

## Icon Image and Strategies of Presence: Early Siamese Royal Portraiture

Isabel Arbeláez Botero

The Buddha had gone ninety days earlier to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to preach the Law to his mother. King Prasenajit [King Udayana], regretting not being able to see him, had a statue carved in sandalwood ... and had it placed at the spot where the Buddha used to sit. Later, when the Buddha returned to his vihara, the statue came out to welcome him. The Buddha said: 'Return to your seat. After my nirvana, you will serve as model to the four categories of followers.' The statue sat down. This statue is the first of a multitude.

*Gaoseng zhuan* (Biographies of Eminent Monks)<sup>1</sup>

In the early canonical scriptures, one often reads that the Buddha is not in his image. In the *Daoxing jing*, for instance, the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata asks his disciple, Sadāprarudita, 'O Noble One, would you say that the Buddha's spirit is in the image?' Sadāprarudita replies, 'It is not there. The image of the Buddha is made (only) because one desires to have men acquire merit.'

Bernard Faure<sup>2</sup>

The history of Western photography often attributes to the medium a conceptual provenance in the advent of linear perspective during the Italian Renaissance. Indeed, photography as invention, as idea, has its genealogical roots in ocular epistemology and Cartesian perspectivalism.<sup>3</sup> Though this may be a cogent explanation for the desire to invent photography and its subsequent place in Western pictorial traditions, it is by no means a sufficient model to understand visual culture and modes of perception in Southeast Asia, or any non-Western culture. The introduction of photography into the Siamese royal court by Western colonial forces, and its subsequent adoption by King Mongkut, Rama IV, highlights the gap between concepts of perception and gaze in the East and the West. The legacy of photography in Siam, modern-day Thailand, instigated a transformation and modernisation of politics, perception, social formations, and national identity. The Siamese relationship with photography began with King Mongkut and was subsequently refined by his son, King Chulalongkorn, Rama V. In this article I will focus on the shock of representation and self-representation, and the absolute foreignness and violence of the modern gaze, which is inherent in an early daguerreotype of King Mongkut produced by his royal court and Luang Wisut Yothamat, Director of the Siamese Mint and Royal Photographer [Figs. 1 & 2].<sup>4</sup> I will investigate the adoption of photography in Siam through the re-

embedding of this daguerreotype in the cultic tradition of Theravāda Buddhism, and will engage with the particularities of Buddhist icons as essentially living traces and embodiments of power that assert a relationship of mediated symbols and truths to the viewer.

Previous scholarship on this subject has focused on King Mongkut's adoption of photography as a diplomatic tool for the legitimisation of his monarchical status and tends to concentrate on his son, King Chulalongkorn, the celebrated and handsome moderniser of Thailand.<sup>5</sup> There has been little written on the peculiar state of transition from aniconism to visual representation evident in this early photograph, which employs cultic and Buddhist 'strategies of presence.'<sup>6</sup> Visual culture in Siam was embroiled in the duality of Buddhist iconoclastic rhetoric alongside the consecration and ritual of Buddhist icons, notions of gaze, the inherent power of images/icons, and their status as living entities capable of asserting their will. This illuminated daguerreotype is not just a diplomatic image. Although it was a gift to Queen Victoria, it is a daguerreotype used as a substrate for a Buddhist icon, a double so to speak, that has its own strategies of presence.<sup>7</sup> The shift from historical to religious and cultural anthropological concerns allows a "focus ... on the vision of icons, on the asymmetrical exchange of glances that characterize icon worship ... Because they are, in a manner, alive, and not simply dead representations, these icons are images of power."<sup>8</sup> This is precisely how I regard this daguerreotype: as a veritable Buddhist icon, not simply a forced reaction to the aggression of Western colonial powers, but an icon image endowed with its own gaze, power, and agenda.

Each Buddhist icon possesses a different type of relationship with the beholder. Within that range there are varying strategies of presence that stem from either touch (a physical encounter) or from the gaze (or lack of) in the Buddhist icon. There are icons famous for their ritualistic powers and which are made for the express purpose of being touched. In Japan they are called *nade-botoke* or 'Buddha to stroke' and offer physical contact as a form of communication with the observer. "Others are kept, on the contrary, off-limits, because they are too powerful; they tend to get out of hand, or cannot be touched without harm [hidden Buddha]. It is often one of the lesser manifestations that is offered to the touch or gaze of worshippers."<sup>9</sup> In Buddhist thought, the notion of the gaze, either projected onto or reciprocated by the icon, has the power to harm or to violate either the Buddha or the observer. It is no surprise that, in Siam, which belongs to the conservative sect of Theravāda Buddhism (or 'Original Teaching'), they would have been acutely aware of the power of the gaze explicated in traditional religious and philosophical teachings.<sup>10</sup> Along with the "introduction of Buddhism, the god-king became an image of the king as Buddha."<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Siamese monarch is the embodiment of Buddha, the supreme keeper of dharma, and in his own right an icon beset with gaze.

