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Hollandois*

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*Taguin*

*Reclon*

*Canal*

*Bangkok*

LIVING BESIDE

THE RIVER OF CULTURE







*Bangkok*  
LIVING BESIDE THE RIVER OF CULTURE













Message from  
MR Sukhumbhand Paribatra,  
Governor of Bangkok

Bangkok is a city rich with history, traditions and diverse cultures, religions and ethnicity. While modernization has come to this capital city of Thailand like most major cities in the world, Bangkok's cross-cultural, multidimensional heritage has been passed down from generation to generation making the city a unique blend of ancient tradition and modernity, historic buildings and modern high-rises, local wisdom and international know-how, old communities and new urban centers.

The conservation of Bangkok's uniqueness is not the mission for a single individual or organization, but a challenge to each and every person residing in the metropolis, together with all Thai citizens across the world. Everyone can lend a hand to preserve and maintain the grandeur of this city and the delicate balance between the old and the new.





This special publication, *"Bangkok ... Living Beside the River of Culture"*, is part of an historical and cultural study project on Bangkok that aims to compile all knowledge related to the city of Bangkok and its people in every walk of life over a span of more than two hundred years in term of its history, arts, and culture. This represents one way in which people may learn from the past and cherish the present to create a sustainable future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'S' followed by a horizontal line and a small upward stroke.

MR Sukhumbhand Paribatra  
Governor of Bangkok





Message from  
Mr. Charoenrat Chutikarn  
Permanent Secretary for BMA

Over the past 200 years, besides the capital city of the nation, Bangkok has maintained its significance as a melting pot of diverse multi-ethnic and multi-cultural heritages originating from the accumulated body of knowledge and the perseverance of our ancestors. The national cultural identity that has been created can be recognized through oral history, researches, historical evidences and art objects on invaluable cultural and historical significance.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) has realized the values of culture and national heritage; hence conservation efforts utilizing various stratagems coupled with determination have been initiated to educate and sensitize the public on cultural values and national heritage; and to instill a sense of belonging in the present generation to consolidate the Thai pride through the storms of cultural shocks and undesirable influences.





With attractions on cultural diversity that appeals to foreign visitors, Bangkok has inevitably been hard hit by the influences of foreign culture. Refined indigenous cultural identity has been underrated by global trends that sometimes ignore ways to promote awareness of sustainable cultural conservation.

This special publication entitled, *“Bangkok ... Living Beside the River of Culture”* is in order to amass intellectual capital on the history and culture of Bangkok for Bangkokians and other interested parties. This also helps to cultivate Bangkok as a learning metropolis, corresponding to the BMA’s policy to instill and nurture love, pride, and sense of belonging in the amazing wealth and character of Thailand’s cultural heritages. This will eventually create voluntary participation and joint contribution from all concerned in the development of the city’s cultural identity for coming generations.

C. Chutikarn.

Mr. Charoenrat Chutikarn  
Permanent Secretary for BMA



# Foreword

For over two centuries, a small community on the eastern flank of the Chao Phraya River grew into the capital city of the Rattanakosin Period after the fall of Ayutthaya and replaced Krung Thon Buri which had weaker military defenses.

Phrabat Somdet Phra Buddha Yotfa Chulalok Maha Rat or King Rama I the Great utilized belief in the God Indra to revive the spirits and morale of his subjects; thus he named the new capital with the wording of Vishnukarma under the command of Indra. In various architectural premises in the compound of the Grand Palace, the figure of Indra has been recreated as he is the King of the Gods who watches over the entire world.

When Bangkok changed its administration from a city municipal to a special administrative entity in 1972, the figure of Indra astride his three-headed elephant Erawan was adopted as the BMA's emblem. This reflects its core mission to watch over and to serve Bangkok residents better.

As time passes, the lifestyles, beliefs, and images of Bangkok have been transformed. A glimpse of yesteryear's charm and beauty is still preserved amidst the influx of eastern and western cultural influences at a pivotal point in modern history.





