



INTERWEAVING CULTURES

International
Contemporary
Art Project

THE JAMES H.W. THOMPSON FOUNDATION

On International Art and Cultural Collaboration: A Local Perspective

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A starting point

Three years ago, Sachiko Namba, a Tokyo-based freelance curator and writer visited Thailand in order to review *Under Construction*, 'an international collaborative art project,' involving young curators and artists in Asia, and initiated and endorsed by the Japan Foundation. Namba came to see the exhibition that I put together entitled *'Sorry for the Inconvenience,'* which included Thai, Chinese and Indian artists. Whilst in Bangkok, she interviewed me and the artists involved in the exhibition, and she also visited the Jim Thompson House. Namba found she was inspired by the context of Jim Thompson's House and his legendary story. She asked me to collaborate with her to create a new type of international art project, a project that would push the boundaries of the existing formats. The idea of the show was to respond to the organizational strategies of large international art exhibitions, the 'biennial' and 'triennial' models, which are most often short-term, mega budget exhibitions, and whereby curators and artists have usually lacked the opportunity to conduct extensive research or to develop a deeper understanding of the given context. This project, which we have entitled *Interweaving Cultures*, could not have been realized without the technology now available at beginning of the 21st century. The project reflects a new type of long-distance collaboration and cultural operation. We were able to complete many aspects of the project via email or msn chat, which allowed us to hold regular discussions or to make decisions on exhibition details, the publication, artists' projects etc.

As the host of this project, from the curatorial and organizational position, I found that this is not a new role. My country has frequently served as the recipient or host of 'international guests', visitors, and tourists for such a long time. In short, Thailand has always been famous for being a host. It was planted in our blood unknowingly. But one might wonder where this tradition comes from? And how this essay will address such questions? How does this exhibition differ from previous international art projects in this country and perhaps the region? I will answer these questions in turn, but will begin with a consideration of the history of Thailand's involvement in international relationships. Later, I will touch upon certain issues relating to the international art scene from a local and regional context, and from the perspective of the 'host' country. The essay will bring into focus a number of international art projects, particularly those making claims regarding cultural collaboration.

What makes this project interesting and becomes a point of important discourse is its ability to transcend the notion of a specific cultural identity. Because of the logic of selection and the nature of the site, this project is also in no way 'area specific'. Rather, it reveals the new phenomenon of global city and global citizen, where migration and mobility bring hybridism, allowing us to create a new paradigm, a new kind of cultural project.

Open first

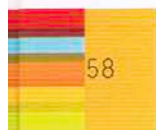
As the 'gateway' to Southeast Asia, the area of present-day Thailand has been subject to the fluxes of foreign cultures. Although located at a point of intersection between East and West, the country's cultural landscape has not always been a contradictory space, as was supposed, but rather presented a unique sphere where Chinese and Indian civilization were harmonized and profoundly adapted to conform to the local mentality. From the Sukothai period (13th century), Siam (now Thailand) established good relationships with both China and India. In the 17th century, King Narai, of the Ayudhaya period, started to open the country to the rest of the world. He pursued a friendly policy towards the Europeans who moved into Ayuthaya either for business or religious reasons. Constantine Phaulkon was a particularly able Greek merchant who rose swiftly to become the King's leading advisor. King Narai,

is allocated to shipping works of art. One of the aims of this project is to develop an ongoing and sustainable collaboration, wherein the artists are challenged to work with the specific historical and cultural context of each site, in a conceptual framework. We hope, therefore, to see *Interweaving Cultures* become a long-term project, and to work with three different sites in three different countries. A time and context-based art project like this is something new, and it opens up opportunities for all partners and participants of the projects to develop a long term engagement with each new context.

The project began with a long period of discussion between the artists, curators and host organization. It was interesting to witness certain cultural conflicts and how these were raised, negotiated and resolved. When Myung Ok Han, a Korean-born, Paris-based artist, came to Thailand she had neither a preconceived notion of the country, nor a solid idea of how she would go about producing works of art for the project. Han was inspired by a group of monks she encountered and proposed to use the *bart* (monk's bowl) in her work, placing the container on the floor. This proposal presented a difficulty and revealed a difference in cultural understanding. Han altered the project to alleviate our fears of showing disrespect, while still using the form and concept of the *bart* as her major source of inspiration.

