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UNESCO recognizes Wat Pho in Bangkok with Memory of the World award

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UNESCO Memory of the World award has been granted to Wat Pho or the Temple of the Reclining Buddha, in Bangkok. Like the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the award is given to documents that are officially recognized as being of “outstanding universal value”.

Thailand submitted the Epigraphic Archives of Wat Pho to be placed on the Memory of the World International Register at a meeting of the International Advisory Committee for the Memory of the World Programme of UNESCO in May 2011.

The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme and International Register was established in 1990 in order to raise awareness of the existence and significance of the world’s documentary heritage. The use of a variety of media is one of the strategies used to increase access to such heritage and to stimulate efforts to preserve and protect precious items for future generations to enjoy. Thailand has submitted three nominations to date and all have been accepted by the UNESCO International Advisory Committee on Memory of the World. The first was King Ramkhamhaeng’s inscription from the 13th century, approved in 2003; the second was the Archival Documents of King Chulalongkorn’s Transformation and Modernization of Siam, approved in 2009; and the most recent, the Epigraphic Archives of Wat Pho.

The unique collection of 1,440 inscriptions and illustrations at Wat Pho (Temple of the Bodhi Tree) in Bangkok are the result of a remarkable undertaking by King Rama III and the Thai scholars of that period. The inscriptions are recorded on various tablets and are displayed on different buildings in the temple compound. They are indeed excellent examples of Thai and Asian knowledge and wisdom on a range of subjects including religion, medicine, ethnicity and literature. Almost half of the recordings contain medical and massage of Thai yoga texts which were composed by royal physicians.

The Ministry of Education and the Thai National Committee on Memory of the World are collaborating with Wat pho and its relevant partners to organize celebratory activities on 19-27 November 2011. The aim is to make these inscriptions better known to Thais and foreigners alike and raise awareness and interest amongst the general public on documentary heritage issues.

Located next to the Grand Palace on the south side, Wat Pho is the oldest and biggest temple with the largest number of pagodas (95 in all) in the city. It is well known for its huge Reclining Buddha, 46 meters long and 15 meters high. Besides, it was the first open university of Thailand which used to offer courses in several branches of knowledge like literature, archaeology, astrology and medicine.

Nowadays Wat Pho is famous among foreign visitors for its Thai Traditional Massage School which offers three kinds of massage services namely, body massage, body massage with herbs, and foot massage. The massage service opens daily from 8 a.m. till 5 p.m. For learning courses, there are three courses, i.e. general Thai massage, therapeutic and healing massage and foot massage.

Web site: www.watpho.com