

A Review on Historic Monument Conservation in Thailand: Problems of Modern Heritage

by

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Abstract

Since Thai conservation institution of historic monuments (the FAD) was established in 1911, Pre-Modern monuments (be built before 1909) have been well preserved. However, Modern ones (be built between 1909 and 1979) have received less attention and are increasingly demolished. It is worth reviewing the situation of historic monument conservation in Thailand in order to find out the problems that impact on Modern heritage conservation. Therefore, conservation philosophy, laws, regulation, and registration processes in Thailand will be analyzed, including a study of DOCOMOMO International as the globally active conservation organization of Modern heritage, and DOCOMOMO Thailand concerning national conservation. The results of this study will not only review the problems of Modern heritage conservation but also understand factors involved in order that solutions can be suggested directly to this point.

Keywords: Conservation of historic monuments, Modern heritage, DOCOMOMO Thailand, Problems of Modern heritage in Thailand

1. Introduction

The Fine Arts Department (FAD), Ministry of Culture, Thailand is the main national institution of historic monument conservation which was founded in 1911. According to the Department of City Planning (CPD) (2003), 511 sites in Bangkok are defined as historic monuments. 191 of these are legally protected by conservation laws, and these 191 sites are registered sites of historic monuments. 4 out of 191 sites are Modern heritage¹⁾. This means that Modern heritage has received less attention from the FAD, which might lead to the risk of its demolition the future. Therefore, the aims of this paper are to:

- 1) Define the problems of Modern heritage conservation in Thailand in terms of conservation philosophy, laws, regulation, and national registration processes of historic monuments
- 2) Study the conservation of Modern heritage at international level: DOCOMOMO International
- 3) Propose an initial solution: DOCOMOMO Thailand

To achieve the three objectives, the FAD's Gazette of registered historic sites, the CPD's reports and statistics, and national laws are analyzed.

1.1 Definitions

It is necessary to define two important terms. First, 'Modern heritage' means buildings or structures of all building types, ranging from private to public buildings which are built from 1909 to 1979. 1909 refers to the completion year of the oldest Modern building which is listed by DOCOMOMO Thailand. 1979 is defined as the end of Modern movement in Thailand²⁾. Second, 'historic monument' and 'ancient monument' are interchangeable. In this paper, 'historic monument' is used when discussing about practical conservation and 'ancient monument' is used when referring to conservation laws.

1.2 Previous studies

The fields of conservation and history of architecture have been widely studied by Thai and foreign scholars. Palakawong Na Ayuttaya (1993) gives a historical overview of historic monument conservation in Thailand from 1923 to 1933³⁾. Prakitnonthakarn (2003) provides an analysis of political meaning in architecture being built during 1892-1957 which was the period of early Modern movement in Thailand⁴⁾. Suteerattanapirom (2005) studies conservation concept and practice of historic monuments through case studies in Thailand⁵⁾. The work by Akagawa and Sirisrisak (2005) clarifies the issues on conservation policy,

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legislation and the FAD’s framework⁶⁾. Wajvisoot (2012) analyses European design concept and conservation principles of new structures over ruins so as to make recommendations for the similar works in Thailand⁷⁾. Povatong (2014) outlines history of Modern Thai architecture between 1914 and 2014 regarding social, economic and cultural transformation⁸⁾. He also points out that Modern movement is a global phenomenon and is reflected in the development of architecture in each country. It is apparent that the previous studies have focused on either historic monument conservation or Modern architectural history. However, they provide useful information for this paper. This paper will try to combine two fields of research on historic monument conservation and history of Modern architecture.

2. Conservation Movement in Thailand

2.1 The Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture

The Fine Arts Department (FAD) was established by King Rama VI in 1911. The FAD was merged into the Royal Institute and became its Archaeological division in 1926. It was re-established as the FAD again in 1933 and was under the Ministry of Education in 1958. Finally, it is under the Ministry of Culture since 2002. Currently, the FAD is in charge of conservation of ancient objects and monuments, playing the major role in regulating conservation projects in Thailand. The latest organization chart of the FAD is announced in 2014 as shown in Fig.1⁹⁾. Office of Archaeology (in grey shade) is responsible for historic monument registration which will be discussed in section 2.4.1 and 2.4.2.