The process of 'interweaving cultures' between artists and communities continues in different forms. Shigeaki Iwai is a Japanese artist who set in motion his fake movie poster project "Kiku Sadud Rak", during his research trip to Bangkok. Iwai found the audience's perception of his posters astonishing. To learn about people's mentality through this process, from personal interaction and experience was, to him, the best way to learn about contemporary Thai culture. In a similar way to Iwai, Alana Jelinek and Kaoru Motomiya have also used the opportunity afforded by their invitation to participate as a way to re-connect the Jim Thompson museum and house with local communities. Alana Jelinek has specifically worked with the Ban Krua families, asking them to collaborate by photographing the facades of their houses. Jelinek has thus attempted to reactivate the previous connection and visibility of the Ban Krua community with Jim Thompson, by including them in the process. Kaoru Motomiya's work reflects upon her childhood memory of the fairy tales of Somerset Maugham and makes an indirect connection with Jim Thompson whom Maugham knew and visited as a guest in his house. Motomiya used the fairy tale as a starting point to communicate through a series of workshops with groups of young students from the Ban Krua community, asking them to translate and interpret the stories based on their personal experiences and cultural background. Sutthirat Supaparinya is a local artist who attempts to deal, through her new work, with the legend of Jim Thompson himself, and his mysterious disappearance. Supaparinya invites us to attempt a form of communication with Thompson. She raises suggestions in the minds of the audience and, by bringing her childhood communication games together with modern technology, presents a work which combines and questions superstitions, technology and mystery.

This project, through its process and strategy, has managed to push the boundaries of international cultural collaboration to the next level. The exhibition reflects conceptually, via artists' projects, the patterns of local and international collaboration established in the past, through the effort of Jim Thompson himself and the Ban Krua community. Each of the artists has touched upon important elements of the house and its history in a partial or fragmentary manner. Through their works they have gradually developed a way of complimenting each other. The exhibition in Bangkok represents the beginning of the first phase of this intriguing project, which will continue to investigate similar situations in two further countries. I believe that *Interweaving Cultures* also shows the capacity of Thailand, as a host country. Without the commitment of the James H. W. Thompson Foundation, the dedication of the artists and curators, and the technology of hi-speed internet this project would not have been possible. I will not offer a final summary of this essay or of the project, because this is just the beginning of the process.



และเคยเยี่ยมเยียน จิม ทอมป์สันในฐานะแขกที่บ้านมาแล้ว โมโตมิยานั้นได้ใช้เทพนิยายนั้นเป็นจุดเริ่มต้นเป็นในการสื่อสารโดยผ่านการอบรมเชิงปฏิบัติการต่างๆกับกลุ่มเด็กนักเรียนของชุมชนบ้านครัว โดยได้ขอร้องให้พวกเขาเหล่านั้นทำการแปลและตีความเรื่องราวที่อิงมาจากประสบการณ์ส่วนตัวและพื้นเพทางวัฒนธรรมของแต่ละคน โดยใช้นิทานที่มอห์มเขียนเป็นตัวเริ่มต้น สุทธิรัตน์ ศุภปริญญา นั้นเป็นศิลปินไทย พยายามที่จะทำการสื่อสารกับตำนานของจิม ทอมป์สันและสนใจเกี่ยวกับการทาสบาบุญอย่างลึกซึ้งของเขา เธอได้พยายามที่จะชวนให้เราได้ลองรูปแบบการสื่อสารกับจิม ทอมป์สัน เธอได้ตั้งข้อเสนอนะในใจของผู้ชมและโดยการนำมาตีความสื่อสารในสมัยเด็กของเธอมาพร้อมกับเทคโนโลยีในการนำเสนองานซึ่งผสมผสานและตั้งคำถามกับความเชื่อโบราณ โสยศาสตร์ และ เทคโนโลยี

ขั้นตอนและยุทธศาสตร์ของโครงการนี้ถูกจัดไว้เพื่อที่จะผลักดันขอบเขตของความร่วมมือทางวัฒนธรรมในระดับนานาชาติให้ไปสู่ในอีกระดับหนึ่งมันสะท้อนอย่างเป็นแนวคิดที่ว่าแบบแผนของความร่วมมือกันในระดับท้องถิ่นและในระดับนานาชาตินั้นประสบความสำเร็จได้อย่างไรในอดีตจากความอดทนของตัวจิม ทอมป์สันเองและชาวบ้านชุมชนบางครัว โดยผ่านงานของศิลปิน ซึ่งแต่ละคนนั้นดูเหมือนว่าจะสามารถสัมผัสถึงปัจจัยที่สำคัญของบ้านและประวัติของบ้านอย่างกระตือรือร้น แต่ผลงานของพวกเขามีการปะติดปะต่อกันที่ละเอียดละน้อย สุนทรและความเท่าเทียมกันของผู้ที่ให้ความร่วมมือท้องถิ่นนั้นแตกต่างไปจากงานนิทรรศการนานาชาติในครั้งก่อน เนื่องจากการแสดงนิทรรศการเกิดขึ้นในกรุงเทพฯ เป็นเพียงการเริ่มต้นของส่วนแรกของโครงการนี้และจะทำการแสดงต่ออีกสองประเทศ ในสถานที่คล้ายคลึงกับบ้านจิม ทอมป์สัน ทำให้โครงการนี้เป็นที่น่าสนใจเป็นอย่างมาก และยังได้แสดงถึงศักยภาพของประเทศไทยในฐานะที่เป็นประเทศเจ้าภาพและผู้อำนวยความสะดวกหลักของโครงการนี้

