetics to strengthen Bangkok-centric authority while simultaneously resisting

the homogenizing force of *siwilai*, a civilizing discourse that sought to remake the country in the image of the West. Bhabha's notion of hybridity therefore provides a valuable framework for understanding how architectural forms could simultaneously express foreign influence and local political aspirations.

While Bhabha's theory illuminates the negotiation of cultural identity under conditions of imperial dominance, it pays less attention to the political motivations behind elite cultural appropriation. To address this dimension, this article also draws upon Néstor García Canclini's concept of *mestizaje*, developed in the context of Latin American modernity. García Canclini argues that cultural hybridity often functions as a strategy through which ruling elites selectively appropriate prestigious foreign forms while consolidating domestic political authority. His emphasis on cultural mixing as a mechanism of state formation complements Bhabha's concern with ambivalence and negotiation, providing a broader analytical framework for examining how architecture mediated both international influence and internal political power in modern Thailand.

Against this background, this article argues that the dynamics of hybridity and crypto-colonial modernity identified by postcolonial theory are materially manifested in modern Thai architectural history. To demonstrate this, it examines the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall as a historically significant case through which these processes became architecturally articulated. By analyzing the building's historical context, planning process, architectural design, and symbolic program through the complementary perspectives of Bhabha's concept of hybridity and García Canclini's concept of *mestizaje*, the article demonstrates how architectural form functioned as a medium through which the Thai state negotiated both international subordination and domestic political authority.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework: Applying Postcolonial Theory to Siamese/Thai Society

Homi Bhabha's "Hybridity" Theory

Among the most influential contributions to postcolonial theory is Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity. Bhabha reconceptualized colonial encounters not merely as acts of domination but as ongoing sites of cultural negotiation. His theory has been widely applied in Thai Studies to interpret the complex cultural practices of the Siamese elite—not as passive imitations of the West, but as strategic engagements with global modernity.

Rather than defining hybridity as a simple fusion of two cultural elements, Bhabha emphasized its instability and openness. As Hernández (2010) explains, hybridity in postcolonial thought is not a fixed cultural mixture but an ongoing process of rearticulation—"a site of cultural productivity that emerges on the margins of culture, between cultures." It is within this "in-between" space—what Bhabha terms the *Third Space*, where identities are continually translated and rearticulated rather than fixed within binary oppositions—that cultural meaning is constantly negotiated, contested, and transformed (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity therefore generates new meanings through continual negotiation rather than resolving cultural differences.

Central to Bhabha's theory is his rejection of binary models that position the colonizer and the colonized as fixed opposites. Instead, he argues that colonial authority is inherently ambivalent, shaped by negotiation, contradiction, and continual slippage. Drawing upon poststructuralist thought, Bhabha demonstrates that colonial power is never absolute because every act of cultural transmission inevitably introduces difference and instability (Kraidy, 2005; Hernández, 2010). These tensions expose the internal contradictions of imperial authority and undermine its claims to cultural superiority.

This ambivalence is particularly evident in the colonial "civilizing mission," which sought to transform colonized peoples into subjects resembling Europeans. Colonial discourse

positioned non-Western societies as inherently inferior and placed them within a linear narrative of progress toward European civilization. Yet this project generated an inherent contradiction: the closer the colonized came to resembling the colonizer, the more they threatened the distinction between Self and Other upon which colonial authority depended (Hernández, 2010). The success of the civilizing mission therefore simultaneously reinforced and destabilized imperial power.

To explain this contradiction, Bhabha introduces the concept of *mimicry*, whereby colonial authority desires a subject who is “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). Mimicry produces a hybrid subject that is neither wholly native nor fully colonial (Hernández, 2010). Although it appears to reproduce colonial authority, mimicry simultaneously disrupts it by generating difference within repetition. The colonized appropriate the language, institutions, and symbols of the colonizer, but never entirely on the colonizer’s terms. The resulting gap between imitation and difference becomes a space through which colonial authority is subtly challenged.

For Bhabha, hybridity is therefore not simply the outcome of mimicry but the condition of colonial discourse itself. Every act of cultural transmission introduces contingency, reinterpretation, and transformation (Brah & Coombes, 2000). Rather than representing a failure of cultural purity, hybridity reveals that colonial authority can never fully reproduce itself. It is precisely this instability that enables new forms of cultural agency to emerge.

Thai architectural historian Fusinpaiboon (2014, p. 30) similarly characterizes Thailand’s engagement with Western modernity as a process of creative transformation rather than straightforward cultural fusion. As he observes, “there definitely has been hybridity and ambiguity... not in the sense of $A+B = (A+B)$... but rather $A+B = C$.” Rather than producing either simple imitation or transparent synthesis, encounters between Thai and Western cultures generated new cultural meanings and forms through continual negotiation and reinterpretation.

This understanding of hybridity provides an important framework for interpreting modern Thai

architecture. Rather than viewing architectural modernity as either the direct adoption of Western forms or the expression of an authentic national tradition, Bhabha’s theory instead emphasizes the negotiated and ambivalent character of architectural production. It provides a theoretical framework for understanding how imported architectural languages could be selectively appropriated, transformed, and reararticulated to serve new political and cultural purposes within Thailand’s crypto-colonial condition.

Néstor García Canclini’s “Mestizaje” Theory

Another influential framework for understanding cultural hybridity is Néstor García Canclini’s theory of *mestizaje*. Originally referring to racial and cultural mixing in colonial Latin America, García Canclini interprets the concept to explain how political elites selectively combine traditional and modern cultural forms to construct national identity and consolidate political authority under conditions of postcolonial modernity. Whereas Homi Bhabha examines hybridity within the context of formal colonial domination, García Canclini explores how hybrid cultural forms emerge in societies that have achieved political independence yet continue to be shaped by the legacies of colonialism and global modernity (Jackson, 2010a). This perspective is especially relevant to Siam/Thailand, where political sovereignty coexisted with cultural and geopolitical subordination within a crypto-colonial world order.