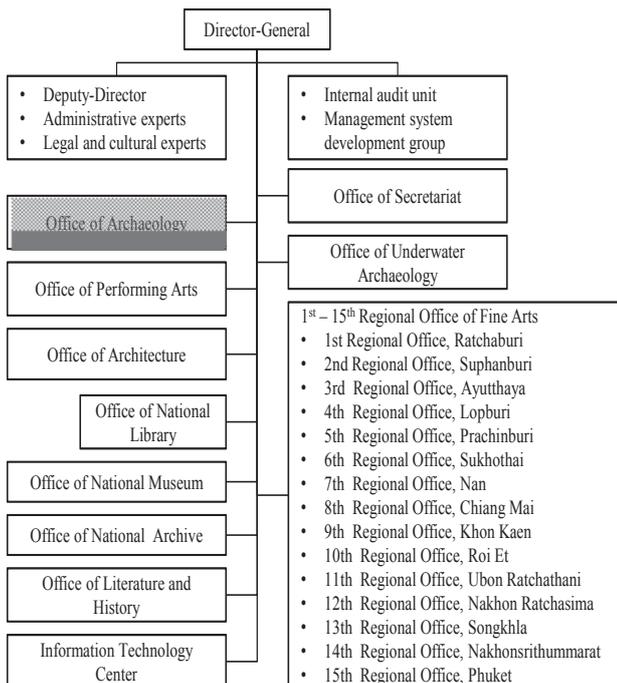


Fig.1 The Fine Arts Department organization chart 2014

2.2 Conservation philosophy in repairing techniques (1926-2005)

In 1926, the FAD was merged into the Royal Institute as its Archaeological division. HRH Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, the Royal Institute’s director, delivered a Speech on Preservation of Ancient Arts and Monuments on 19th November 1930. He stated that ancient monument conservation methods could be divided into three stages: first, maintaining the current state of monuments without demolition, second, stabilizing monument structure and third, restoring monument to the original state. In case of restoration done by non-governmental parties, the government officers should advise them to restore according to existing monument characteristics and not build new structure near the monument¹⁰⁾. This speech informs the attempt of implementing guidelines on conservation and levels of intervention to the authority and general users.

At the end of 1931, there was a significant conservation project of Anastylis method at Banteay Srei, Cambodia by French archaeologists from the École Française d’Extrême Orient (EFEO, the French School of the Far East)¹¹⁾. Anastylis is a conservation technique to restore stone monuments by using the original material from their sites¹²⁾. In 1962, the first Anastylis project was commenced at Phimai, Thailand, by French Anastylis experts from EFEO¹³⁾. Since then, Anastylis technique has been used for many restoration projects of stone monuments in Thailand such as the projects at Phanumrung Temple and Muangtum Temple in 1971.

In 2005, the FAD published a conservation technical manual in order to give step by step instruction of conservation methods such as maintenance, stabilization and Anastylis¹⁴⁾. Anastylis is only technique written in the manual. Although the FAD has greatly studied conservation of stone monuments since 1962, it is likely that there might be less research on conservation of other types of historic monument materials such as concrete, steel and glass, which are main materials of Modern heritage.

2.3 Laws and Regulation (1933-2013)

2.3.1 The Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums of 1961

The Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums of 1961 was introduced to protect the historic or ancient monuments¹⁵⁾. There are three sections in this law related to the definition of historic monuments, registration processes and practical conservation. They are discussed below:

Section 4, ‘Ancient monument means an immovable property which, by its age or architectural characteristics or historical evidence, is useful in the field of art, history or

archaeology'. It can be seen that values in heritage have been assessed in terms of age, architectural and historical values.

Section 7, 'The Director-General shall,..., have the power to cause any ancient monument as he thinks fit to be registered by means of publication in the Government Gazette...'. It is clear that the heritage evaluation process was based on the subjective judgment of one person. So the judgment could have biased.

