

Origins of the Thai typography and printing press

Clear evidence exists that Thai typography originated during the early Rattanakosin Period, which coincided with the 1816 reign of King Rama II. The credit goes to Mrs. Ann Hazeltine Judson wife of Pastor Judson, an American Baptist missionary in Burma but no evidence remains of the book that was published. The printing press and Thai typeface were subsequently moved to India, where *A Grammar of the Thai or Siamese Language* was printed. The book, written in English by Captain James Low, contains several pages that bear the Thai script and is the oldest known book with the Thai typeface.

In 1835, Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, an American missionary, imported a printing press with a Thai typeface into Siam. On June 3, 1836, the printing press produced the first Thai book with Thai typeface in Thailand. Therefore, the Thai printing industry considers June 3 to be Thai Print Day.

From then on, Dr. Bradley continued to print countless Thai books such as *Opium Ban Declaration* 1839, which was the first official printed government document, and *Khamphi Khan Raksa* [Textbook on Midwifery] of 1842, which used a new Thai typeface that Dr. Bradley and his team designed themselves in Thailand.

Dr. Bradley also standardized the Thai typography to fit with modern printing technology. In 1844, he established the first Thai newspaper, *The Bangkok Recorder*.

After Dr. Bradley, several other foreigners attempted to develop Thai typography. Notable figures included Dr. Samuel John Smith. Dr. Smith printed several Thai and English books most significantly, *Tamra Khit Lek* [Arithmetic Textbook] in 1875, and *Chod Mai Het Farang Khrang Krung Kao* [Foreign Chronicles from the Old Capital]. Between 1882 and 1886, Dr. Smith published the *Chod Mai Hed Siam Samai* [Siam Chronicle] in order to report government announcements; he also published Sunthorn Phu's *Phra Abhai Mani* and other stories in book form. They proved to be very popular. While Dr. Bradley published Thai prose, Dr. Smith concentrated on Thai poetry.