

Between Localism and Nationalism: Two contemporary examples of
Thai Temple Art and Architecture in Northern Thailand

by

Geneviève Gamache
B.A., McGill University, 2001
M.A., McGill University, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Abstract

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This dissertation is about the tension and continuum between localism and nationalism in contemporary Thai Buddhist art and architecture. It deals with two contemporary Buddhist temples as works of art and architecture set into particular spatial relations. In this dissertation I compare two contemporary neo-traditionalist Buddhist temples, Wat Rong Khun and Wat Pa'O Ram Yen, situated near the city of Chiang Rai in northern Thailand. Neo-traditionalism has been identified as an important and relatively standard artistic style in Thailand since the 1970's. It is often presented as a style which follows and promotes a conventional view of Thai national identity formation and nationally defined Thai Buddhist practices.

However, the social anxiety experienced during the 1970's social uprisings, then following the 1997 Asian financial debacle and more recently during and after the early 21st century yellow and red shirts rallies in Bangkok and Chiang Mai led to a profound reevaluation and reassessment of Thai national identity formation. Many Buddhist, social, ecological and political movements have since either obviously or subtly destabilized the perceived Thai national image. These movements often include, even promote, discourses on localism where Thai nationalism is experienced, questioned and adapted by and for the local community. Yet the art historical discourses on neo-traditionalism still follow a conventional national identity formation and visual propaganda. In this dissertation I analyze how two northern temples promote different national vocabularies, from a centralized and more accepted nationalism, to one where concepts based on

localism, such as local knowledge, have the potential to destabilize and reevaluate, national identity, without negating it.

Charlarmchai Kostipipat is the mastermind behind Wat Rong Khun's design and construction. Though this temple seems to differ from other temples in Thailand, I will show how the main emphasis of this neo-traditional monument is to promote and support a more conventional and institutionalized version of national identity. I will show how the visitor's aesthetic experience emphasizes aspects of Buddhism also promoted by the centralized Thai national identity formation, such as social hierarchy. Indeed when visiting the temple, social hierarchy is paralleled in the artistic and architectural elements of the temple, such as its spatial division, the mural paintings and the separation between monastic architectural monuments. Most importantly, there is a strong artistic emphasis on the Traiphum Phra Ruang, an important religious text in Thailand. I believe visitors can experience different levels of rebirth described in the Traiphum through the temple's artistic and architectural program.

Wat Pa'O is a temple located less than 30 km away from Wat Rong Khun. Like Wat Rong Khun, Wat Pa'O is also the artistic project of another northern Thai artist, this time Somluk Pantiboon, a ceramicist established in the village of Pa'O. The temple of Pa'O is an artistic monument I argue is a neo-traditional work because of its use of traditional media, artistic details and monastic conventions. Yet I will show how this artistic architectural project has the potential to destabilize the more conventional 'neo-traditionalism' promoted by institutionalized processes of Thai national identity formation. For example it promotes different elements of the Thai discourses on localism, including an engaged form of Buddhism focusing on social interactions and an acknowledgement of one's relation to others at the immediate local level rather than an acceptance of being a generic player in the institutionalized Thai national identity formation. It also promotes a connectedness with nature, allowing the participant to experience and realize dependent origination by observing and experimenting with nature.

This dissertation shows the complexity of Thai national identity negotiated in two case studies of northern Buddhist art and architecture in a post-1997 financial

debacle and current political situation. I hope to have demonstrated this complexity needs to be taken into account in the artistic discourses on Thai neo-traditionalism.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Summary

This dissertation is about the tension and continuum between localism and nationalism in contemporary Thai Buddhist art and architecture. This dissertation deals with two contemporary Buddhist temples as works of art and architecture set into particular spatial relations. I will compare two contemporary Buddhist temples currently under construction in the province of Chiang Rai, northern Thailand.¹ I will argue that one temple follows mainly a nationalist and centralized form of Buddhism and Buddhist social outlook, while the other represents a renewed interest in locality, ecology and engaged Buddhism scholars have noticed, particularly after the 1997 financial debacle.²

The first temple, Wat Rong Khun, by artist Chalermchai Kositpipat (เฉลิมชัย โฆษิตพิพัฒน์),³ is visually dramatic and at first glance, appears to be quite different from other temples in Thailand, due to its monochromatic scheme, arabesque decorations and overall organization of the buildings. Yet Chalermchai says that he wants to build this temple as a gift to the Nation, Buddhism and the King, which are,

¹ The term ‘Siam’ will be used when specifically referring to a historical moment before 1939 when the name of the country was changed from Siam to Thailand. For moments after 1939, the term ‘Thailand’ is preferred. ‘Thailand’ will also be used as a general term when particular historical moments are not specified.