Section 10, 'No person shall repair, modify, alter any ancient monument..., except by order of the Director-General...'. This means that there is less chance of public involvement and conservation technical knowledge cannot disseminate to other parties.

2.3.2 Regulation of the Fine Arts Department Concerning the Conservation of Monuments of 1985

Furthermore, the FAD developed the regulation to use within the organisation in 1985 so-called Regulation of the Fine Arts Department Concerning the Conservation of Monuments of 1985¹⁶⁾. This regulation was set after Thailand participated in ICOMOS in 1985. In 1964, ICOMOS announced the Venice Charter 1964 in order to define the terms for conservation and restoration. Therefore, conservation (Article 4-8) and restoration (Article 9-13) sections¹⁷⁾ in the Venice Charter 1964 are translated and applied to use in this regulation.

Furthermore, the definition of historic monument (Article 1) in the Venice Charter might impact the revision of Section 4 in the Act of 1992 which will be discussed in the following section.

2.3.3 The Act of 1961 and the Amended Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums (No.2) of 1992

In order to strengthen the law and keep it up-to-date, minor content of the Act of 1961 was changed. Since then such law has been an active law on conservation until now. It is called the Act of 1961 and the Amended Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums (No.2) of 1992¹⁸⁾. The mentioned three sections are changed as follow:

Sections 4, the terms of 'Archaeological site, Historical site and Historic park' have been added into Ancient Monument definition. The term for 'setting' is written in the Article 1 of the Venice Charter which was introduced in Thailand in 1985. This addition demonstrates that Ancient Monument is not only architecture or structure, but also includes its setting, landscape and environment.

Section 7, the decision to register Ancient Monument has still as same statement as the Act of 1961 which has

entirely relied upon the Director-General's opinion.

Section 10, this act gives the Director-General and FAD's representatives to be able to do the inspection if they suspect the inappropriate works on monument.

2.3.4 The 2013 revision of the Act of 1961 and the Amended Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums (No.2) of 1992

Recently, there has been an attempt to revise the Act of 1961 and the Amended Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums (No.2) of 1992 (2.2.2) in the Council of Ministers meeting on 15th August 2013. The change is made on the definition of historic monuments (Section 4). The new definition will be 'the Ancient Monument must be built more than 75 years'¹⁹⁾. It means that at the year of 2015, 'Ancient Monument' must be built before 1940. Although some Modern heritage built between 1909 and 1940 can be defined as 'Ancient Monument' and consequently protected by laws, many monuments of Modern heritage built between 1940 and 1979 could not be 'Ancient Monuments' and could be demolished without obtaining any permission from the Fine Arts Department. Fortunately, this revision has not been enacted as of April 2015. If it is enacted, it will cause a threat of future demolition for Modern heritage.

2.4 Registration processes

2.4.1 Registration workflow

In Bangkok, the Historic Monument Registration and Information Division, Office of Archaeology, the FAD is responsible for the historic monument registration as shown in Fig.1). Archaeologists are the main staffs of this office. They use an archaeological approach to value monuments. Due to a lack of knowledge about architecture, it is difficult for archaeologists to evaluate monuments, especially Modern monuments which present significant architectural value²⁰⁾.

Furthermore, national registration workflow can be divided into 9 stages as illustrated in Fig.2²¹⁾. Among all the 5th stage (in grey shade) is one of the most important stages because values in monument will be evaluated in order to qualify as historic monument and be registered later.

2.4.2 Evaluation of historic monument

To clarify the values of candidates, the FAD set the committee to design an evaluation form for the first time in 1999 and the form is used in 2005. The reason for making this form was to distribute the FAD's central authority in Bangkok to provincial conservation offices across the country²²⁾.

