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**Trends in the Studies and Research
on Buddhist Arts in Thailand**

1960-1969

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Description of Progress of Studies and Research :

Buddhist arts in Thailand may be divided into nine periods:

1. Indian Buddha images discovered in Thailand (2nd-9th or 10th centuries A.D.).
2. Dvāravatī period (6th or 7th-11th centuries).
3. Śrīvijaya period (7th or 8th-13th centuries).
4. Lopburi period (11th century or earlier-13th centuries).
5. Chiengsaen or Northern Thai period (about 11th-18th centuries).
6. Sukhothai period (13th-14th centuries).
7. U-tong period (12th-15th centuries).
8. Ayudhya period (14th-18th centuries).
9. Bangkok period (from late 18th century onward).

From 1960 to 1969 some new early Indian Buddha images in Thailand were brought to light, especially a few small Indian Amarāvati bronzes. Some terracotta figurines showing the Indian Amarāvati influence discovered at U-tong, Supanburi in western Thailand led Professor Jean Boisselier, a French scholar who had come to do research in Thailand, to propound a new theory that the original cradle of Funan, the earliest kingdom in the Indochinese peninsula, might have existed first in the central part of Thailand before it spread east to southern Cambodia about the fifth century A.D.

For the Dvāravatī period many researches have been carried on especially excavations executed by the Thai Fine Arts Department and Professor Jean Boisselier at many Dvāravatī sites in Thailand such as at U-tong, Supanburi (west of Thailand); Ku Bua, Ratburi (south); Chedi Chula Paton, Nakhon Pathom (central); Khok Mai Den, Nakhon Sawan (central north); Muang Fa Daed Sung Yang, Kalasin (northeast); and Dong Si Maha Pot, Prachinburi (east). From these excavations many remains of Dvāravatī architecture including stone, bronze, stucco and terracotta sculptures have been unearthed, studied and restored. The influence of Śrīvijaya art in southern Thailand on the Dvāravatī school about

the eighth century A.D. has also been pointed out by Professor Boisselier. Remarkable terracotta figurines have been discovered at Ku Bua, Ratburi, and testify that during the Dvāravatī period Mahayana Buddhism was also worshipped.

For Śrīvijaya art in southern Thailand one must admit that not very much has been done concerning the research on Buddhist art there. Few excavations have been carried out at Sating Pra, an important Śrīvijaya site not very far from the modern town of Songkhla (Singora).

For the Lopburi period a large survey on Khmer temples in the northeastern part of Thailand has been carried out by the Thai Fine Arts Department and the result is published in two volumes, both in English and in Thai. The Temple of Pimai, an early twelfth-century Khmer centre of Mahayana Buddhism in northeastern Thailand, has been successfully restored through the anastylosis method by the Thai Fine Arts Department with the help of a French expert, M. Groslier. A large bronze head of a Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism about the late eighth century A.D., including some other fragments of the body, was discovered at Amphoe Non Sung in Nakhon Ratchasima (Korat) Province in northeastern Thailand and is now preserved in the Bangkok National Museum. The head was restored in a French laboratory through the kind assistance of the French government. It is, however, regrettable to report that about 300 Mahayanist Buddhist bronzes were clandestinely dug up in 1965 from a Khmer temple at Amphoe Prakhonchai in Buriram Province, northeastern Thailand. They all date back to about the 8-9th centuries A.D. and can be classified into the Dvāravatī and early Lopburi styles, the latter of which resemble the Khmer sculptures of the same period. Most of them were smuggled out of Thailand. Now many are displayed in large museums and private collections both in Europe and in the United States of America. Fortunately two large bronzes and a small one of the same two styles above mentioned and probably of the same faith were recently unearthed at Muang Fai, Amphoe Lamplimat, also in Buriram Province and are now preserved in the Bangkok National Museum.

For the Chiengsaen or northern Thai period, so far very few activities have been carried out such as the clearance and restoration of ancient Buddhist monuments in northern Thailand by the Thai Fine Arts Department. The theory of Mr. A. B. Griswold, an American scholar, on the contemporaneity of the Buddha images of the early Chiengsaen style and those of the late Chiengsaen or Chiangmai period has been refuted by many scholars.

For the Sukhothai, U-tong, Ayudhya and Bangkok periods, the clearance and restoration of ancient monuments have also been done especially at the three towns of the Sukhothai period: Sukhothai, Sisatchanalai and Kampaengpet; and at Ayudhya. The Sukhothai stone inscriptions are now being newly deciphered by Mr. A. B. Griswold and Dr. Prasert Na Nagara. They have all been published in the *Journal of the Siam Society*. The history of the U-tong period has been formed up

from various chronicles by some Thai scholars but so far it is still not very convincing. There has been some move to preserve and restore some of the late Ayudhya and early Bangkok mural paintings.

The Thai Fine Arts Department has also opened many museums or new buildings in already existing museums such as at Bangkok, Ayudhya, Kampaengpet, Khonkaen, U-tong, Sukhothai and Chiangmai. All of them display objects mostly of Buddhist art.

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Handwritten signature in Thai script, possibly reading "วิภากร ใจดี" (Wibha-gra Jai-dee).

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