Traditionally, the king of Siam was a 'hidden Buddha,' an icon of power and enlightenment, not available for the gaze of commoners or foreigners. This

notion of a Buddha too powerful and simultaneously too fragile to be gazed upon accounted for the general ban on travel for the King of Siam.<sup>12</sup> As Maurizio Peleggi explains, “the general taboo on representation extended to the very vision [gaze] of the royal body: commoners were forbidden to cast their eyes on the king’s person at public ceremonies, and he concealed himself behind a curtain or in a dim light when receiving foreign representatives.”<sup>13</sup> Rama III, Mongkut’s elder half-brother, retained his status as a hidden Buddha, shielding himself from the gaze of others and therefore rejecting the use of photography. King Mongkut was the first Siamese monarch to use photography, and was consequently the first king to allow for his status as hidden Buddha to shift. With this daguerreotype’s representation of the royal body, King Chulalongkorn was subsequently allowed to travel so extensively that he visited all the major sites of Europe.<sup>14</sup> Buddhism in Siam was especially equipped for the adoption of various foreign cultural practices and hybridisation. Many of the religious doctrines and important texts, along with Buddha himself, originated in geographical areas outside of Siam, so a rich history of interdependence and cross-cultural influence is inherent.<sup>15</sup> King Mongkut’s adoption of foreign technology, specifically photography, can be partially attributed to this cultural exchange.

As King Mongkut made himself visible to the West, he also ceded a certain amount of control over his own representation. There is no denying that the kingship became vulnerable to desacrilisation by the West, not uncommon to many other manifestations of Buddha. Ernest F. Fenollosa (1853-1908), an influential writer and art historian who dealt specifically with Japanese and Chinese Buddhist art, recounted a story in which he received permission from the Meiji government, contrary to the wishes of the monks, to open a temple in which a hidden Buddha resided:

They resisted long, alleging that in punishment for the sacrilege an earthquake might well destroy the temple. Finally we prevailed, and I shall never forget our feelings as the long disused key rattled in the rusty lock. Within the shrine appeared a tall mass closely wrapped about in swathing bands of cotton cloth, upon which the dust of ages had gathered ... at last the final folds of the covering fell away, and this marvelous statue, unique in the world, came forth to human sight for the first time in centuries.<sup>16</sup>

This anecdote exemplifies the inherent violence, perpetrated through profanation and desacrilisation, in the subjection of a Buddhist icon to the gaze. Bernard Faure warns against the “intrinsic violence of the modern gaze and discourse, the predatory nature of our relation with non-Western cultures—a violence so deeply embedded” that it has the ability to repress the cultic associations of the Buddhist icon as an animated image of power.<sup>17</sup> This repression is not only evident in early art historical writings on Buddhist icons as Buddhist *art* but also in exclusively secular explanations for Siamese modernisation and hybridisation. The common secular and pragmatic explanations for the uses of photography in Siam are important

considerations. However, they should not stand as the sole explanation for the self-representation and self-presencing evident in this early daguerreotype [Fig. 1], as they obfuscate the cultic power of this image and King Mongkut's gesture of resistance. Colonial aggression and violence are reified in the newly visualised and gazed-upon image of King Mongkut. The violence of the Western gaze, and more specifically of Queen Victoria's gaze, as well as the use/abuse of the visualisation of King Mongkut, are aspects of the animated icon, but it would be a mistake to assume that this daguerreotype is a purely reactionary image, as I will further discuss.