The form is a rating system ranging from scale 0 to 5 to assess candidates from all ages and building typologies. It had

been used since 2005 but it might not be effective. According to an interview, the score from 0 to 5 is too limited to understand all values and criteria, and some criteria require descriptive explanation rather than score system. Therefore, the division has searched for alternative methods to use in the process of evaluation²³⁾. This means that currently there is neither final method nor specific tool yet for both Pre-Modern and Modern historic monument evaluation.

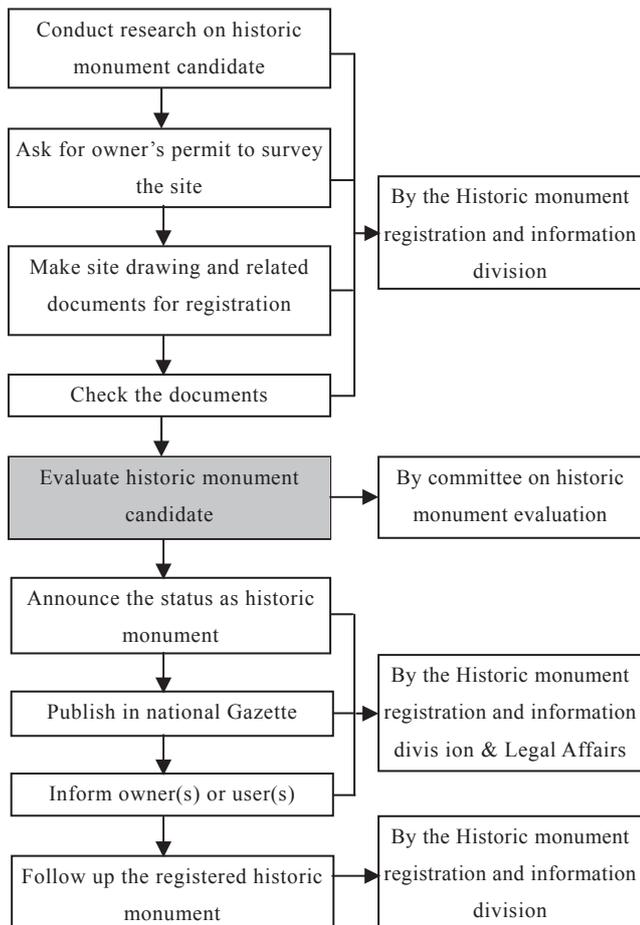


Fig.2 The FAD Bangkok office's registration workflow

2.4.3 Historic monument classification

In terms of protection status, historic monuments are classified into two groups, namely, registered and non-registered one. Since the first registration was compiled in 1935, the total numbers of both registered and non-registered monuments in Thailand are 8,732 sites and only 2,103 sites (24.08%) have been registered and legally protected (Table1)^{24,25)}. Two-thirds of total numbers are waiting for the registration. According to Table1, there are 191 sites of registered historic monuments located in Bangkok, the very same numbers since 2003. It can be argued that the national registration process in Thailand requires the improvement of registration process in order to deal with huge stocks of non-registered one.

Table1 Registered sites of historic monuments 2003- 2011

Types of Historic monument	Thailand (in 2003)	Bangkok		(B)-(A)
		2003(A)	2011(B)	
National registered	2,103 (24.08%)	191	191	0
Non-registered	6,629 (75.93%)	320	344	24
Total	8,732 (100%)	511	535	24

2.4.4 Registered historic monuments of Modern heritage in Bangkok

Registered historic monuments can be classified into 11 typologies (Table2). Surprisingly, only 4 sites (2.09%) of Modern heritage were registered between 1988 and 2003 as shown in grey shade of Table3²⁶⁾. Those monuments are built from 1932 to 1950. The first entry of Modern heritage was made in 1988 for the King Rama I Monument²⁷⁾ followed by the Thonburi Train Station in 2001²⁸⁾, the Wat Sangwet Printing School in 2001²⁹⁾, and the air-raid shelter in 2002³⁰⁾. There have been very few proportions of Modern heritage registration compared to monuments from other ages.