² See Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand's Crisis* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000). It is important to note however that questions regarding Buddhism, ecology and aspects of localism have been part of Thai history since its ‘beginning.’ Indeed, as this dissertation mentions, questions regarding Buddhism and the complicated relations between the center/Bangkok and its peripheries were part of national identity formation since the founding of the Chakri dynasty and most importantly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, following Thongchai Winichakul’s writings on the 1973 and 1976 political and social tensions, Pasuk and Baker’s writings on the post-1997 financial crisis, as well as following the more recent social and political tensions of the early 21st century between the yellow and the red shirts, I believe we have seen and are still witnessing, a renewed of interest in these debates. I believe these events have acted as social catalysts and have helped the questioning of certain components of the established national identity formation.

³ The Thai language operates on a first name basis. Therefore, in this dissertation, after the full Thai name is given, only the first name of the person will be used to identify this individual. For example ‘Chalermchai’ will be used instead of Mr. Kositpipat.

following King Vajiravudh's concept of nationalism, the three pillars of Thai nationalism.⁴ Chalermchai's involvement at Wat Rong Khun started after the 1997 Asian financial debacle, when an important reassessment of Thai nationalism occurred. Though this reassessment of Thai nationalism took many forms, Chalermchai's artistic program and inspiration are centered mostly on a centralized nationalism based on the late 19th and early 20th centuries CE modernization of Thailand. Indeed, even if the village of Rong Khun is a small northern village, and though the complexity of the artistic details of Wat Rong Khun appear different from other Thai temples, the complex artistic program promotes merit-making, social hierarchy and traditional Thai cosmography, which are important elements of the centralized nationalist discourses and the Thai central *Sangha*.⁵ I therefore argue that this temple promotes a nationalist use and view of Buddhism and therefore a centralized national identity. The second temple on the other hand, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen, has a very subdued artistic appearance. The artist responsible for the project, Somluk Pantiboon (สมลักษณ์ ปันติบุญ), has specifically studied traditional Lan Na art and architecture for his design of Wat Pa'O, yet does not copy it indiscriminately; he transforms it to suit contemporary needs and context. At Pa'O, the contemporary context is the local community, a small village of northern Thailand.

The principles behind the temple's art and architecture are centered on the community instead of mainly a national identity formation, as the foremost element in the syncretic structure of Wat Rong Khun. The Buddhism promoted at Pa'O is a

⁴ The three pillars of nationalism according to King Vajiravudh will be discussed further in chapter 2.

⁵ A *Sangha* is an assembly of monks. Far from me to suggest that social hierarchy, social divisions (between lay community and the Sangha) and most importantly merit-making are not important elements generally found, though the level of significance may vary, in the different regions where Theravada Buddhism is practiced. As will be explained in more details later however, I believe that these aspects were of particular importance during Thailand's period of modernization. As Cohen shows however, and as will be discussed, a unified and centralized Sangha did not exist in historical Lan Na. Paul T. Cohen, "Buddhism Unshackled: The Yuan 'Holy Man' Tradition and the Nation-State in the Tai World," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (2001): 227-47. Furthermore, as Bowie shows, though the importance of merit-making was always present in historical Lan Na, its practices were less ritualized than in central Bangkok. These differences will be studied in greater details in a subsequent section. Katherine A. Bowie, "The Alchemy of Charity: Of Class and Buddhism in Northern Thailand," *American Anthropologist* vol.100, no.2 (1998): 469-81.

local application of an engaged Buddhism, with an active take on society, rather than a fixed social hierarchy based on Buddhist cosmology. Furthermore, though two individual artists created both artistic programs, Chalermchai Kositpipat at Wat Rong Khun and Somluk Pantiboon at Wat Pa'O, Wat Rong Khun is promoted as the artistic vision of one singular artist, Chalermchai Kositpipat, while Somluk Pantibon emphasizes the collaborative production of Wat Pa'O. Therefore though the artistic programs of both temples were respectively designed by individual artists and though both temples are physically constructed by groups of people, the promotion as well as the importance of both temples as being individually or communally produced separate the two temples.