For a culture that had no royal portrait tradition, the daguerreotype and photography, as opposed to other forms of visual representation, would have seemed a fitting technique to create an icon out of the likeness of the Siamese king. The physical and technological nature of photography can be easily aligned with the philosophical and doctrinal precedents of earlier visual representations of Buddha. The daguerreotype portrait of King Mongkut [Figs. 1 & 2] is artfully and lovingly

illuminated with gold leaf and gold dust. The spectral trace of King Mongkut is delicate and evanescent, and the mirror-like polished surface of the daguerreotype creates an auratic halo around the king's gracefully seated position. This pose references Buddhist visual symbolism, in which different postures represent a spectrum of importance from a deity to a major Buddha, and within which the seated position is generally associated with the latter. "Buddhist iconology has valorized stillness;" their immobility signals the absence of passions and desires.<sup>18</sup> The king is portrayed in full royal regalia, including the crown that resembles the fleshy extension, formally known as the *uṣṇīṣa*, normally depicted in icons of Buddha as a sign of enlightenment. The subtle rainbow colors appear and disappear, like the image of King Mongkut as Buddha, while the viewer turns



**Fig. 1.** Luang Wisut Yothamat (Mot Amatyakun), Director for the Siam Mint and Royal Photographer, *Mongkut, Rama IV of Siam (King of Thailand)*, r. 1851-68 (c. 1856-7). Daguerreotype with added gilt. The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.



Fig. 2. Detail from: Luang Wisut Yothamat (Mot Amatyakun), Director for the Siam Mint and Royal Photographer, *Mongkut, Rama IV of Siam (King of Thailand)*, r. 1851-68 (c. 1856-7). Daguerreotype with added gilt. The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

and tilts the daguerreotype. The King of Siam was a hidden Buddha, but with the creation of this daguerreotype his iconicity shifted; the gaze and tactile touching and tilting became a part of his presence and absence, and he became a Buddha to stroke.<sup>19</sup>

To a Western viewer, this visual approach to photography was often seen as contradicting the unique ontology of the medium of photography. John Thomson, the Scottish photographer who also captured the likeness of King Mongkut [Figs. 3 - 5], took a more proto-ethnographic approach, relying heavily on the indexicality of the image. But, as I will illustrate, photography — specifically the daguerreotype — was a suitable medium for the representation and creation of Buddhist icons. Faure defines the nature of icons thus:

Icons ... are ritually animated and in this sense are not different from masks, puppets, or automatons, in which one finds the same 'conflation of sign and signified.' At times, Buddhist icons are literally animated by the presence within them of a (supposedly) live entity ... The icon becomes a container, a recipient ...<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 3. John Thomson, *The 1<sup>st</sup> King of Siam, King Mongkut, in state robes, Bangkok 1866*, 1866. Photographic glass plate © Wellcome Library, London.

To speak of an icon as a *container* or a *mask* is reminiscent of the terminology utilised in notable texts about the nature of photography. Roland Barthes spoke of photography's dependence on the mask in order to generalise: "the mask is meaning, insofar as it is absolutely pure (as it was in the ancient theatre) ... The Photograph of the Mask is in fact critical enough to disturb ..." <sup>21</sup> Siegfried Kracauer wrote that "photography brings to the fore the entire natural shell," or the natural container, and in this case it is a shell for an animated icon. <sup>22</sup> To further the comparative similarities between the effectiveness and functioning of Buddhist icons and photography, the strength and the power of an icon is integrally associated with its physical connection to the Buddha. Faure asserts that, in this relationship, "the existence of a direct link, historical or metaphysical, with the ultramundane prototype is essential ... Just as the *vera eikon* was imbued with the power of Christ through the impression of his face, the efficacy of Buddhist icons derives from their initial contact with Buddha." <sup>23</sup> This