Bangkok has changed over time, both physically and culturally, to appropriately address the ever-changing times and contexts. However, any transformation should be based on the foundation of understanding of cultural development in this metropolis. Aside from looking after the residents of Bangkok in all respects, promoting understanding of precious cultural roots passed down from one generation to the next is also our crucial mission.

To withstand the impacts of such changes we have to learn from history and profit from the wisdom of our ancestor by carefully selecting what is most appropriate for our society. This is the only way to withstand changes and to move steadily into the future. *“Bangkok ... Living Beside the River of Culture”* will assuredly provide you with invaluable knowledge about Bangkok and its history.

*Somsak Chantawattana*

Mr. Somsak Chantawattana  
Director-General  
Culture, Sports and Tourism Department, BMA



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# Living Beside the River of Culture

Rattanakosin was established in 1782 by King Phra Buddha Yotfa Chulalok the Great who intended to restore the past glory of Ayutthaya, the former capital city of Siam that fell to the Burmese in 1767. Testaments to the prosperity of the kingdom such as the exquisite grand palace and temples, which were renowned far and wide for artistic beauty, incomparable elsewhere, vanished when the capital was engulfed in smoke and flame.





Even though physical structures had been destroyed, Thais and Thai-ness, the reason behind the incessant stream of culture, lived on. They gathered along the banks of the Chao Phraya River, especially in the area for so long named Bangkok. This is where Rattanakosin City was established as the new capital city of the Siamese Kingdom. Ayutthaya residents liked the new capital which was as glorious as its fallen predecessor. These people were of one heart and one mind to erect and create a cluster of awe-inspiring palaces, royal halls, large and small monasteries and temples, pagodas and stupas on both sides of the Chao Phraya River. These grand monuments became the proud national heritage for many generations to come.





As time elapsed, the capital city gradually transformed. Yet, changes have never tarnished the magnificence and splendor of national heritages; cultural diversity has varied according to the ever-changing social contexts of certain periods. Presently, buildings with a perfectly harmonious combination of Thai and western architectural themes can be found in the inner Rattanakosin Island.

Cultural identity in architecture may vary in appearance to the eye of the beholder. Multiracial residents who became part of this metropolis have created lively and colorful stories with traditions and customs derived from Buddhism and other religions. People from various origins and backgrounds can live happily in this metropolis; they have jointly developed Bangkok's charm for over 200 years.





Since its establishment, Ayutthayans who sought refuge in Bangkok after Ayutthaya's fall had significant roles in the formation of the culture of the newly-established capital. In addition, ethnic groups who had been affected by wars in other kingdoms, some of whom were captured and herded to Siam after surrender, mostly shared one significant feature – they were Buddhists. Others had different beliefs or creeds, but under the generosity and benevolence of the Thai monarchs, they could practice their faith. Religious rites and customs had no adverse effects on the lives and lifestyles of people in Bangkok society.





The multiracial and multicultural metropolis was further impacted by the immigration of Chinese people in the reign of King Taksin the Great of Thon Buri and the early Rattanakosin Period, coupled with an influx of western merchants and missionaries after Siam had entered into various trade treaties with western nations.

Ethnic diversity has increased the charms of Bangkok and impressed visitors from all over the world.

All of the changes manifested by different peoples and cultures created social phenomena. Physically, the city has expanded tremendously since its establishment in 1782.