โครงการนี้จะไปไม่ได้เลยถ้าปราศจากอนุเคราะห์จากมูลนิธิ เจมส์ เอช ดับบลิว ทอมป์สัน ความช่วยเหลือจากบรรดาศิลปินและภัณฑารักษ์และเทคโนโลยีอินเทอร์เน็ตความเร็วสูง ผู้เขียนจะไม่ขอทำการสรุปโครงการเนื่องจากมันเป็นเพียงแค่การเริ่มต้นของขบวนการเท่านั้น

¹ Politics, p. 4, <http://www.thaiconsul-uk.com/politics4.htm>

² Ibid.

³Mr. Anand Panyarachun, Chulalongkorn, Thailand beloved monarch reformed his ancient land and opened it to the West, without surrendering its sovereignty.

⁴Apinan Poshyananda, *Modern Art In Thailand ; Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1992, p. 5-6

⁵Apinan, Ibid, p. 31.

⁶Apinan, Ibid, p. 28-31.

⁷Dr. Helen James, *ECONOMIC COLONIALISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF THAILAND AND MYANMAR 1948 – 1998*, http://www.canberra.edu.au/ucardi/economic_colonialism.htm

⁸Dr. Helen James, Ibid.

⁹Hans Ulrich Obrist, Do It, HYPERLINK "<http://www.e-flux.com>" http://www.e-flux.com/projects/do_it/itinerary/itinerary.html

¹⁰ <http://www.art4d.com/bangkokonthemove/2542/city6/index.html>

¹¹ http://www.yipintsoi.com/~aara/here_now/press_eng/introduction.html

กฤติยา กาวีวงศ์ เป็นหนึ่งในสมาชิกผู้ก่อตั้ง โปรเจ็ค 304 องค์กรศิลปะร่วมสมัยทางเลือกที่มีฐานอยู่ในกรุงเทพฯ ตั้งในปี 1996 เธอได้ผ่านการดูแลจัดการนิทรรศการศิลปะนานาชาติและเทศกาลภาพยนตร์และวีดิทัศน์ในลิงคอล์น ติรานา เมลเบิร์น สต็อคโฮล์ม ปารีส และโตเกียว นิทรรศการล่าสุด ประกอบไปด้วย Alien(generation) กรุงเทพฯ เชียงใหม่ และขอนแก่น (2001-2003) Sorry for the inconvenience, โปรเจ็ค 304 Siam Art Space, กรุงเทพฯ University of Art Gallery(2002) , Under Construction , Tokyo Opera City Gallery and Japan Foundation, ประเทศญี่ปุ่น (2003); Nothing: Retrospective of Rirkrit Tiravanijja and Kamin Lertchaiprasert, หอศิลป์มหาวิทยาลัย เชียงใหม่, เชียงใหม่ (2004) , บางกอก บางกอก, ลา คาเปญา, บาร์เซโลนา (2005) ปัจจุบันเธอพำนักอยู่ในกรุงเทพฯและกำลังเตรียมการโครงการศิลปะระดับภูมิภาคสำหรับ Haus Der Kulteran Der Welt, เบอร์ลิน (2005)และ Mekong Laboratory Project, ประเทศในอนุภาค ลุ่มแม่น้ำโขง (2005-2007)

Sutthirat Supaparinya

Sutthirat Supaparinya's works consistently engages with the supernatural and with technology. Supaparinya had been interested in working with sound, and exploring the relationship between visibility and invisibility for some time. Her time-based works started when she was a student at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiangmai University in the 1990s. Working site-specifically with the deserted building of an old train station hotel in the middle of the city, she asked musicians to sign up and choose music to play for one minute. The timing of their performance was a response to a given room number in the 60-room hotel. The project was conceived to allow the musicians to randomly fill up the whole space with their songs.