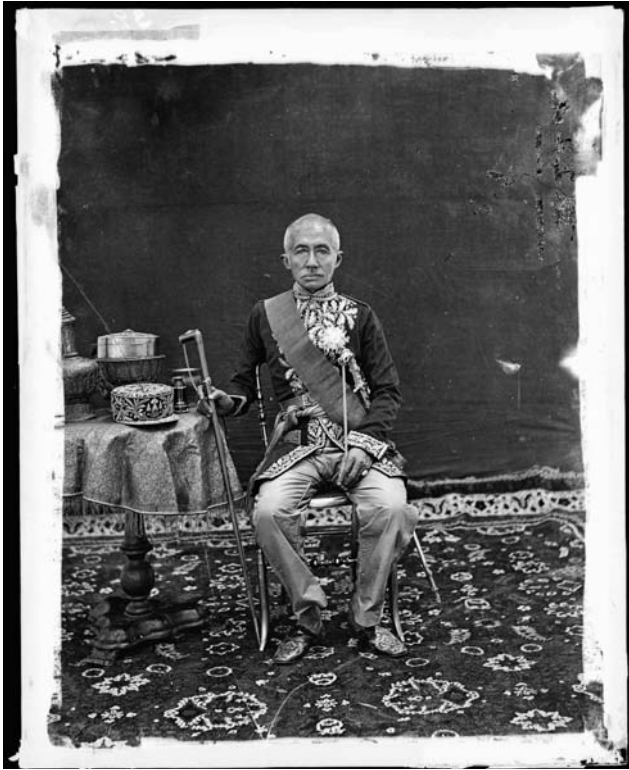


Fig. 4. John Thomson, *The 1<sup>st</sup> King of Siam, King Mongkut, in western style state robes, Bangkok, Siam 1865*, 1865. Photographic glass plate © Wellcome Library, London.

description is also reminiscent of the legend that links the first icon to the “original shadow” left by Buddha on a cave wall in Central Asia.<sup>24</sup> With its own utilisation of impressions and shadows, photography has a natural association with iconicity. The physical emanations of light from King Mongkut’s body are an unbroken physical link, which exposed the light-sensitive plate and created the image of King Mongkut as Buddha, as the embodiment of dharma. The daguerreotype as an object is representative of this contingency, allowing for the breath of aura and delicate trace to vacillate between the spiritual and the tactile, just as the light that was reflected off the Buddha along with the golden marks from his worshippers are, in essence, communicating with the beholder. The Buddhist icon embodies the tension between mimetic qualities and its capacity to transcend representation — that is why there is the double tracing of light and gold leaf.



Fig. 5. John Thomson, *The 1<sup>st</sup> King of Siam, King Mongkut, in western style state robes, Bangkok, Siam, c. 1865-6*. Photographic glass plate © Wellcome Library, London.

With the concept of a photographic Buddhist icon thus understood, the use of such an icon as a gift to Queen Victoria can be adequately explored as part of the power struggle and “asymmetrical exchange of glances” that characterises the relationship between viewer and icon.<sup>25</sup> A particularly interesting facet of the icon is that it retains a sort of transference of power due to its lifelike nature and physical link to figures of power, whether a deity or a King. A Buddhist icon not only borrows power from its double, in this case King Mongkut, but also lends power and legitimisation to its physical embodiment. As Faure explains, “Icons, in their ritual context, are essentially traps, devices for capturing power (*li*) ... [they] permit an articulation between different symbolic orders (the stupa, the human body, the social body, the cosmos).”<sup>26</sup> There is not only a link between Buddha and the icon but also between the viewer and Buddha. This corporeal link, expressly made through the substitute body of King Mongkut in the daguerreotype gifted to Queen Victoria,



allowed for a symbolic and mediated presence, made possible by photographic representation. As King Mongkut was banned from travelling outside of Siam, the gift of his likeness as Buddha served a double purpose: on the one hand, it asserted his presence, while on the other it established a relationship that reciprocated his gaze and therefore his power. Rosalind C. Morris warns that the sacred position of King Mongkut should not be the premise behind the power vested in his royal position because it “makes sacralty an explanation for power rather than a form of its appearance or a representation of power’s own self-transcendentalization.” In this sense, the icon of King Mongkut is all about the forms power can assume.<sup>27</sup> As Morris notes, “A portrait of a monarch is always a picture of power.”<sup>28</sup>

King Mongkut’s act of self-representation and self-presencing was not simply a reactionary move but one that asserted his power and, by extension, his will. Buddhist doctrine and narratives passed down by Buddhist monks propose that the Buddhist icon has a power of resistance and a power of assertion. This power does not exist without risks, for to subject oneself to the purview of others is to become vulnerable. In the same way, the viewer also becomes vulnerable. Buddhist icons are capable of emitting a rancid stench, punishing an offender, or creating a catastrophic natural disaster as ways of asserting their unique will. As Faure suggests, “The icon fights back,” and this power to fight is inherent in the relationship of viewer and icon.<sup>29</sup> A physical correspondence occurs and allows for the existence of a supernatural link. No distinction is made between a worshiper or a viewer, as Faure states: “The correspondence between the icon and its human counterpart is such that the sympathetic magic works even on iconoclasts.”<sup>30</sup> Once Queen Victoria became the viewer, even if only symbolically (though there is reason to believe she cast her eyes on the gift since she was in correspondence with King Mongkut) she was subject to the physical link that allowed King Mongkut to assert his power and legitimacy. This is not intended to suggest that King Mongkut was practicing any sort of ‘black magic’ on Queen Victoria in order to retain his monarchical status, but simply to emphasise the way in which images of power and gaze were viewed and theorised upon in Buddhist visual culture and the resistance that is inherent in this self-presencing.

