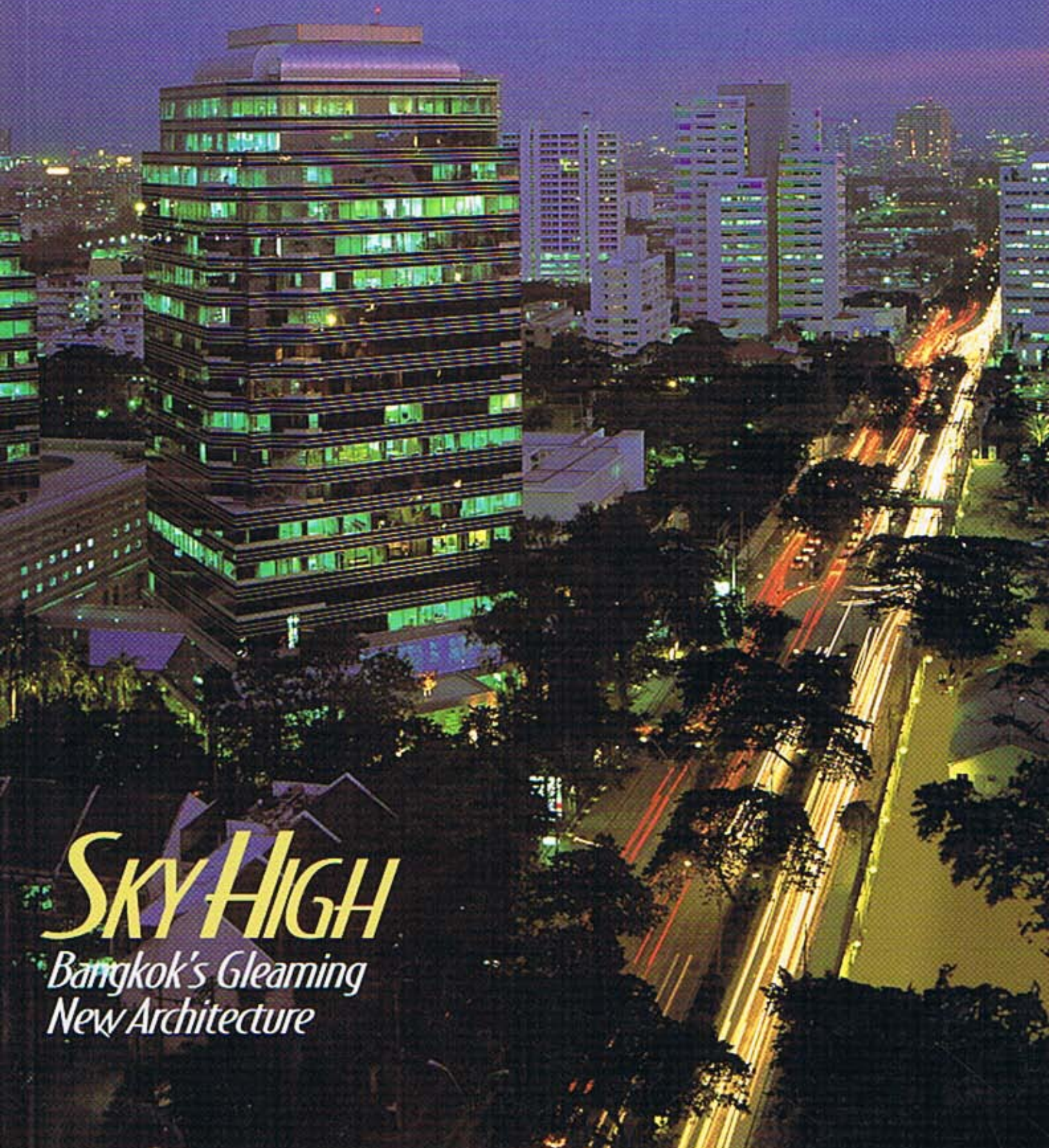




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# SAWASDEE

THE BEST OF THAILAND MAY 1997



## *SKY HIGH*

*Bangkok's Gleaming  
New Architecture*

# Endangered Feces

By HARRY ROLNICK

**K**hun Boonman Poonyathiro is a man with a mission. In the age of conservation, the 65-year-old amateur archaeologist is single-handedly trying to save Endangered Feces. Known to scientists as coprolites, petrified dinosaur droppings have been a passion for Boonman for over 20 years. He sells the droppings from his little shop on New Road, Bangkok, for five baht a gram. A small dropping may cost close to THB1,000 (US\$40).

"I admit that they used to go for half that price," he laughs, "but Steven Spielberg changed all that. After *Jurassic Park*, dinosaur feces became inflated."

Tektites collected near the River Kwai, fossils, dinosaur eggs, bones, books and pictures are crammed onto the shop's wooden shelves. But ever since Boonman discovered that Thailand was the home of coprolites, he has been most proud of their little case.

"I never studied this," he explained, "but I loved things with history. So when I joined the Thai Embassy in London in 1962, I had time to indulge in my passion. I set up the Cambridge University Buddhist Society at the same time as I would go to the Geology Museum and Natural History Mus-

eum near the Embassy."

When he returned to Bangkok, Boonman took over his cousin's jewelry shop, carved wood (another passion) and searched for tektites.

"One day, in Mukdaharn Province, I was approached by some women with dull-looking wrinkly rocks," he recalls. "They told me that they had discovered 'the dung of the Lord Buddha's cow.' In fact, they used to put the dung in water, then bathed in it and made wishes.

"Well, I knew that dinosaur remains were sometimes found in the province. So I brought back the 'Sacred Dung' and had it analyzed by an English geologist. My hypothesis proved correct. And since that time, I've been hunting the dung in the Northeast."

Today, he can distinguish carnivorous and veggie dinosaurs by the color of the coprolite. He recalls the largest piece of dung he ever found, an eight-kilo ball which was bought by a Japanese collector.

But buyers still search out his shop, set amidst more mundane businesses. And, as he carefully wraps the coprolites for his customers, he includes this poem written by another, equally awed collector:



## ON GIVING PREHISTORIC FECES TO A FRIEND

*Dinosaur droppings! Useless things, really  
Can't wear 'em, invest 'em, pin 'em to the wall.  
Why give your friend something so silly?  
Go to a shop, a market, a mall!!*

*But no: In every drop was a hot birth,  
Predating even Chinese dragons,  
Masting over the furious earth,  
Thrashing, thrusting, trampling sky and suns.*

*Yet even thrashing, the nutrient spat out  
Crouching it uttered a listless lizard moan  
And all we have today, all from the spout  
Is a prehistoric dropping, an egg, a bone.*

*We were not from dinosaurs descended.  
But maybe – just maybe – some germ in it thrived  
And a pre-mammalian mite whose species would have ended  
Fed upon it and survived!  
It lived, matured, produced something more,  
And may – finally – have produced you and me.  
History itself can only soar  
From imagination, life's primal energy.*