Jackson (2010a) argued that Thai Studies benefits from a dual analytical framework capable of explaining both Thailand’s subordinate position within the international order and the internal exercise of elite power, he argues that each illuminates a different dimension of Thailand’s historical experience. García Canclini’s concept of *mestizaje* is particularly useful for understanding *siwilai* (“civilization”) as a discourse of elite hegemony within Siam, whereas Bhabha’s theory of hybridity better explains Siam’s subordinate relationship to Western imperialism. As Jackson observes:

“[A]t the local level of autonomous royal and elite power, one should compare García Canclini’s account of the hybrid *mestizaje* discourse of Latin

American Hispanic elites as a mode of hegemonic rule to the nineteenth-century Siamese elite discourse of *siwilai* ('civilized'). In contrast, at [the] international level in which Siam's rulers were subordinate to the West, one should draw on Bhabha to read *siwilai* as a hybrid discourse manifesting Thai elites' subaltern resistance to Western imperialism" Jackson (2010a, p.188).

García Canclini developed the concept of *mestizaje* primarily to explain the legacy of Spanish colonialism in post-independence Latin America, where elite discourses of cultural mixture selectively incorporated Indigenous and African traditions into modern national identities. Rather than eliminating colonial hierarchies, this process reconfigured and legitimized them through culture. As Canclini (1995) argued, Latin American modernity did not replace tradition but selectively reorganized and reinterpreted it within new political and cultural contexts.

Kraniauskas (2000) similarly observes that García Canclini's concept of *mestizaje* reveals how traditional culture was strategically reproduced rather than erased. Alberto Moreiras further argues that García Canclini understood modernizing hybridity as the means through which political elites "take charge of the intersection of different historical temporalities and try to elaborate a global project with them" (Canclini, 1995). Hybridity therefore functions not merely as a cultural condition but also as a political strategy. By selectively appropriating Indigenous traditions while excluding those considered incompatible with elite agendas, Latin American ruling groups constructed national identities that reinforced postcolonial hierarchies while presenting themselves as culturally inclusive (Kraidy, 2005).

This framework provides a compelling lens for understanding Siam's encounter with Western modernity. Like the Latin American elites described by García Canclini, Siamese rulers neither simply imitate foreign models nor reject them outright. Instead, they selectively appropriated elements of Western modernity together with Indigenous traditions to reinforce domestic authority and legitimize elite rule. Cultural hybridity therefore became an instrument of governance rather than merely a consequence of foreign influence.

Thailand's crypto-colonial condition consequently operates through two interconnected systems of power. Internationally, Siam negotiated unequal diplomatic, economic, and political relationships with Western powers that resembled colonial dependency without formal colonization. This dimension is effectively illuminated through Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry. Domestically, however, the adoption of Western institutions, aesthetics, and administrative practices strengthened the authority of the Bangkok elite while facilitating the centralization of state power. García Canclini's concept of *mestizaje* more effectively captures this internal process, demonstrating how cultural hybridity became a strategy for consolidating political authority.

Taken together, Bhabha and García Canclini illuminate two complementary dimensions of Thailand's modernity. Bhabha explains how Thailand negotiated its subordinate position within a Western-dominated international order, whereas García Canclini reveals how Siamese elites strategically mobilized hybridity to consolidate domestic power and construct national identity. Rather than competing explanations, these theories provide complementary perspectives for understanding the complex and multilayered character of Thailand's crypto-colonial experience. The following section builds on these complementary theoretical perspectives to examine how these intertwined processes of international negotiation and elite statecraft materialized in modern Thai architecture through the case of the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall.

DISCUSSION

Strategic Borrowing as a Civilizing Tool in Siamese/Thai Statecraft

Building on García Canclini's concept of *mestizaje* as a strategy of elite cultural governance, the case of Siam demonstrates how the appropriation of foreign culture functioned not as a threat to national identity but as a mechanism of political legitimacy. As in Latin America during the height of European

imperialism, patterns of cultural hybridization in Siam reflected shifting geopolitical alignments and changing conceptions of civilization (Jackson, 2010a).

O'Connor (1995) contrasts mainland Southeast Asia with premodern India and China, whose rulers generally regarded themselves as centers of universal civilization and therefore viewed foreign influence with greater suspicion. By contrast, Southeast Asian polities occupied a geopolitical middle position and frequently appropriated prestigious foreign institutions, symbols, and cultural forms as sources of political legitimacy and urban authority. Within this historical tradition, Siamese elites regarded the civilizations of India, China, Europe, and later the United States not as threats to sovereignty but as valuable political resources.

Modernization therefore did not require abandoning indigenous traditions. Rather, Siam's rulers selectively appropriated foreign institutions, aesthetics, and administrative practices while reinterpreting them within local political and cultural contexts. In this article, *borrowing* refers not to passive imitation but to the selective appropriation and reinterpretation of foreign cultural forms that reinforced local political authority and national identity. Through this process, foreign symbols acquired new meanings within Siamese statecraft while simultaneously legitimizing elite rule.

Borrowing thus became a civilizing strategy through which political authority and cultural prestige were continually rearticulated (Loos, 2010). Rather than representing cultural dependency, it constituted a form of elite agency that enabled Siam to participate in successive international orders while preserving domestic control. The persistent appropriation of foreign cultural forms therefore reflected less the dominance of external powers than a long-standing strategy through which ruling elites continuously redefined political legitimacy.

Understanding borrowing in this way shifts attention from questions of cultural authenticity to the political uses of cultural appropriation. It is within this broader historical tradition that modern Thai architecture should be understood—not simply as evidence of Western influence, but as a material expression of elite statecraft.

