

2011

La Masonería en el mundo - Tailandia

Archivo C I E M - Madrid

Documentación - países

Adrian Mac Liman
Centro Ibérico de Estudios Masónicos (CIEM)
03/04/2011



A Brief History of Freemasonry in Thailand

Thailand began to open up to the west in the late 19th century. King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) was the first Thai king to travel abroad and to begin to understand the importance of the west as a trading partner. As a result, westerners began to arrive in the kingdom as part of diplomatic and commercial missions. History has shown that these are the necessary seeds for the growth of Freemasonry.

Unfortunately Thailand proved rocky ground for the Craft. Perhaps it is due to the fact that unlike most other nations in the region, Thailand was an absolute monarchy that had never been colonized. It had (and still has) distinct and rigid classes of society. The central Masonic concepts of democracy, treating men of all social class on the level, and the Judeo-Christian basis for the Craft's legends must have seemed unnatural and strange to the devoutly Buddhist local population.

Between 1878 and 1905 there were four failed attempts to start an English lodge. The brethren in Bangkok faced the most amazing string of bad luck. The individual failures are too painful to detail here. The reasons ranged from waning interest on the part of the few founding members in the first attempt to the death of the Master-elect in the final attempt.

In 1907, a new generation of brethren petitioned and was granted a warrant from the Grand Lodge of Scotland. But of course the troubles hadn't ended yet. Expatriate lodges are renowned for high turnover as assignments end and new ones begin. Thus when the charter eventually arrived from Edinburgh, several of the officers had left and the charter had to be reissued. Lodge St. John was finally consecrated on January 24, 1911 with the reissued charter.

The lodge attracted very international following including British, Thai, German, Swiss, and American and other brethren. This diversity was shortly to become critical to the fate of the brethren in Bangkok. In World War II, Thailand remained neutral. Shortly after the Japanese entered Thailand at the start of World War II, the Japanese secret police raided the rented premises where the lodge met. Records, regalia and other items were seized and brethren from Allied countries were interred. Thankfully the international flavor of the lodge enabled the neutral Thai and Axis German brethren to save some of the early records. They were also able to help the interred brethren better cope with their incarceration.

A growth spurt hit Freemasonry in the kingdom between 1991 and 1996, when four lodges were formed. A second Scottish lodge, Lodge Pattaya West Winds was opened in Pattaya in 1991, more than 80 years after Lodge St. John. The kingdom's first Irish lodge, Lodge Morakot, followed this. The National Grand Lodge of France (GLNF)

founded a lodge in Chiang Mai that eventually went into darkness, but had more success in Bangkok with Lodge Tantawan Fleur du Soleil in 1996. After the recovery from the 1997 financial crisis, a second growth spurt occurred and seems to still be in progress. Lodge Lane Xang was a Scottish lodge originally formed in Laos, but went dark in 1976. The brethren of Bangkok reopened the lodge in Thailand in 2000. In 2001, the English finally succeeding in establishing Chula Lodge in Bangkok a mere 123 years after their first attempt. The opening of another English lodge in Phuket in 2004 followed this.

Two more lodges have been formed this year. GLNF formed a second Lodge Hoa Sen Lumière d'Asia in Bangkok while the Irish branched out to southern Thailand with a lodge in Songkla.

The Dutch established their first lodge in South East Asia with the consecration of Loge Erasmus, No. 297 in Bangkok on January 7, 2006. The lodge works in English and includes brethren from The Netherlands, Thailand, and assorted other countries. It has become a focal point for Dutch masons from all over Southeast Asia and even Australia.

In February 2006, the Scottish founded the first Thai language lodge. Lodge Ratanakosin, No. 1833 SC refers to the name bestowed upon what is now Bangkok by the first king of the Chakri Dynasty in 1782. The name translates as "Bejeweled City of the God Indra." The Standard Scottish ritual is being translated by a team of very distinguished Thai brethren. The lodge works in Thai and English. Now Thailand supports lodges from six Grand Lodges offering ritual in three languages. Freemasonry may have had a rocky start in Thailand, but we hope that the strong and very diverse system in place continues to grow and flourish for years to come.

[Taken from a variety of local sources]