

Let the past serve the present

Siam Society vice president stresses the importance of learning history

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When Prof Visanu Krue-ngam delivered a keynote speech at a seminar on Rattanakosin at the Siam Society, the legal expert captivated the audience not with his profound knowledge of law, but in history.

While informative, his speech inaugurating the Siam Society's Siamese Heritage Protection Programme was brisk and entertaining.

In his speech, Prof Visanu looked back over 230 years after Rattanakosin was founded by King Rama I in 1782 and vividly described how each monarch of the Chakri Dynasty had put his focus on how to enrich the capital and provide welfare to his subjects.

"King Rama I concentrated on the infrastructure of the new capital. He followed the blueprint of Ayutthaya while King Rama II tried to revive art and culture. King Rama III invigorated the religion.

"He was known for his love of building temples. He also encouraged noblemen around him to do the same.

"Through the king's request, the wealthy Phraya Phraklang constructed Wat Nual Noradit and Wat Prayoon.

"Then the king turned to the nobleman's young brother, Phraya Sri Pipat, with the same request that resulted in Wat Pichaiyat. Then it was the wife's turn to respond to the king's request. The lady built Wat Anongkaram."

The legal expert, who is vice president of the Siam Society, revealed that he has deep interest in history, though few people are aware of that.

In fact, he said, knowledge of history complements his study of law.

When we know history, we know why a particular law was crafted the way it was, he said.

Like so many people, Prof Visanu said he used to find history boring until he learned the trick. His trick is to link historical events to get a big picture which makes learning history more fun.

"Our history learning is boring because the texts are full of the BC years without telling much. The language is also difficult," he said.

The link is needed not just in national history, but also in world history, he added.

After leaving a top bureaucratic job, and a political position as deputy prime minister, Prof Visanu is now busy teaching, accepting invitations to give lectures at several law institutes.

When conducting a law class, he said he always adds history to make sure his students have a historical context that will enable them to understand the laws better.