As this dissertation deals with two contemporary Buddhist temples as works of art and architecture set into particular spatial relations, the main theoretical frame will be Art Historical, with an emphasis on formal analysis as well as religious and social perspectives. This dissertation locates itself within art historical scholarship, with theoretical perspectives pertaining to Thai studies (part of Southeast Asian studies, an area studies approach), visual culture, sociology, political science, history and religious studies. The comparative analysis will involve central/national and local perspectives. In my analysis I will show how the concepts of 'central' and 'local' often permeate each other.

Thai Artistic Context

The first writings on pre-modern arts published in Thailand were written in parallel with and to support, an emerging nationalist, centralized and elitist view of Thailand's history. These writings were using a grand narrative format, both at the historical and art historical levels, which demonstrates a clear evolution of styles and artistic productions, written in a manner that demonstrates the legitimate historical underpinnings of the greatness of the Thai nation.

Prince Damrong Rajanubhap (1862-1943) (กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ), half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (พระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว),

who is known as the ‘father of Thai history,’⁶ constructed the history of Thailand from the perspective of a Bangkok elite, “creating a royal/national history to serve the modern Thai state.”⁷ The nation needed to be built and defined, hence the formal and descriptive approach to history and art history.⁸ Indeed Prince Damrong wrote Thai history as well as a manuscript on Thai monumental architecture.⁹

Damrong’s historiography is a grand narrative constructed from an elite’s perspective and used to, among other things, justify their political and hierarchical locations. This grand narrative is written as a historical development of the different acknowledged Thai historical kingdoms of the land, an evolution from the historical kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya to the modern Thai capital of Bangkok. This historiography and art historiography are still in use today and are sometimes referred to as the Damrong School.¹⁰ Although, as I revisit later, this grand narrative comes to be questioned in the 1970’s, still, many Thai and English historical as well as art historical surveys still follow this ‘evolution’. This historiography is showing the greatness of Thailand’s past, and was created to counteract westernization as well as bringing Thailand into a new world order.¹¹ This grand narrative historiography is constructed from a royal or elite perspective, with a chronological account of the different kings’ reigns, using Buddhism to

⁶ B.A. Batson, “Sources of Thai history: The Papers of Prince Damrong,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 63, no. 2 (1975): 334-42; Tej Bunnag, *The provincial administration of Siam, 1892-1915: the Ministry of the Interior under Prince Damrong Rajanubhab* (Kuala Lumpur and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Damrong Rajanubhab, *A History of Buddhist Monuments in Siam*, trans. S. Sivaraksa (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1962).

⁷ Tongchai Winichakul, “The Changing Landscape of the past: New Histories in Thailand since 1973,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995), 102. He also reorganized the provincial administrations, effectively damping the power of province officials and local administrations, giving strength to a central administration based in Bangkok and administered by an urban elite.

⁸ Rajanubhab, *A History of Buddhist Monuments in Siam*. This formalist approach is still the official format for publications by the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Education of Thailand. See *Development of Thai Culture* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Education, 1993).

⁹ Batson, “Sources of Thai history: The Papers of Prince Damrong,” 334-42; Rajanubhab, *A History of Buddhist Monuments in Siam*.

¹⁰ Winichakul, “The Changing Landscape of the past: New Histories in Thailand since 1973,” 99-120.

¹¹ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994).

legitimize and support the elite in both politics and art. Indeed, in his art historical writings Damrong focuses on monumental Buddhist architecture as evidence of the kingdoms' and the kings' greatness.

Thai non-monumental art received acknowledgement somewhat later, especially while Luang Wichit Wathakan (หลวงวิจิตรวาทการ) was the head of the Thai Government's Fine Arts Department for seven years after the 1932 coup ending the absolute monarchy.¹² During this time Thai minor arts were used to increase national awareness and unity. Yet, these crafts or minor arts were not the arts of the everyday life, but arts of the elite, with gold ware, silverware, nielloware, mother-of-pearl inlay etc.¹³ The publications related to these crafts follow the same formal and descriptive approach of the previous monumental art publications, with an interest in works pertaining to the elite class or to Buddhism, the same way monumental architecture was used by Damrong to promote national identity. This desire for the Thai artworks to express a certain Thai identity and national unity is also present in contemporary art, especially neo-traditional Thai art. Indeed, as will be seen in chapter 2, the artistic neo-traditionalist movement is very strong in Thailand. As Apinan Poshyananda has pointed out, in discourses on Thai neo-traditionalism, the *tradition* is primarily seen as 'Thai' and the art works promote 'Thainess'. This dilemma of tradition versus modern, or indeed the integration of both, is the scope of major publications on Thai modern art, and indeed on Southeast Asian art in general.¹⁴

¹² Apinan Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford and New York: Oxford university Press, 1992), 29; Winichakul, "The Changing Landscape of the past: New Histories in Thailand since 1973," 99-120. See page 19 of this dissertation.