Hybridity in the Formation of Siamese/Thai Modernity

The civilizing process in Siam/Thailand was never simply one of cultural imitation or external imposition. Although it involved appropriating the prestige of dominant global powers, this process was consistently accompanied by reinterpretation and reinvention. Hybridity in the Siamese/Thai context therefore emerged less as a subaltern response to colonial domination than as a deliberate strategy of elite self-empowerment. Through the selective appropriation of foreign cultural forms, the ruling class strengthened its authority while constructing a distinctive model of modernization under domestic control.

Patterns of cultural assimilation in Siam/Thailand had long been recognized by historians and anthropologists, even before the emergence of postcolonial theory. David Streckfuss cites Léon de Rosny's observation that Thai culture is "the result of every sort of hybridity." Likewise, the French historian Georges Coedès observed before the Second World War that:

"[T]he Thai have always been remarkable assimilators: they have never hesitated to appropriate for themselves whatever in the civilization of their neighbors and masters might place them in a position to fight victoriously against them" (Coedès, 1944/1968, p. 191).

For Siamese and Thai elites, foreign cultural symbols consistently functioned not as threats to national identity but as resources through which political legitimacy could be expanded and redefined.

These historical observations reveal the political logic beneath what has often been celebrated as Thailand's "genius" for cultural appropriation or its so-called "miracle of tolerance." Drawing upon Reid (1993), Kitiarsa (2005) argues that the Age of Commerce in mainland Southeast Asia fostered cultural and religious hybridity through a regional ethos of tolerance. Peter Jackson, however, challenges this romantic interpretation, arguing instead that:

"[T]his tolerance was not a 'miracle,' but reflected the strategy of power outlined above. Thai 'syncretism' and 'tolerance' are cultural expressions of a premodern project of political power, and self-conscious assimilation of the

foreign became a defining element of modern Thai national identity because of its centrality to historical strategies of elite rule" (Jackson, 2010a, p. 193)

Viewed from this perspective, hybridity in Thailand was not merely a cultural phenomenon but a longstanding political strategy through which ruling elites legitimized their authority while reinforcing existing hierarchies. Rather than promoting pluralism or cultural equality, the selective appropriation of foreign forms enabled the state to integrate diverse influences into a centralized national identity. As Marwan Kraidy similarly observes, "discourses of cultural mixture [in Thailand] have historically served ideologies of integration and control—not pluralism and empowerment" (Kraidy, 2005, p. vii).

This political logic became particularly evident during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Siamese rulers consciously redefined themselves through the language of *siwilai* ("civilization"). More than simply denoting Westernization, *siwilai* functioned as a discourse through which the monarchy selectively appropriated foreign institutions, aesthetics, administrative reforms, education, architecture, etiquette, and diplomacy while redefining them as expressions of Thai civilization. Positioned between regional powers and expanding Western empires, Siam's rulers used this language of civilization to reinforce domestic authority while enhancing the kingdom's international legitimacy. Power and cultural borrowing thus became inseparable.

A key concept underlying this strategy was *kleun-khai* (กลืนกลาย), literally meaning "to swallow, to transform into oneself," which captures how cultural borrowing was understood as incorporation rather than submission (Jackson, 2010a). Rather than implying passive imitation, *kleun-khai* described the selective absorption and reinterpretation of foreign cultural forms within Thai society. As Kasian Tejapira notes, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab identified "love of national independence, toleration, and power of assimilation" as defining characteristics of the Thai nation (Tejapira, 2001, pp. 23–24). Political

autonomy and cultural receptivity were therefore presented as mutually reinforcing. Hybridity became an instrument through which Siam preserved its sovereignty while participating in an international order increasingly dominated by the West.

This strategy extended beyond political institutions into architecture, urban planning, court rituals, and material culture. Through these practices, Siamese elites fashioned a modern identity that resonated with international expectations while reinforcing domestic authority. Winichakul (2000a, 2000b) argues that the appropriation of Western idioms enabled Siam's elites to "recapitalize" their authority with minimal disruption to existing hierarchies. As India and China gradually lost their status as dominant civilizational models, the West emerged as the principal source from which Siam reconfigured its political legitimacy.

Bhabha's notion of mimicry provides a useful lens for understanding this process. By reproducing Western forms while simultaneously transforming them, Siamese elites occupied what Bhabha describes as the Third Space—a site in which cultural meanings were negotiated rather than simply copied. The adoption of Western styles in clothing, court ceremonies, urban planning, and architecture (Figure 1) enabled the monarchy to appear modern while preserving a distinctively Thai political identity. The result was neither imitation nor resistance alone but a hybrid cultural formation that reinforced elite authority through strategic adaptation.

The historical trajectory provides the foundation for the architectural analysis that follows. Rather than viewing modern Thai architecture as either Western imitation or the continuation of indigenous traditions, this article argues that architectural hybridity constituted a deliberate strategy of statecraft. The U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall represents a clear architectural manifestation of this long-standing process, demonstrating how international architectural languages were selectively appropriated to negotiate both geopolitical subordination and domestic political legitimacy.

Figure 1

The Royal Bangkok Sports Club



Note. The Royal Bangkok Sports Club, established in 1901, is one of Bangkok's oldest sporting institutions. From *Royal Bangkok Sports Club, c. 1910* [Photograph], 1910, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_Bangkok_Sports_Club_c.1910.jpg). In the public domain.

Case Study: The U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall

Historical Background

To examine how architectural hybridity materialized within Thailand's crypto-colonial condition, this section investigates the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall, completed in 1974 as Thailand's second parliamentary complex. Serving as the seat of the National Assembly until 2018, the building witnessed military governments, semi-democratic administrations, democratic transitions, repeated coups, and successive constitutional reforms. Rather than treating the Assembly Hall simply as a government building, this article considers it an architectural expression of Thai statecraft through which changing relationships between monarchy, military authority, parliamentary democracy, and international modernity found material expression.