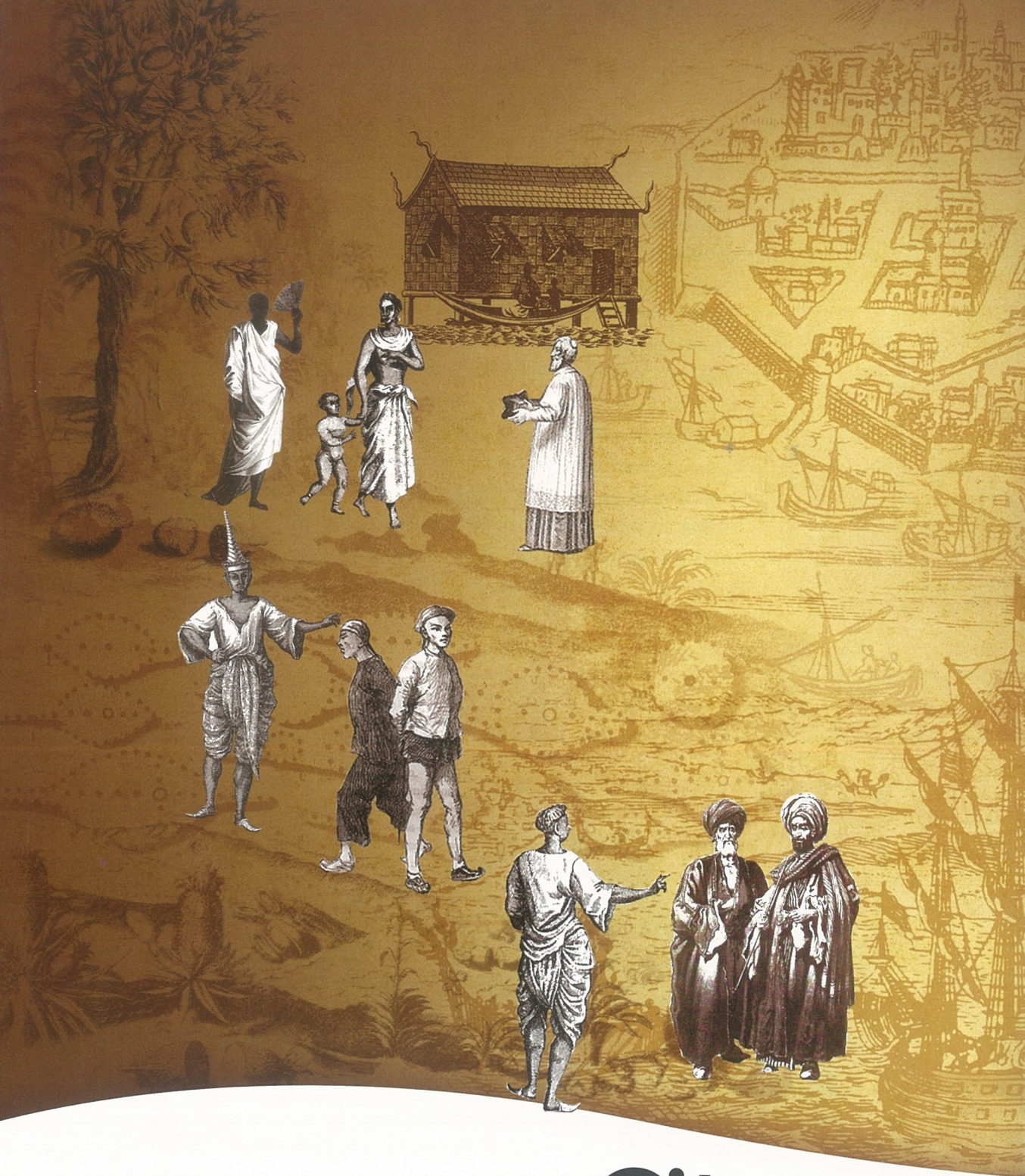


The development of Bangkok, both in physical and cultural dimensions, is a case study of evolution over the course of time. Cultural improvements and changes can be divided into five phases: before the Thon Buri Period; the Thon Buri Period and Early Rattanakosin (King Rama I – King Rama III); the influx of Westerners (King Rama IV); the great reform and laying of political foundations (King Rama V – King Rama VII); and after the Siamese Revolution up to the eve of World War II.

Each period of cultural transformation revealed improvements and alterations of situations and people amidst internal and external social contexts. The dynamism that drove these movements is still as strong as ever among the citizens of Bangkok today.