¹³ *Thai Minor Arts* (Bangkok: National Museum Division, The Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Education, 1993); Birasri Silpa, *Thai Lacquer works* (Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department, 2506).

¹⁴ Apinan Poshyananda, "Thai Art _Past and Present," in *Southeast Asian Art today*; Apinan Poshyananda, "Thai MODERNism to (post?) modernISM, 1970s and 1980s," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark, The University of Sydney East Asian Series number 7 (Broadway: Wild Peony Ltd, 1993); Apinan Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transtition," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Tradition/Tensions* (New York: Asia Society, 1996); Apinan Poshyananda, "Contemporary Thai art: Nationalism and sexuality à la Thai," in *Traditions/Tensions. Contemporary Art in Asia*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York: Asian Society Galleries, 1996); Apinan Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and*

The two temples will therefore be located against this Grand Narrative of Thai art and part of my analysis will be to evaluate if they reinforce or destabilize it. To do so, Thai discourses on modern nationalism and localism will be studied to position the two temples, their inspirations and artistic discourses, within the current cultural and social contexts in Thailand.

Theoretical frameworks

Art and Art History and literature review of Thai Art History

“Art history is one of a network of interrelated institutions and professions whose overall function has been to fabricate a historical past that could be placed under systematic observation for use in the present.”¹⁵ There is no consensus amongst art historians as to the efficacy and adequacy of “various paradigms or analytic methods for rendering artworks adequately legible[.]”¹⁶ Far from being the only possible analytical methods when studying modern and contemporary neo-traditional artworks, the art historical approaches taken in this dissertation center around social art history, iconography, formal and stylistic analysis, as well as art historical identity politic, which itself can be seen as part of social art history.

This dissertation is an analysis of what I consider two contemporary neo-traditional artistic and architectural projects. As will be explained shortly in greater details, neo-traditional art in Thailand is often categorized as a modern Asian art form, sometimes also classified as the Modernism’s ‘derivative,’ to use John Clark’s word, Post-Modernism.¹⁷ Many scholars have studied Asian modern art as well as

Twentieth Centuries (Oxford and New York: Oxford university Press, 1992); Sandra Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003); Helen Michaelsen, “State Building and Thai Painting and Sculpture in the 1930s and 1940s,” in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark, The University of Sydney East Asian Series number 7 (Broadway: Wild Peony Ltd, 1993); Herbert P. Phillips, *The Integrative Art of Modern Thailand* (Berkeley: Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, 1992);

¹⁵ Donald Preziosi, “Art History: Making the Visible Legible,” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

¹⁷ See John Clark, “Open and Closed Discourses of Modernity in Asian Art,” in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark, The University of Sydney East Asian Series number 7 (Broadway: Wild Peony Ltd, 1993), 5. See Apinan Poshyananda’s work Apinan Poshyananda, *Modern Art in*

Southeast Asian modern art, sometimes comparing how different social, cultural and political factors, such as colonialism, nationalism, even the foundation of different art schools, affect the different Asian modern art movements.¹⁸

Publications on modern and contemporary Asian art also stress the importance of analyzing the different Asian movements in relation to their own contexts of production and value formation. Indeed many publications deal with the 'reception' of modern Asian art, as well as Southeast Asian art by the western community.¹⁹ Clark says "when we look at modern Asian art we must be sure about who is the 'we', and sure about the 'where from' which 'we' look."²⁰ Other scholars have also warned against applying Euro-American artistic perspectives on Southeast Asian modern art forms. Referring to modern Indonesian art, Astri Wright says "it is on the level of ideas associated with the forms employed in an art work that indigenous, non-Western perspectives are most evident."²¹ This also applies to Thai modern art.

Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Oxford and New York: Oxford university Press, 1992), 197-201.

¹⁸ See for example John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998).

