

For Public Archaeology in Thailand

—The Case of Dvaravati Sites—

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Place of fieldwork: Bangkok, Thailand

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- Research background

The Tai people began to rule the area of present-day Thailand in the 13th century. Previously, other ethnic groups ruled the region, divided into various countries and kingdoms. One such ruling group was the Mon kingdom of Dvaravati, which lasted from the 6th to the 13th centuries. Modern Thai people, who are mainly ethnic Tai, do not feel a kinship with Dvaravati sites, as they do not trace their roots or identity to this group.

With this in mind, is it possible for Dvaravati sites to be accepted and preserved as cultural heritage sites in the present Thai society? In this research project, I consider the meaning and worth of Dvaravati sites to answer that question; I also discuss concrete ways in which to preserve them.

- Research purpose and aim

This research project aims to discuss the research, preservation, and practical use of Dvaravati sites through the following investigations: 1) positioning of the sites in past and present Thai society, 2) recognition of the sites by local people, and 3) influence of excavations on local communities and Thai society as a whole. This research will form a foundation for the practice of public archaeology in the future.

- Results and achievements of fieldwork

During my stay in Thailand, I visited various museums and archaeological sites.

At the national museums, I felt a significant influence by the royal family. The relationship between the royal family and the museums is emphasized in the various exhibitions.

Second, I found that there were some differences between



Picture 1. Somdet Phra Narai National Museum.

the exhibitions of the Bangkok National Museum and those of other national museums located in provincial cities. At the Bangkok National Museum, exhibitions discuss topics related to Buddhism since the Sukhothai period. This is not the case at the provincial museums. For example, at Somdet Phra Narai National Museum in Lopburi (Picture 1), we can see various relics excavated not only from Sukhothai sites, but also from prehistoric, Dvaravati, and Angkor sites. This may be because Lopburi was one of the main cities in the Dvaravati and Angkor periods and the area still boasts many sites from those eras.

- Implications and effects on future research

This fieldwork excursion's main purposes were to learn the Thai language, visit museums and archaeological sites, and decide upon an appropriate research field. As a result, I selected the Phromthin Tai site (Picture 2), located in a suburb of Lopburi (Fig. 1), as my research field.

I will participate in the excavation at the Phromthin Tai site organized by Dr. Thanik of Silpakorn University, while also conducting a literature survey and interviews about the research aim mentioned above. With the results of this research, I plan to discuss concrete measures for public archaeology at Dvaravati sites (Picture 3).



Figure 1. Location of Lopburi.



Picture 2. Excavation pit at the Phromthin Tai site.



Picture 3. An example of public archaeology at the Phromthin Tai site.