

**Statement
on
The Preservation of Hua Lamphong Train Station, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Society of Architectural Historians
Heritage Conservation Committee**

Hua Lamphong Train Station (Bangkok, Thailand, opened in 1916) is acknowledged as an internationally significant work of architecture. The station, referred to by local residents as Krung Thep (Bangkok) Station, is a significant example of cross-cultural exchange in the design process, and is often compared to its near twins, the Hauptbahnhof in Frankfurt and the Gare de l'Est in Paris.

The station was a part of the efforts of King Chulalongkorn, son of King Mongkut, both of whom are highly regarded as having moved the country towards modernization in a number of significant ways. Chulalongkorn and Mongkut's long-standing efforts to modernize Thailand, always self-ruled, led to a very different approach to European design than occurred in places where such design bore the mark of colonialism. King Chulalongkorn worked with two Italian architects, Mario Tamagno and Annibale Rigotti, on the Hua Lamphong Station and several other prominent projects, including a royal palace and a throne room hall. These projects were and are embraced by Thais, and there is no anti-European sentiment about Italian influence in the Thai court. Hua Lamphong Station is notable for its structurally innovative embrace of modern architecture, including the construction of its dramatic wood and metal framed, glazed train glass sheds and distinctive curtain wall on its main elevation. Hua Lamphong is the most architecturally significant stations in all of Thailand, and is one of the most significant of the remaining historic train stations in South East Asia.

Facing a deficit, the State Railway of Thailand (SRT), overseen by the Thai Minister of Transport Saksayan Chidchob, has announced that the station will be decommissioned at end of December, 2021, and the government-owned land opened to commercial development. After local outrage at the initial plan, the SRT determined that the façade might be saved as a part of future development. Other articles suggest its conversion into a railway museum, though with no identified funding stream such a plan will face great financial challenges, as do all museums. There is considerable local fear that any future use that is not seen as commercially viable will result in the demolition of the building. In fact many of the rail connections have already been moved to the new Bang Sue station.

Hua Lamphong Station is the dramatic focal point of a large urban square. If the station were to remain in use, or be reimagined in a vital way, this could continue to be a major urban space in Bangkok. The station serves a diverse economic community, almost certainly more diverse than those who would use the residential/shopping development that is currently envisioned to replace it. An adaptive project in which the station remains in use to some degree, yet contains a range of new commercial development—such as has been successfully undertaken at Union Station, Washington, DC; Grand Central Station, New York City; and King's Cross/ St. Pancras in London—would preserve the historic resource while embracing a host of vital new uses.

The Society of Architectural Historians urges the preservation of the Hua Lamphong Train Station, and a sensitive redevelopment that includes its continued use while embracing new functions that will inject additional economic vitality. Historic buildings such as Hua Lamphong should be preserved, but they need not remain static. They can, and often are, updated to reflect current desires for accessibility, sustainability, and flexible performance, while retaining their historic

core, and their vital connection to the urban networks around them.

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