¹⁹ See for example Clark, "Open and Closed Discourses of Modernity in Asian Art," 1-17; Apinan Poshyananda, "Thai MODERNism to (post?) modernISM, 1970s and 1980s," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark, The University of Sydney East Asian Series number 7 (Broadway: Wild Peony Ltd, 1993); Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain. Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford, Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); John Clark, "What Modern and Contemporary Asian Art Is [or Is Not]: The View from MoMA and the View from Asia," in John Clark, Maurizio Peleggi and T.K. Sabapathy, University of Sydney East Asian Series, no.15 (Broadway: Wild Poney Ltd, 2006); John Clark, Maurizio Peleggi and T.K. Sabapathy, eds. *Eye of the Beholder. Reception, Audience and Practice of Modern Asian Art*, University of Sydney East Asian Series, no.15 (Broadway: Wild Poney Ltd, 2006).

²⁰ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 23

²¹ Wright, *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain. Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters*, 6. See also Izmer Ahmad, "Tracing the Mark of Circumcision in Modern Malay/sian Art" (University of Victoria, 2008); Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*,; Stanley J. O'Connor, "Humane Literacy and Southeast Asian Art," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995): 147-58; Nora A. Taylor, ed. *Whose Art are We Studying? Writing Vietnamese Art History from Colonialism to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2000).

The historiography of Art in Thailand is relatively modern, starting with Silpa Bhirasri²² (ศิลป์ พีระศรี) in the early 20th century. Thai art history is generally descriptive and formal, with a high degree of aesthetic criticism, especially when it comes to historical art.²³ This descriptive and formal analysis of Thai art, especially of Thai historical art, follows a standardization of art history and art ‘appreciation’. This descriptive Thai art history is within the parameter of Thai studies, both from Thailand and abroad, which often tries to describe and define the cultural characteristics and the history of a nation or region.²⁴

As Thongchai Winichakul explains, this ethnographic and ‘descriptive’ scholarship is not only specific to Thai studies, not even to Southeast Asian studies, but is part of the larger post-colonial and nationalist scholarship of the 20th century, from both Thailand and abroad.²⁵ Some of the strategies of post-colonial scholarship were to forge a national identity, from the perspective of the nation based on cultural specificities that would define their national and ethnic legitimacy. Though Thailand was never formally colonized, the impact of foreign political threats²⁶ led to what scholars call, the neo-colonialization of Thailand.

Various Thai art historical writings are part of this descriptive scholarship. For example, Damrong’s son, Prince Subhadradis Diskul (หม่อมเจ้าสุภัทรดิศ ดิศกุล), wrote ศิลปะในประเทศไทย/ Sinlapa Nai Prathet Thai [Art in Thailand: A Brief

²² Silpa Bhirasri was born Corrado Feroci. He was invited by the Thai government to “work as a sculptor in Bangkok” in 1923. He was given an official first contract of 4 years in 1924, followed by unlimited stay. Feroci changed his name and was naturalized Thai during WWII. He was behind the establishment of Silpakorn University, Thailand’s University of Fine Arts, in 1943. Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 21, 34.

²³ For example, see Woralan Bunyasourat, *วิหารล้านนา/Vihan Lanna* (Bangkok: Khansouttakanphim, 2001). Wolaran’s study of Lan Na *vihan* and decoration are good examples. His work is descriptive and often uses the word ‘beautiful’ to show the importance and value of a work. This particular relation between descriptive details and aesthetic is รายละเอียด/railaiad, where the intricacy of a work and the finesse of its details are the basis of its aesthetic importance. Herbert P. Phillips, *The Integrative Art of Modern Thailand* (Berkeley: Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, 1992), 41.

²⁴ Winichakul, “The Changing Landscape of the past: New Histories in Thailand since 1973,” 99-120.

²⁵ Ibid, 99-120; Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*.

²⁶ See pages 70-71 of this dissertation.

History], first published in Thai in the 1960's and in English in the 1970's, an art historical survey following his father and Luang's great narrative.²⁷ Both van Beek and Tettoni's book *The Art of Thailand* (1985) and Betty Gosling's *Origins of Thai Art* (2004) follow the same 'evolution' of art based on royal historical periods. Other books also follow the same basis of analysis, such as Matics' *Introduction to the Thai Temple*, published in 1992, Woodward's *The Art and Architecture of Thailand*, published in 2003, Stratton and McNair Scott's *The Art of Sukhothai, Thailand's Golden Age*, published in 1981 and H.G. Quaritch Wales' *The Origins of Sukhodaya art*, published in 1956, to name only a few.