The establishment of the National Assembly of Thailand followed the promulgation of Siam's first constitution in 1932, which transformed the country from an absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy. During the period examined in this article, the National Assembly consisted of the House of Representatives and the Senate, reflecting Thailand's bicameral

parliamentary system. Prior to 1932, however, the Kingdom of Siam had never possessed an elected or representative legislature, as legislative authority resided exclusively in the monarch. Although constitutional government fundamentally altered the political structure of the state, the monarchy continued to occupy a central ideological position. The king continues to be understood as a *Dharmaraja*, a righteous ruler who governs according to the Buddhist principle of Dharma (Patamasukhon, 1974), illustrating the continuity of traditional political thought within the new constitutional order.

Following the Siamese Revolution of 24 June 1932, King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) accepted the Khana Ratsadon's draft of the Temporary Charter for the Administration of Siam, promulgated on 27 June as the country's first constitution. The Charter established the People's Assembly, initially consisting of seventy appointed members, which convened for its inaugural session on 28 June in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, an Italian Neo-Classical royal reception hall designed by Mario Tamagno and Annibale Rigotti and completed in 1915 (Patamasukhon, 1974) (Figure 2). A permanent constitution followed on 10 December 1932 (Figure 3). Although the Khana Ratsadon initially regarded the population as unprepared for a fully elected legislature, Thailand held its first parliamentary election on 15 November 1933.

Figure 2

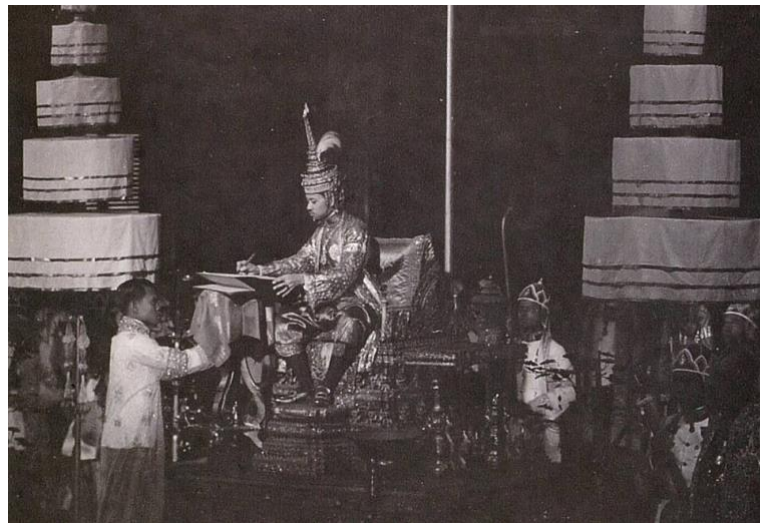
Revolutionary Armored Cars Move to Secure the Royal Plaza in Front of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall During the Siamese Revolution on 24 June 1932



Note. From *Armored Cars in Front of Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall in Bangkok 1932* [Photograph], 1932, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armored_Cars_in_front_of_Ananta_Samakhom_Throne_Hall_in_Bangkok_1932.png). In the public domain.

Figure 3

King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) Signs the First Permanent Constitution of Siam on 10 December 1932



Note. From *King Prajadhipok Signs Constitution of Siam 1932* [Photograph], 1932, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_Prajadhipok_Signs_Constitution_of_Siam_1932.jpg). In the public domain.

Following the first parliamentary election, King Prajadhipok proposed that the National Assembly continue meeting in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (Figure 4). Over the following decades, however, the parliamentary system expanded beyond the building's original capacity. The transition from a unicameral to a bicameral legislature substantially increased the number of legislators and administrative personnel, while

parliamentary committee reports documented numerous functional deficiencies that rendered the Throne Hall increasingly unsuitable for a modern legislature. In addition to inadequate accommodation for members, committee rooms, and administrative offices, the reports criticized the building's environmental performance, noting insufficient natural lighting, poor ventilation, excessive heat and humidity, and severe

acoustic reverberation caused by its marble interior. Proposed improvements, including the installation of mechanical air-conditioning and acoustic treatments, were ultimately rejected because they would compromise the historic and architectural character of the building (National Archives of Thailand, 1951–1962).

These functional limitations prompted successive governments to propose the construction of a permanent parliamentary complex (Figure 5). Three separate proposals (1938, 1950, and 1962), however, failed to bring the project to construction. During the deliberations of the third Parliamentary Construction Committee in 1962, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) questioned whether constructing a new parliament building was necessary, observing that the National Assembly might continue using the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall given the considerable public expenditure involved (Patamasukhon, 1974). The committee responded that the existing building had become incapable of accommodating an expanding bicameral legislature, lacked sufficient offices and supporting facilities, and remained an important venue for royal ceremonies. Consequently, it concluded that a purpose-built parliamentary

complex had become both functionally and symbolically necessary.

The proposal was ultimately revived during the military government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and Field Marshal Praphas Charusathien (Figure 6). Beyond addressing practical deficiencies, the project presented an opportunity to associate the regime with the construction of a national monument representing the modern Thai state. At the same time, the symbolic meaning of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall had become increasingly incompatible with the representational needs of constitutional government. Designed as a royal ceremonial hall, its Italian Neo-Classical architecture, monumental spatial composition, and elaborate decorative program remained inseparable from the visual language of monarchical authority. By contrast, the restrained forms of postwar modern architecture—with their emphasis on functional planning, technological progress, and rejection of historic ornament—were increasingly regarded as more appropriate for expressing the institutional identity of a modern legislature and the constitutional principle that political authority derived from representative government rather than absolute monarchy.

Figure 4

The People's Assembly in Session in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, ca. 1937



Note. From *Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall Parliament* [Photograph], 1937, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ananta_Samakhom_Throne_Hall_Parliament.jpg). In the public domain.

