

‘The Politics of Aesthetics and Modernity in Thai contemporary Arts’

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My research project attempts to understand two important questions regarding Thailand’s project of modernity in the field of cultural politics: where is ‘the politics of aesthetics’ in Contemporary Thai arts located and what state is ‘the regime of value’ in contemporary Thai arts situated?

The first question highlights the encounter between traditional Thai arts and western landscape painting, in particular the works of a renowned traditional Thai painter Khrua In Khong, who was commissioned by King Rama IV to render pavilions in royal palaces and temples. This paper tries to understand the practices of a Thai artist’s effort to embrace western and scientific views into his arts. While Khrua In Khong was praised as a prominent painter in his time, his school was limited in the reign of Rama IV, however. This paper explains why his legacy is no longer practiced. In other words, why the social life of his arts came to an end.

This paper also explores Thailand’s project of modernity after the 1932 Revolution by the People’s Party. The new regime employed the project of modernization in arts through the adoption of western styles. The paper furthermore highlights the attempts of Thai artists to achieve their positions in the art world while trying to essentialize ‘Thainess’. The latter practices led to a new phase of Thai arts, the so-called ‘contemporary Thai arts.’ My paper will take on the distinction between modern Thai arts and contemporary Thai arts by using the notion of ‘structure of feeling’. Lastly, this paper concludes by undertaking Appadurai’s notion of social life of things to explain within the phases of contemporary Thai arts.

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