These works have commonalities, they follow a grand narrative of artistic evolution and they focus on certain periods of monumental art in Thailand. They also show the relations between the alleged Thai kingdoms and other great Asian kingdoms or empires, such as Indian and Khmer artistic influences. These works are also similar as they include the monumental architecture and sculpture of the different time periods. They focus on Buddhist architecture, as these monuments were built with relatively permanent media, such as stones and bricks. Only sometimes are short sections of the publications dedicated to pottery or temple wall paintings. Crafts and everyday artifacts are usually not part of these surveys, except perhaps for ceramic art. Interestingly, the Thai Fine Arts Department published *Thai Minor Arts* in 1993, where important crafts are described, such as gold ware, silverware, niello ware, mother-of-pearl, but also royal barge procession. Yet the everyday crafts used by Thai people are not present in this book. Indeed, except for textile, only a few books on Thai crafts are available, such as Warren and Tettoni's book *Arts and Crafts of Thailand*, first published in 1994, Naengnoi and Somchai's *The Art of Thai Wood Carving: Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Rattanakosin*, published in 1992. These books follow the lead of the Thai Fine Arts Department by centering on Buddhism and the elite. Michaelsen shows how Silpa Bhirasri (ศิลป์ พีระศรี) was reticent to include traditional and historical art on the curriculum of modern art, yet

²⁷ The book is based on the prince's lectures at Thammasat University in Thailand. Jane Puranananda, "The Prince of Thai Art History: The James H.W. Thompson Foundation Honours Mom Chao Subhadradis Diskul," *Orientalism* 35, no. 6 (2004), 79-80.

was forced to do so because of the political context of the time.²⁸ It was included mainly because of Luang Wichit²⁹ and his support of the strong nationalist politics of the time (Field Marshal Sarit Thannarat was in power between 1958-1963), which was promoting traditional values.³⁰

When it comes to modern art, Apinan Poshyananda's work *Modern Art in Thailand*, published in 1992, offers an imposing and comprehensive survey of modern Thai art, from its alleged beginnings during the late 19th century, during the absolute monarchy of the Chakri dynasty, to 1991. Apinan divides his work contextually and stylistically, following a chronological progression. He centers his study on major events pertaining to the development of Thai modern art, such as the foundation of different schools, galleries and evolution of patronage. He also looks at artistic schools and styles, such as abstract art, neo-traditionalism or landscape art. Apinan has become an important scholar, administrator as well as curator on the Southeast Asian and international artistic scene.³¹

The dilemma of tradition versus modernism, or indeed the integration of both, is the subject of major publications, including Apinan's subsequent works, such as his 1996 introduction to the publication on the exhibition *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, an exhibit for which he was the curator, his articles 'Contemporary Thai art: Nationalism and sexuality à la Thai' of 1996 and again 'Thai MODERNism to (post?) modernism, 1970s to 1980s' of 1993. Other publications on the dilemma of tradition versus modernism are Herbert Phillips' catalogue, *The Integrative Art of Modern Thailand*, published in 1992 and Sandra Cate *Making Merit Making Art* (2003) and John Clark *Modern Asian Art of 1998*. For an analysis of these tensions in modern architecture, see Michaelsen's

²⁸ Helen Michaelsen, "State Building and Thai Painting and Sculpture in the 1930s and 1940s," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark, The University of Sydney East Asian Series number 7 (Broadway: Wild Peony Ltd, 1993).

²⁹ See page 5 and 19 of this dissertation.

³⁰ Winichakul, "The Changing Landscape of the past: New Histories in Thailand since 1973," 99-120; David K. Wyatt, *Thailand, a Short History*, Second ed. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), chapters 8- 9.