Figure 5

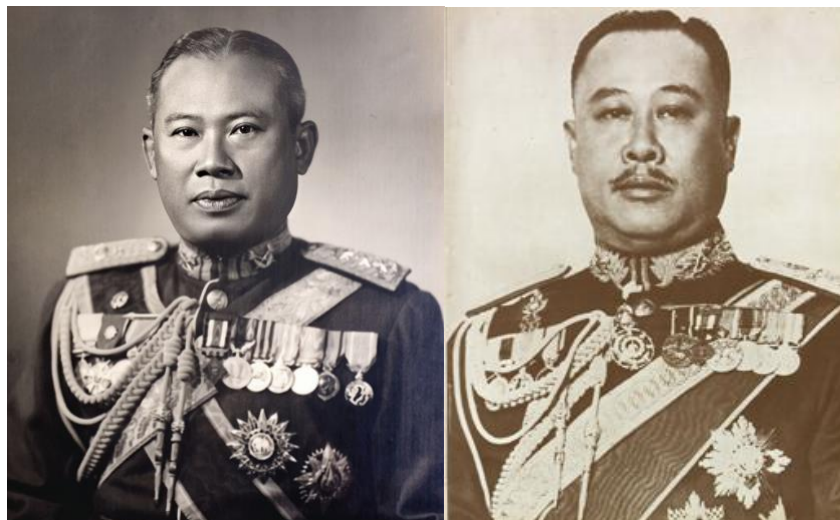
Land Granted for the Construction of the New Parliament Complex



Note. King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) granted the 7.9-acre plot of royal land—north of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, east of Dusit Palace, and adjacent to Rajavithi Road. From *Thai Dusit Parliament Map* [Map], by Nord794ub, 2022, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thai_Dusit_Parliament_Map.png). CC BY-SA 4.0.

Figure 6

Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (Left) and Field Marshal Praphas Charusathien (Right)



Note. Kittikachorn and Charusathien were principal leaders of the military government that approved the construction of the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall in 1969. Left image from *Thanom Kittikachorn 1960s* [Photograph], 1960, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thanom_Kittikachorn_1960s.jpg). In the public domain. Right image from *Praphas Charusathien* [Photograph], 2016, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Praphas_Charusathien.jpg). In the public domain.

These practical and symbolic considerations culminated in the government's approval of a new National Assembly complex in 1969. Nevertheless, the project was carefully framed not as a rejection of the monarchy but as a reorganization of institutional functions within the constitutional state. The military government ensured that the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall continued to serve as the venue for major royal and state ceremonies, thereby preserving its ceremonial association with the Chakri monarchy while transferring the everyday activities of parliamentary governance to the new Assembly Hall. Rather than replacing one political symbol with another, the creation of the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall (Figure 7) redefined the architectural relationship between monarchy and parliament, allowing each institution to occupy a distinct yet complementary place within Thailand's constitutional order.

This historical background provides the political context for understanding the planning and design of the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall. As the following section demonstrates, the project was never conceived as a simple exercise in architectural modernization. Instead, it embodied the same processes of selective appropriation, negotiation, and reinterpretation discussed in the preceding theoretical sections, translating

international architectural models into a distinctly Thai architectural expression of modern statehood.

Planning a New Parliament

Planning had begun in 1966 under a fourth Parliamentary Construction Committee, and after the cabinet approved the project in 1969, the Department of Public Works oversaw its construction. The project represented far more than the provision of additional parliamentary space. It was conceived as a monumental national undertaking to embody the aspirations of a modern Thai state while accommodating the functional requirements of an expanding legislature.

The committee's deliberations reveal that the architectural character of the new parliament was regarded as a matter of national importance. In the committee's earlier deliberations, Luang Sutthisan Ronnakorn, Chairman of the Parliamentary Construction Committee, argued that the new parliament should express a distinctly Thai architectural identity while reflecting the country's artistic and cultural heritage. At the same time, however, he acknowledged that the design would necessarily require adaptation from foreign precedents where appropriate. According to a contemporary newspaper report preserved in the National Archives of Thailand (1951–1962), he explained:

Figure 7

The U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall



Note. The site of Thailand's former National Assembly, the hall was commissioned in 1969, constructed between 1970 and 1974, and demolished in 2019. From *Thai Parliament House* [Photograph], 2008, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thai_Parliament_House.JPG). In the public domain.

“The new parliament building should embody Thai architectural form, artistic expression, and culture. However, it may be adapted, where necessary, from foreign models, while maintaining Thai architecture as its principal foundation.”

This approach echoed an earlier position articulated by Nat Phothisprasat, who advocated “following international style but adapting it to suit our ideas” (Phothisprasat, 1943, as cited in Fusinpaiboon et al., 2021). This statement reveals one of the central tensions underlying the project. Although the committee sought to create a parliament that represented Thai national identity, it simultaneously recognized that the functional and technological requirements of a modern legislature demanded architectural solutions that could not be derived solely from traditional Thai precedents. Rather than viewing foreign influence as incompatible with national identity, the committee envisioned selective appropriation, in which external models would be adapted to serve a fundamentally Thai architectural expression.

To inform the design process, the cabinet authorized Pon Chunlasewok, chairman of the architectural subcommittee, and Prasert Patamasukhon, Secretary-General of the House of Representatives and later Secretary-General of the National Assembly (1960–1971), to undertake a month-long study tour of parliaments in Britain, several other European countries, and India in 1970, in order to refine the arrangement of the chamber and offices (Patamasukhon, 1974, p. 1027).

Earlier, in 1950, the Department of Public Works requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs obtain architectural drawings, photographs, and planning information for parliament buildings in the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United States for the committee's consideration (National Archives of Thailand, 1950, April 24–September 25). These initiatives demonstrate that foreign precedents

formed an official component of the state's design strategy. Rather than relying on indigenous architectural precedents, the committee examined international examples to evaluate planning strategies, legislative chambers, committee rooms, circulation systems, and administrative facilities. Foreign precedents were understood not as models for direct imitation but as sources of technical and spatial knowledge to be selectively adapted to Thailand's political, cultural, and institutional context.