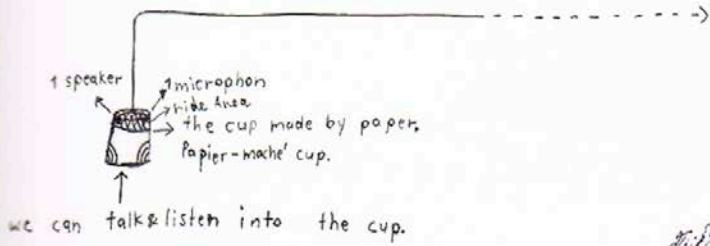
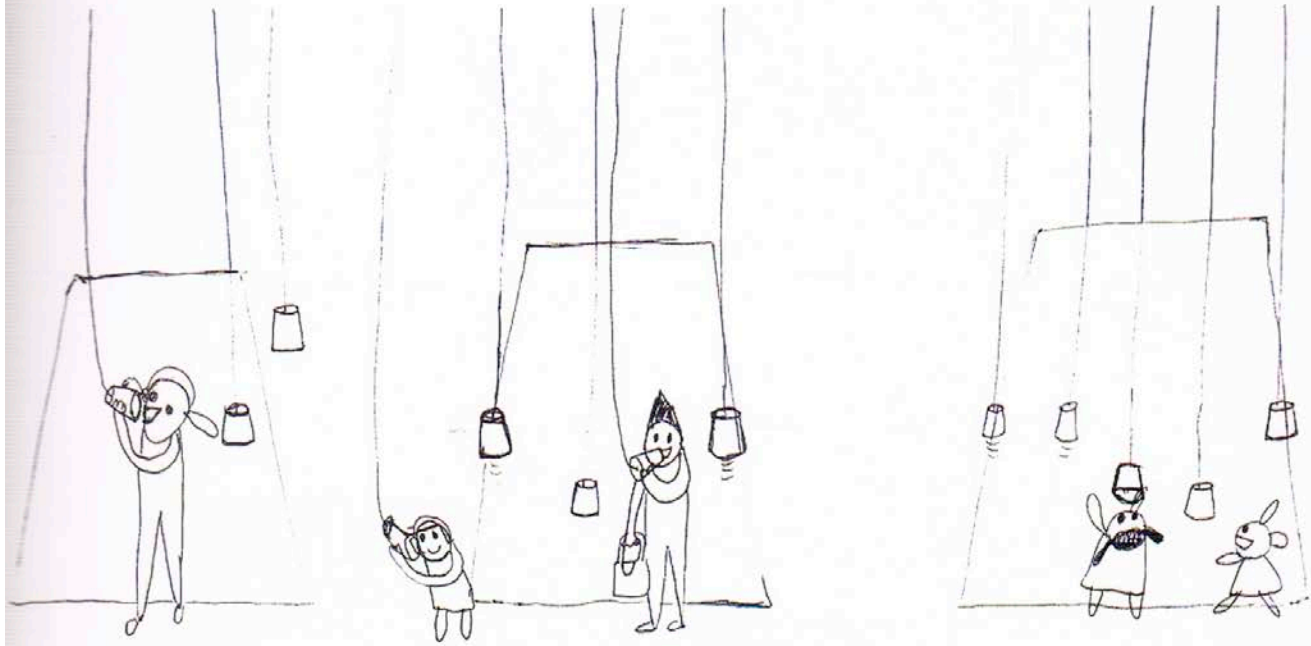
During her study of Media Art in Leipzig, Supaparinya worked again with site-specific installation. Playing on the instincts of animal nature and human nature, she managed to work with media art successfully in *Continued Breath* to elicit both internal instincts and to expose the relationship between the hunter and those who are hunted. Setting up this system needed help from a technician, but the resulting video was something special. She manipulated and constructed the footage manually, without any technical support. In this way she exploited the pros and cons of media art and the critique of the machine.

Supaparinya's research into the legend of Jim Thompson shows that she understands the curiosity among Thai people – visitors and friends – about Thompson's history and his disappearance. In an attempt to communicate with him, she has executed a sound installation that connects the historical past with our present understanding or perception of the man Jim Thompson.

Based on her interest in transferring or interpreting through her project the Buddhist idea of *tha vai sang kha than* (the action of offering something to a monk which may be passed to the spirit of a person). She has described 'the idea like... we pass food or cloth to a dead person through the monk. It doesn't matter whether those items of food or cloth really arrive to that person or not, but it is important that we try to communicate somehow... to hear something from someone.... to say something with someone.'

'You are there.
You are not there.
You are here.
You are not here.
Let's taste the way between us.'

Supaparinya explores the most sensitive issues relating to Thompson himself, his disappearance and his persona. As a response to visitors' curiosity, she has created a sound installation at the exhibition space which connects aurally to Jim Thompson's bedroom, in his house. This room is the last stop for visitors and tourists, who are always curious about his history. Audiences in the exhibition space are given the chance to listen to visitors and to guide conversation. People may attempt to talk to Jim Thompson (if they wish), or simply to each other.



จิ. สัตหิราท์ สุปาปาริญา ๒๕๔๗



You are there, you are not there, 2004-2005
 sound installation
 (proposal drawing for Interweaving Cultures,
 the Art Center at the Jim Thompson House, Thailand)