Table2 Bangkok's registered sites of Modern heritage in 2003

	Historic monument typologies	National registered sites in Bangkok	National registered sites of Modern heritage
1.	Royal buildings	16	0
2.	Buddhist temples	81	0
3.	Places of worship	4	0
4.	Military structures	8	0
5.	Public & private-owned buildings	37	3
6.	Commercial buildings	13	0
7.	Monuments	3	1
8.	Bridges	24	0
9.	Public parks	2	0
10.	Canals	3	0
11.	Piers	0	0
	Total	191 (100%)	4 (2.09%)

Table3 Bangkok’s registered sites of Modern heritage

	Modern heritage (completion)	Building’s name	Year of entry
1.	King Rama I Monument (1932)		1988
2.	Thonburi Train Station (1950)		2001
3.	Pipit Banglamphu or Wat Sangwet Printing School (1932)		2001
4.	Air-raid shelter (1941)		2002

3. Modern Heritage Conservation in Global View

3.1 Awareness of Modern heritage at international level

There have been many conservation organizations aiming to save the heritage of Modern movement internationally. One of the most influential conservation institutions is DOCOMOMO International which was established in 1988. Secondly, ICOMOS formed an advisory committee on the 20th century heritage (ICOMOS: ISC20C) in 2005. Another prominent committee is UNESCO’s World Heritage. The collaborative project among these three main organizations was to achieve inscription of Modern monument on the World Heritage List (WHL). The latest WHL inscribed Van Nellefabriek, Netherlands in 2014 (Fig.3)^{31, 32}. It is clear that the conservation of Modern heritage has called for its important nearly three decades since DOCOMOMO International was established and some exceptional Modern buildings have been recognized their significance at international level.

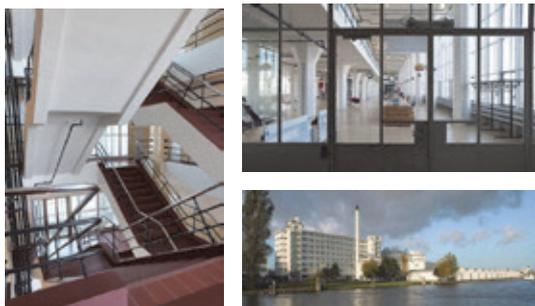


Fig.3 Van Nellefabriek, Netherlands: the World Heritage List of Modern Heritage in 2014

3.2 DOCOMOMO chapter worldwide

DOCOMOMO International has 68 worldwide chapters³³. Its missions are to conserve Modern heritage and against its demolition.

In Asia there are seven members, namely, Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Macau, Thailand and Taiwan (Fig.4). Japan is not only the first Asian DOCOMOMO’s member, but it has also supported other countries in Asia to establish their own DOCOMOMO, DOCOMOMO Thailand, for example.



Fig.4 DOCOMOMO Asian chapter members

3.3 DOCOMOMO Thailand

3.3.1 DOCOMOMO Thailand 2014 selection from ‘ASA Conservation Award’

DOCOMOMO Thailand has become DOCOMOMO International’s member since 26th September 2014 under the support of the Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage (ASA), Thailand. The ASA provides an inventory of Modern buildings which already received ‘ASA Conservation Award’ as well preserved buildings. In order to receive this award, those buildings must be built over than 50 years and present historical and architectural interests³⁴. Therefore, the 24 buildings of 1st selection have been posted on DOCOMOMO Thailand’s website since 2014, ranging from 1909 to 1972 (Table4)³⁵. Although the information of those buildings is described in great detail, they are not categorized in any order. The information would be easier to understand, if the buildings are organized in chronological order and then divided into groups of which have similar architectural characteristics. This could be a suggestion for DOCOMOMO Thailand information management.