The second epigraph of this essay reflects a common Buddhist narrative in which visual representations of Buddha are denounced: *Sadāprarudita* makes clear that they are made only to satisfy the desires of men. In contradiction, the first epigraph espouses the opposite point of view as it narrates the Buddha’s own agreement in using icons and representations for the betterment of his followers. Buddhist iconography and aniconism is a duality that at once shuns visual representation while simultaneously using it as an aid for meditation or as a mediator of power or presence deferred. In the abandonment of aniconism to the realm of iconography, the daguerreotype of Rama IV can be seen as a curse.<sup>31</sup> This gifted icon perpetrates the curse of presence and visualisation that was projected onto Queen Victoria, the

symbolic figurehead of Western aggression. The West viewed representations of the 'other' as essentialised types. Indeed, when John Thomson photographed King Mongkut, this is precisely what happened. As Morris poignantly asserts,

[T]he photograph that Thomson took home with him to the rain-drenched sobriety of Scottish positivism ... came to occupy its place in the archive of the ethno-graphic Other and the social type ... We might call the difference [between Figs. 1-2 and Figs. 3-5] one of discourse and, more specifically, a difference located between the discourse of science and politics ... Or we might call it the difference between knowledge and belief. The point to be made is that this difference is not *in* or *of* the photograph per se. The photographs of King Mongkut, I suggest, open up an era and a history which will be characterized by this duality, this split in representation.<sup>32</sup>

The icon image delivered disruption, even if only for an instant. It disrupted the homogenised perspective of positivism and photographic vision whilst forcing Queen Victoria to confront this multiplicity of perspectives. It also illustrated how the photograph could exceed its representational limits, thus challenging the Western theorisation of photography as a stockpile of objective details. These differing perspectives were often dismissed, in a self-superior Western interpretation, as irrational. King Mongkut forced Queen Victoria into a relationship of exchange and of vulnerability (his and hers). It is the disruption of perceived hegemony and control that constitutes the curse. In this way, the power of images was acutely embodied in the ever present/absent icon.

The paradox, tension, and duality of representation in Buddhist visual culture are mirrored in an interesting historical assumption. The creation of the modern nation-state of Thailand, under the ubiquitous perception of unity evident in the image of the monarch, was achieved partly through the aggression of colonial powers and forced boundary-making due to disputes over land.<sup>33</sup> In Buddhist teaching there is a theory of Two Truths. A split dual existence of the real, the icon is used as a bridge between these two truths. The icon is a symbol that meditates presence, power, and aura between these two realities; between concepts of aniconism and iconicity, positivism and cultism, representation and presence. Through this theory of two truths, the resistance of the daguerreotype is highlighted by the existence of varying perspectives. The mediation between Queen Victoria's gaze and King Mongkut's is one between knowledge and belief.

- 1 *Gaoseng zhuan*, in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, T. Junjirō and W. Kaigyoku, eds, 100 Vols. (Tokyo, 124-32) 50:860b, quoted and trans. by B. Faure, 'The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1998, 782.
- 2 Faure, 'The Buddhist Icon,' 782-3.
- 3 S. Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies* (Albany: State