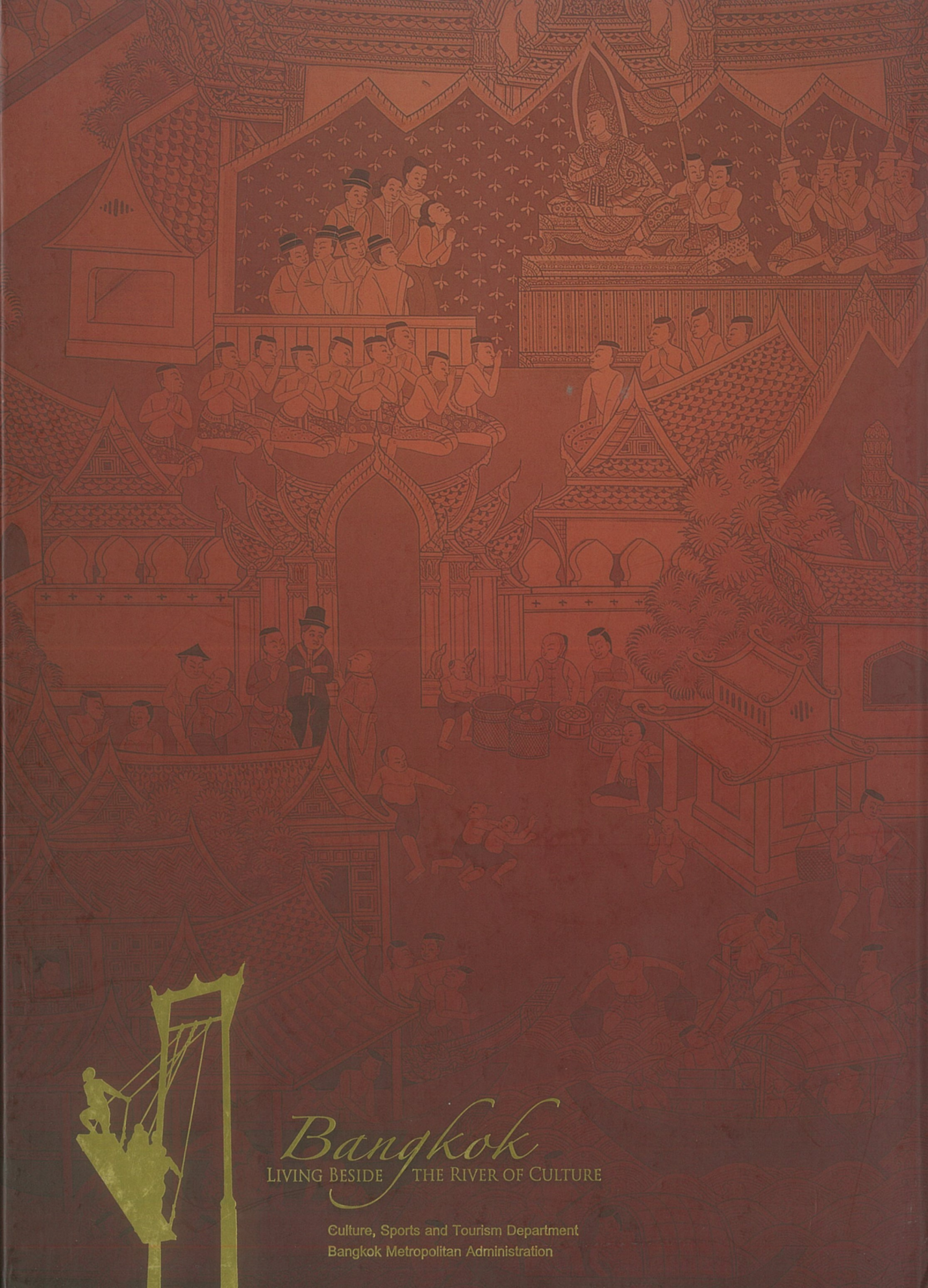
# 1 Strategic City in Terms of Trade and





Security for the **Future**





# *Bangkok*

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Culture, Sports and Tourism Department  
Bangkok Metropolitan Administration