Table4 DOCOMOMO Thailand 2014 selection

	
1. Thai Waterworks Museum (1909-1930)	2. Pipit Banglamphu or Wat Sangwet Printing School (1932)

	
3. Tuek Klom, Mahidol Uni. (1965)	4. Agricultural machinery Eng. Dept. Rajamangala Uni. of Tech. Isan (1962)
	
5. Administration office of Anandamahidol Hospital (1937-1938)	6. Grand Portal Building (1935-1940)
	
7. Supachalasai Stadium (1937-1938)	8. Dome Building, Thammasat Uni. (1935-1936)
	
9. Building of Arts and Culture Chulalongkorn Uni. (1937)	10. Chiang Rai Tobacco Office (1964)
	
11. Scala Theater (1969)	12. Chiang Mai Railway Station (1947-1948)
	
13. Warichwes Palace (1933)	14. Prasanmit Bldg, Srinarinwirot Uni. Prasanmit Campus (1950)

	
15. Chulalongkorn Uni. Alumni Asso. under the Patronage of His Majesty the King (1967)	16. Sala Chaloe Krung (1930-1933)
	
17. Tawin Shop (1949)	18. Hub Ho Hin Rice Mill (1921)
	
19. Khurusammanakharn, Rajamangala Uni. of Technology Isan (1960)	20. Building No.1, Rajamangala Uni. of Technology Tawan-ok Uthenthawai Campus (1941)
	
21. Royal Thai Army's cinema (1939)	22. The complex of the Court of Justice (1939-1943)
	
23. New Suan Amporn Pavillion (1972)	24. Indra Regent Hotel (1970)

3.3.2 DOCOMOMO Thailand: moving forward to the national registration of Modern heritage

Among 24 buildings of DOCOMOMO Thailand 2014 selection, there is only one building, Pipit Banglamphu or Wat Sangwet Printing School (building no.2 in Table4) which is listed as the national registered site of historic monument (building no.3 in Table3). Modern heritage has been registered

very few as stated in section 2.3.4. As a result of the establishment of DOCOMOMO Thailand, it would increase the possibility of Modern heritage national registration in the future and also widely disseminate the importance of it.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, problems of Modern heritage conservation in Thailand can be defined into three issues, namely, conservation philosophy in repairing techniques, laws and regulation, and national registration processes of historic monuments. Finally, the establishment of DOCOMOMO Thailand could be an initial solution to these problems.

First, there is less research on repairing technique of materials for Modern heritage because there is only repairing method of stone monuments written in the FAD's conservation technical manual 2005. This can reflect the philosophy behind the FAD that stone monuments might be given priority over other types of monuments. Thus widening scope of research to include various types of materials such as concrete, steel and glass, which are the main materials of Modern buildings, could result in the better understanding of repairing methods and be able to provide appropriate conservation for Modern heritage.

Second, there are three problems arising in laws and regulation, namely, the definition of 'Ancient Monument', registration processes and practical conservation. Recently, there is no definite age of 'Ancient Monument'. Although there is an attempt to specific age of monument (at the age of 75) will be registered and protected by the national law on 'Ancient Monument' conservation, there might be difficulties with the registration of Modern monument built less than 75 years ago. This is also a discrepancy between the definitions of Modern heritage by the national law and DOCOMOMO Thailand. It would cause problems when trying to register DOCOMOMO Thailand selected buildings into the national registration of historic monuments. Besides the registration processes base on sole judgment of the Director-General which sometimes could have biased. In practical conservation, it can be said that the conservation is still limit in conservation professionals and less public involvement. Public opinions should be allowed to get involved in preserving heritage and at the same time they will be educated to understand heritage values.

Third, the national registration processes of historic monuments are mainly done by archaeologists. They specialize in historical approach to understand values of monuments but might not in architectural characteristics or construction techniques which are intrinsic values of Modern heritage. Therefore, limited understanding of those values can affect the decision to select Modern heritage into the

national registration. It can be suggested that creating conservation community of archaeologists, architects, engineers and material scientists could make multidisciplinary approaches to the registration processes.

Finally, the establishment of DOCOMOMO Thailand will widen scopes of conservation both practical conservation and academic research. In addition, the Fine Arts Department can use DOCOMOMO Thailand selected buildings as candidates for the national registration of Modern heritage. This will be a collaborative work between the two organizations to sustain the conservation of Modern heritage in Thailand.

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