- University of New York Press, 1996) 1-2. This provenance began with a series of lectures by Heinrich Schwarz in 1963, 'Before 1839: Symptoms and Trends,' later published in an anthology of Schwarz's lectures and essays: *Art and Photography: Fore-runners and Influences* (1985). Schwarz's ideas were, borrowed for an exhibition curated by Peter Galassi and John Szarkowski at MoMA in 1981, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*. See G. Thornton, 'The Place of Photography in the Western Pictorial Tradition: Heinrich Schwarz, Peter Galassi and John Szarkowski,' *History of Photography*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1986.
- 4 Little is known about Luang Wisut Yothamat's (Mot Amatyakun) exact contribution to the creation of this daguerreotype. Although he was the royal photographer it is not clear whether he was also responsible for the illumination. Due to this uncertainty I will refer to both Yothamat and King Mongkut's royal court when consulting the creation of this daguerreotype. I would like to thank Sophie Gordon, Senior Curator of Photographs at the Royal Collection, for bringing this to my attention.
  - 5 M. Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), and C. Cary, 'In the Image of the King: Two Photographs from Nineteenth-Century Siam,' in N. A. Taylor, ed., *Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Conner* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000) 122-42.
  - 6 R. C. Morris, 'Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power: Notes from Thailand,' in R. C. Morris, ed., *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) 121-59. This essay is an excellent example of sustained analysis of the visual implications of the daguerreotype of King Mongkut and I am indebted to Morris's research.
  - 7 Faure, 'The Buddhist Icon,' 779. I refer to Faure's research and extensive knowledge of the cultural specificities and functioning of Buddhist icons in Middle-East, Southeast, East, and Far East Asia. I borrow the phrase "strategies of presence" from this essay, which is meant to pay particular emphasis to the cult of the icon and the ways icons create and assert their presence in the cultural and spiritual arena. I use it to allude to these varying strategies whilst analysing the specific implications of visualising King Mongkut as Buddha. Faure's use of this phrase is also meant to conjure Derrida's "metaphysics of presence" used in *Of Grammatology* (1967) translated from French by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1976.
  - 8 *Ibid.*, 768-9.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, 791.
  - 10 D. Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 11.
  - 11 George Coedès, *Pour mieux comprendre Angkor*, 62, quoted in Faure, 'The Buddhist Icon,' 793.
  - 12 Peleggi, *Lords of Things*, 1-43.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 45.
  - 14 For more information on Rama V's travels, see *Ibid.*, 44-71.
  - 15 Keown, *Buddhism*, 70-83.
  - 16 E. F. Fenellosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design*, Vol. 1 (London: Heinemann, 1912) 50.
  - 17 Faure, 'The Buddhist Icon,' 772-7.

- 18 *Ibid.*, 770.
- 19 “However, one should distinguish between those Buddhist icons that are multiplied and offered to the gaze of worshippers and those—like the master’s portrait (*chinzō*), the mummy, or the ‘hidden Buddhas’ (*hibitsu*)—that remain sequestered in the temple’s inner sanctum. The former serve as aids to visualization (but also as ex-votos), whereas the latter remain the invisible bodies (or doubles) of the gods.” *Ibid.*, 807.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 770.
- 21 R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage Books, 2000) 34-6.
- 22 S. Kracauer, ‘Photography,’ first published in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 1927, reprinted in *Critical Inquiry* Vol.19, No. 3, 1986, 435, trans. T. Y. Levin. Kracauer believed that photography’s revolutionary nature was in its separation of the natural shell from meaning and symbolism, or what Walter Benjamin called ‘aura.’ This referred to the use of photography in Western cultures and in a positivist light. The whole issue is therefore problematised when applied to the use of photography in a culture that is still embedded in ritual and sacred traditions, like Siam. I realise that this claim is contrary to Kracauer’s, but believe that the difference in cultures is integral to the validity of both my claims and Kracauer’s.
- 23 Faure, ‘The Buddhist Icon,’ 801.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 804.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 768-9.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 790-1.
- 27 Morris, ‘Photography and the Power of Images,’ 126. Morris further asserts the importance of this daguerreotype: “Integrating indexicality with iconicity, the photograph is that which disappears only to demand looking. It is this looking, born of the senses but enframed by discourse, that ultimately gives to the photograph the possibility of being an image and that renders it an object of investment and identification. Moreover, it is this looking that permits the photograph to be not only a trace of past presence but an image of power, and hence of presence deferred.” *Ibid.*, 131.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 136.
- 29 Faure, ‘The Buddhist Icon,’ 795. Faure recounts a multitude of Buddhist texts and legends that exemplify the many ways in which Buddhas have either reacted to situations or have asserted their own will when deemed necessary.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 803.
- 31 For more on photography and the curse of disruption, see J. T. Siegel, “The Curse of the Photograph: Atjeh 1901,” in R. C. Morris, ed., *Photographies East* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). “Whoever sees these pictures and understands what they mean will lack a reflection of himself in the gaze of the photographed subject. The viewer thus disappears along with those invested in the jihad. Such is the curse.” *Ibid.*, 76. Here Siegel points to the disruption of the Dutch colonial gaze by the Atjehnese as they refused and resisted Western representational norms.
- 32 Morris, ‘Photography and the Power of Images,’ 131.
- 33 This by no means, justifies the colonialist perspective of progress, but rather highlights the paradoxical notions of power and greed.