

## Thai Christian Art: A Christmas Mural in Pattaya



Surprise! On the first view, it looks like a Buddhist temple mural. But if you look closely, you will discover that it doesn't show a Buddhist, but a Christian teaching: The Christmas Story - the birth of Christ - in Thai style (i.e., three kings traveling on elephants, shepherds called by an angel to see Mary and Joseph and to pay respect to the newborn Christ, with a number of Thai-style angels (*thep*) above, singing and praising God, and a Christmas star shining, shaped like a lotus flower).

This Christmas mural (and many other mural depicting the Christian gospel) can be found in St. Clement Chapel, located at the Catholic Redemptorist Center in Pattaya. Not only are the murals designed like murals in a Buddhist temple, but the whole Chapel is designed like a Buddhist temple.

This kind of Christian art is rare in Thailand.

When the first Protestant Christian artists – like Sawai Chinnawong from Chiang Mai – started to adapt traditional Thai style in their art beginning in the 1980s, they were criticized for what seemed to be emulating Buddhist temple art and accused of betraying the heritage of Thai Christian martyrs. Even today, you will find mostly Anglo-American style religious art in Protestant churches in Thailand.

The Roman Catholic Mission in Thailand has a different approach to Thai culture: In their Bible translation, they use terms which are also used in Buddhist teachings, and Roman Catholic art in Thailand is more open to Thai cultural patterns. Sometimes, this has led to the suspicion that this kind of Christian mission tries to undermine Buddhism.

But this kind of art can also offer an opportunity and a challenge: Christ being born in many cultures, thus giving rise to the opportunity to discover, again and again, new aspects of the Gospel of Christ.

The German Protestant Church and the German Catholic Church in Thailand have published a booklet with the Pattaya Chapel murals: "Christ in Thailand" – THB 200 per copy.

For more information look at <http://www.die-bruecke.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Christus-in-Thailand-Cover-Brosch%C3%BCre-3.pdf>, and contact: [ev.kirche.th@gmail.com](mailto:ev.kirche.th@gmail.com) / [post@gemeinde-bangkok.com](mailto:post@gemeinde-bangkok.com)