This approach reflected broader patterns of Thai statecraft discussed in the previous sections. The committee's objective was neither to replicate Western parliamentary architecture nor to reproduce traditional Thai architecture unchanged. Instead, it sought to reconcile the symbolic demands of national identity with the functional requirements of a modern parliamentary institution. The planning process itself therefore embodied a negotiated approach to architectural production, in which international knowledge was selectively appropriated to serve domestic political and cultural objectives.

The commission was eventually awarded to Pon Chunlasewok (1930–2013), an architect with the Department of Public Works who had also served as chairman of the architectural subcommittee responsible for developing the parliamentary project. Rather than producing a direct imitation of foreign parliamentary architecture or a literal revival of traditional Thai forms, his proposal translated the committee's objectives into an architectural language that synthesized modern planning principles with carefully selected Thai symbolic elements. As the following section demonstrates, the completed U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall materialized this negotiated approach through its planning, architectural language, and symbolic composition, reflecting both international modernist influences and the political aspirations of the Thai military government (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Architectural Model of the Secretariat of the National Assembly and the Joint Assembly Chamber, Designed by Pon Chunlasewok and His Team



Note. From *Anuson Nai Prasert Patamasukhon, B.E. 11 Mithunayon 2530* [Cremation memorial book of Prasert Patamasukhon, 11 June 1987] (p. 138), edited by P. Patamasukhon, 1987, Rungreung Sat Kan Phim. Copyright 1987 by Rungreung Sat Kan Phim.

Architectural Expression of the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall

The U-Thong Nai House of Parliament complex originally consisted of three principal buildings. The first, the Parliament House, was a three-story structure of approximately 11,000 square meters that accommodated the National Assembly chamber, shared by both the House of Representatives and the Senate. It also contained the offices of the President and Vice Presidents of the National Assembly and supporting administrative spaces. The second was a seven-story Secretariat building housing parliamentary offices, the parliamentary secretariat, and printing facilities. The third was the Parliament Club, a two-story reception and social building serving members of Parliament. The three buildings were connected by covered bridges that facilitated circulation throughout the complex.

According to Pon Chunlasewok, the functional organization of the Parliament House was intentionally kept as simple as possible. The circular Assembly chamber occupied the center of the floor plan and was surrounded by offices and ancillary rooms, allowing legislative activities to be organized around a clearly defined

symbolic and functional core. This centralized planning reflected the functional requirements of parliamentary governance while creating a coherent circulation system throughout the building (Promyothi, 1974). Rather than emerging solely from the architect's individual vision, this planning strategy also corresponded closely with the state's study of foreign legislatures, which examined circulation systems, legislative chambers, committee rooms, and administrative organization. The completed plan therefore materialized the state's deliberate adaptation of international parliamentary precedents to Thailand's institutional needs.

The building's most distinctive architectural feature was its 31-meter-span thin-shell concrete roof covering the Assembly chamber (Figure 9). At the time of its completion, it was the largest unsupported thin-shell roof in Thailand, demonstrating both technological ambition and structural innovation. Beyond its engineering achievement, the roof became the defining visual symbol of the National Assembly, distinguishing the building from earlier governmental architecture and signaling Thailand's embrace of contemporary architectural modernism during the Cold War.

Figure 9

The Thin-Shell Concrete Roof Spanning the Main Assembly Chamber



Note. From *Parliament Building, U-Thong Nai Road, 26 August 2009* [Photograph], by P. Wimolrang, 2009, Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:อาคารรัฐสภา_ถนนอุทองไน_26สิงหาคม_2552_\(The_Official_Site_of_The_Prime_Minister_of_Thailand_Photo_by_พีรพัฒน์_วิมลรงค์_-_Flickr_-_Abhisit_Vejjajiva.jpg\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:อาคารรัฐสภา_ถนนอุทองไน_26สิงหาคม_2552_(The_Official_Site_of_The_Prime_Minister_of_Thailand_Photo_by_พีรพัฒน์_วิมลรงค์_-_Flickr_-_Abhisit_Vejjajiva.jpg))). CC BY 2.0.

Material selection similarly reinforced this image of modernity. Pon Chunlasewok specified white-gray marble for both the exterior and interior finishes, leading the Thai press to nickname the building the "Marble Parliament." The choice of marble, however, carried symbolic as well as aesthetic significance. As Noobanjong (2013) observes, the marble intentionally recalled the white Carrara marble cladding of the nearby Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. Rather than rejecting the architectural legacy of the monarchy, the new parliament established a visual dialogue with its predecessor while expressing a distinctly modern architectural language. The material continuity symbolized both institutional succession and political transition (Figure 10).

The interior arrangement of the Assembly chamber further illustrates the relationship between architectural form and political ideology. Unlike the democratic amphitheatrical arrangement traditionally associated with parliamentary debate, the chamber adopted a lecture hall configuration in which cabinet members occupied a raised platform while ordinary members of Parliament sat below. This hierarchical spatial organization reflected the political realities of the Thanom–Praphas regime,

where executive authority remained dominant despite the constitutional framework of parliamentary government. The architecture projected the institutional image of democracy while reinforcing the centralized authority of the military government. As Noobanjong (2013) argues, the chamber reveals a fundamental contradiction between democratic representation and authoritarian political practice.

Nevertheless, one important architectural element embodied the democratic aspirations of the new parliament. An elevated public gallery overlooking the Assembly chamber enabled citizens and members of the press to observe parliamentary proceedings, while a closed-circuit television system broadcast debates throughout the parliamentary complex and to the public. Although these mechanisms of transparency were periodically suspended during closed parliamentary sessions, they nevertheless reflected an effort to represent the legislature as a modern public institution. The coexistence of authoritarian spatial hierarchy and democratic mechanisms of public observation illustrates the architectural ambiguity that characterized the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall throughout its operation.

Figure 10

Statue of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII), Located at the Highest Point of the Marble Ceremonial Entrance to the National Assembly



Note. From *Statue of King Prajadhipok at the Thai Parliament Museum* [Photograph], by Iudexvivorum, 2017, Wikimedia Common ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prajadhipok_statue_-_Thai_Parliament_Museum_-_2017-01-26_\(016\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prajadhipok_statue_-_Thai_Parliament_Museum_-_2017-01-26_(016).jpg)). CC0 1.0.

Architectural Hybridity and Thai Statecraft

The architectural language of the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall reveals that the design was neither a direct imitation of Western modernism nor a continuation of traditional Thai architecture. Rather, it emerged through selective appropriation in which international architectural precedents were adapted to satisfy the functional requirements of a modern legislature while expressing Thai political aspirations. This process reflects the dual dynamics identified by Bhabha's concept of hybridity and García Canclini's theory of *mestizaje*: the negotiation of Thailand's subordinate position within a Western-dominated international order and the strategic use of architectural hybridity by the Thai elite to reinforce domestic political legitimacy.

One of the building's most frequently discussed features is its resemblance to Le Corbusier's Palace of Assembly in Chandigarh, India. The formal composition of the Thai National Assembly—particularly its curved parapet, vertical concrete piers, reflecting pools, and the organization of circulation—closely recalls

Corbusier's modernist vocabulary (Figure 11). Rather than dismissing these similarities as simple imitation, they should be understood within the broader context of Thailand's search for an architectural language for a modern parliamentary institution. As the parliamentary committee records demonstrate, the design team deliberately studied parliament buildings abroad during the design process. International precedents were incorporated as part of the design process rather than borrowed indiscriminately.

The choice of Chandigarh is significant. Le Corbusier's Capitol Complex (Figure 12) was designed for newly independent India and quickly became one of the most recognizable architectural symbols of postcolonial nation-building. By appropriating elements of this architectural vocabulary, the Thai architects positioned the new National Assembly within a broader international discourse of modern statehood. At the same time, these modernist forms were selectively reinterpreted through local symbolic references and adapted to Thailand's political circumstances. The result was not architectural replication but a negotiated

architectural language situated between international modernism and Thai statecraft.

A similar process appears in the relationship between the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall and Oscar Niemeyer's National Congress in Brasília. The spatial organization of the Thai Assembly chamber closely resembles the Chamber of Deputies in Brasília, while omitting the second

chamber that symbolizes Brazil's bicameral legislature (Figures 13, 14, and 15). This modification demonstrates that the architects did not simply reproduce Niemeyer's design. Instead, they selectively appropriated architectural elements compatible with Thailand's legislative and symbolic requirements. The comparison illustrates architectural translation rather than imitation.

Figure 11

Curved Parapet and Concrete Piers Vividly Referencing Le Corbusier's Design



Note. From *90 Pi Ratthasapha* [90 Years of the Parliament House] (p. 6), by Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2022, Secretariat of the House of Representatives Press. Copyright 2022 by Secretariat of the House of Representatives. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 12

Le Corbusier's Palace of Assembly in Chandigarh



Note. Completed in 1962, the palace features a monumental hyperbolic roof and sculptural forms that exemplify his civic architecture. From *Palace of Assembly Chandigarh 2006* [Photograph], by Duncid, 2006, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palace_of_Assembly_Chandigarh_2006.jpg). CC BY-SA 3.0.

Figure 13

Oscar Niemeyer's Brazilian National Congress



Note. Two cupolas rising above the flat roof distinguish the chambers of the bicameral legislature. From *Palácio Nereu Ramos (National Congress of Brazil), Brasília* [Photograph], by D. Dabravolskas, 2015, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pal%C3%A1cio_Nereu_Ramos_-_Bras%C3%ADlia_-_20150603172246.jpg). CC BY-SA 4.0.

Figure 14

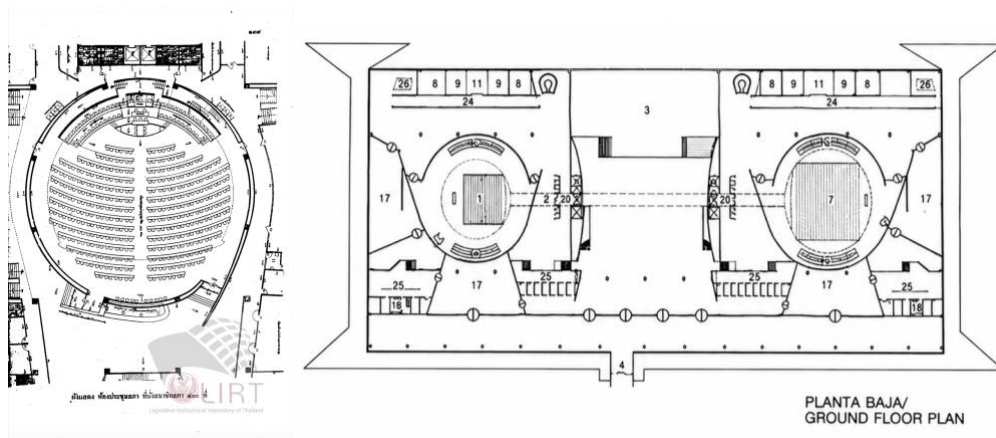
Interiors of Thailand's National Assembly (left) and Oscar Niemeyer's National Congress in Brasília (right), With Notable Formal Similarities



Note. Left image from *Senate of Thailand* [Photograph], by J. Berry, 2007, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Senate_of_Thailand.png). CC BY-SA 3.0. Right image from *Plenário do Congresso* [Photograph], by R. Edilson and S. Rodrigues, 2015, Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plen%C3%A1rio_do_Congresso_\(16428631862\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plen%C3%A1rio_do_Congresso_(16428631862).jpg)). CC BY 2.0.

Figure 15

Floor Plans of Thailand's National Assembly (Left) and Brazil's Chamber of Deputies (Right), Demonstrating Resemblance in Scale and Layout



Note. Left image from *Anuson Nai Prasert Patamasukhon, B.E. 11 Mithunayon 2530* (p. 139), edited by P. Patamasukhon (1987), Rungreung Sat Kan Phim. Copyright 1987 by Rungreung Sat Kan Phim. Right drawing by the author based on Oscar Niemeyer's National Congress floor plan. Adapted from *Architecture Classics: National Congress / Oscar Niemeyer*, by D. Douglass, 2023, ArchDaily (<https://www.archdaily.com/773568/ad-classics-national-congress-oscar-niemeyer>). Copyright 2023 by ArchDaily.

The controversy surrounding accusations of plagiarism further illustrates this ambiguity. In response, Pon Chunlasewok emphasized that the building elevations were intentionally designed with simplicity and that the decorative elements crowning the roof were derived from the traditional Thai flower garland decorating the Jumsai Throne (Figure 16) rather than from Niemeyer's architecture. Whether these explanations account for the formal similarities is less important than what they reveal about the design process. The architects sought to reconcile two seemingly contradictory objectives: creating a building that expressed a distinct Thai identity while employing an internationally recognized modern architectural language. Their response demonstrates that hybridity was neither accidental nor unconscious but a deliberate strategy.

Beyond formal resemblance, the architectural language of the National Assembly reflected the geopolitical conditions of the Cold War. As Chatri Prakitnonthakan has argued, the adoption of contemporary modern architecture was closely connected to Thailand's alliance with the United States and its position within the Free World during the 1960s and 1970s. Modern architecture functioned not merely as an aesthetic preference but also as a visual representation of Thailand's international political alignment. At the same time, selected Thai symbolic elements allowed the building to project a national identity rooted in local political traditions. The resulting architecture embodied the military government's effort to reconcile international modernity with domestic legitimacy.

Figure 16

Decorative Elements Surrounding the Rooftop, Inspired by the Floral Garlands Adorning the Jumsai Throne.



Note. From *Phra Ratcha Koraniyakit Ratchakan Thi 9* [Photograph], Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture, (n.d.) (<https://www.finearts.go.th/songkhlamuseum/view/7160-พระราชกรณียกิจ-รัชกาลที่-9?page=8>). Copyright by Fine Arts Department.

The U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall demonstrates that architectural hybridity in Thailand cannot be understood as passive Westernization. Although the parliamentary committee explicitly sought to create a building expressing Thai architectural identity, the functional demands of a modern legislature and the political aspirations of the military government led its designers to appropriate architectural languages developed elsewhere. Rather than diminishing the building's significance, these adaptations reveal how architecture became an instrument of Thai statecraft. The completed parliament was therefore neither wholly Thai nor wholly Western. Instead, it materialized the dual processes identified by Bhabha and García Canclini: negotiating Thailand's place within a Western-led geopolitical order while reinforcing the authority of the ruling elite through the symbolic language of modern architecture.

CONCLUSION

Hybridity as Strategy in the U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall

The U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall exemplifies the architectural ambiguity at the heart of Thailand's crypto-colonial modernity. Situated between global geopolitical pressures and domestic elite governance, its design reflects a hybrid architectural language that appropriated international modernism while articulating a distinctly Thai political identity. Through Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, the building demonstrates how modern architecture became a site of negotiation rather than imitation. Its thin-shell roof, modern structural system, and formal composition positioned Thailand within an international architectural discourse associated with modernization, while selected Thai symbolic elements asserted cultural continuity and national legitimacy. The building was neither wholly Western nor wholly Thai but occupied what Bhabha describes as a Third Space in which new

architectural meanings were produced through cultural negotiation.

The archival evidence suggests that this hybridity emerged through a conscious design process rather than passive Westernization. Architectural hybridity did not arise after the design process began; it appears to have been part of the state's planning agenda throughout. The chairman of the Parliamentary Construction Committee argued that the new building should embody Thai architectural identity, while the state also collected architectural documentation foreign parliaments and, in 1970, sent its Secretary-General and designer to study them abroad. This apparent contradiction reflected a fundamental architectural challenge. Because traditional Thai architecture had never developed a building type capable of accommodating the functional requirements of a modern democratic legislature, the architects necessarily turned to contemporary international precedents for planning, structural systems, and spatial organization. The resulting design selectively adapted these architectural solutions while incorporating Thai symbolic references, fulfilling the committee's objective of reconciling modern parliamentary functions with a distinctively Thai architectural expression.

Viewed through Néstor García Canclini's concept of *mestizaje*, this process reveals how architectural hybridity also functioned as a strategy of elite statecraft. Rather than merely reflecting foreign influence, the military government appropriated international architectural modernism to construct a monumental symbol of national progress while reinforcing its own political legitimacy. The new parliament projected the image of a modern democratic institution even as its spatial organization and political context reflected the centralized authority of the Thanom–Praphas regime. Architectural hybridity became not merely an aesthetic condition but a political instrument through which the state negotiated both international expectations and domestic authority.

The comparisons with Le Corbusier's Palace of Assembly in Chandigarh and Oscar Niemeyer's National Congress in Brasília further illuminate this process. These similarities should not be understood as evidence of architectural imitation but as manifestations of Thailand's broader strategy of selective cultural appropriation. By

adapting internationally recognized models of parliamentary architecture to local political, symbolic, and cultural conditions, the designers produced a building that embodied both Thailand's participation in global modernity and its effort to define an autonomous national identity.

The U-Thong Nai Assembly Hall demonstrates that architectural hybridity in Thailand should be understood as a deliberate strategy of statecraft rather than a consequence of cultural dependency alone. By bringing together Bhabha's theory of hybridity and García Canclini's concept of *mestizaje*, this study shows that modern Thai architecture operated at two interconnected scales: externally, negotiating Thailand's position within a Western-led Cold War order, and internally, reinforcing elite authority through the symbolic language of architecture. More broadly, the paper suggests that postcolonial architectural history can offer productive insights into societies that were never formally colonized, revealing how architecture mediated complex relationships between sovereignty, modernity, and political power beyond the conventional colonizer–colonized binary.

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