³¹ His promotion of Southeast Asian art at the different international biennales and triennials was discussed at the CIHA conference of 2008, *Crossing Cultures*, during the panel on Asian Art.

article ‘State Building and Thai Painting and Sculpture in the 1930’s and 1940’s,’ published in 1993 and Koompong Noonbanjong’s (คும்พงศ์ หนุมบรรจง) dissertation *Power, Identity, and the Rise of Modern Architecture: From Siam to Thailand*, 2003. These publications analyze how modernism was used as a tool towards modernization and nationalism; they emphasize the artistic tensions between the wish to be modern and the wish to preserve tradition. Koompong’s extensive and comprehensive work on Thai architecture shows, like Apinan’s work did with modern art, that “... the designs of government and public buildings in Thailand have fluctuated between the international and national styles.”³² Koompong shows that even with strong nationalist discourses, modern architectural monuments in Thailand are often hybrids of the past, strongly influenced by western architecture and only minimally by traditional Thai architecture of the elite yet never of the peasant class. In his catalogue, Phillips also presents the quest for modernity, with what seems to be a strong integration of traditionalism. Yet most of the traditions he presents, such as woodcarving, lacquer, temple wall paintings etc., are minor arts for the elite, not local or peasant crafts. The same can be said of Clark who looks at patronage of the new contemporary elite, such as bankers and large companies, who buy and use modern art forms, especially neo-traditional art, to support their nationalist discourses and claims of Thai national identity.

The growing interest in localism, which will be studied in the next section has also generated art historical publications on ‘local’ art, including art from northern Thailand. First, there is an interest in the cultural aspects of northern Thailand, which includes visual culture. Yet most of historical art publications pertain to monumental art and crafts for the elite. These publications center on identifying and preserving cultural heritage. For example, *Vihan Lan Na* by Woralan Bunyasourat (วรลัญจก์ บุญยสุรัตน์) is a survey of temple halls (monumental architecture) from the historical Lan Na time period. Similarly, Premchit Sommai’s *Phra Chedi Lan Na Thai* (1981) is a survey of historical Chedi in Lan Na, where *chedi*

³² Koompong Noonbanjong, “Power, Identity, and the Rise of Modern Architecture: From Siam to Thailand” (University of Colorado, 2003), 335.

are studied according to their designs. Surotawat Suksawat's (สุรสวัสดิ์ สุขสวัสดิ์) โบราณคดีประชาชน/Boranakadeephachachom [treatise on the past] is a study on the population of northern Thailand, past and present. Though not an art historical document, there is an emphasis on art and culture, yet it revolves around monumental art, such as wall paintings and sculpture. He also insists on the importance of Buddhism within village life. There is also an important section on preservation and conservation of artistic heritage. This interest in preserving the past in the face of modernization is found in other publications pertaining to northern Thailand. For example, Naengnoi Punjabhan's (แน่น้อย ปัญจพรรค) book *The Art of Thai Wood Carving* is a study on northern Thai woodcarving. This book is extensive and includes religious as well as secular artworks as well as architectural monuments. Yet he is also explicit in his belief that northern Thai woodcarving is being lost, as less and less people can practice it and that historical pieces are not preserved. Similarly, Chalong Phinituwan (ฉลอง พินิจสุวรรณ) wrote two books, ศิลปิน บ้านพื้นเมือง/Sinlapin ban peun muang [local artists] and ศิลปิน-ศิลปะ/Sinlapin sinlapa [artists and art], on northern Thai artists.³³ The first volume is on historical crafts, focusing on the biographies of different artists of northern Thailand, including a poet, a flute player, a dancer, an Indian lute player, two who carve spoon handles (น้ำบาย/nambouai) etc. The other volume is on modern and contemporary art, with sculptors and painters – including pen drawing, landscapists, and abstract art – as well as installation and ceramic art. Recent exhibits and catalogues also bring northern identity to contemporary artists; such as *Contemporary art Exhibit by 49 Thai Artists in LanNa*, of 2006 and *Lan Na Contemporary Art* also of 2006. Although these artists either live or were born in northern Thailand, most of them living either in Chiang Rai or Chiang Mai, not all artworks can easily be associated with northern Thailand, either by medium or subject.

³³ Chalong is himself an artist residing in Chiang Rai. Though Chalong wrote the books, Thawan Duchanee, another artist from Chiang Rai, helped with the survey and the interviews.

This dissertation deviates from these publications on local northern Thai art history. Indeed, though the discourses and studies on localism have evolved since 1973, and particularly since 1997, the discourse on neo-traditional Thai art has not yet followed suit. The definition and institutionalization of neo-traditional art will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter as this dissertation compares two architectural monuments that could be categorized as neo-traditional. Yet one of them focuses mainly on a national identity and indeed expresses a rather orthodox view of neo-traditionalism, while the other locates itself at the junction of different local forces, such as engaged Buddhism, ecology and local community. This neo-traditional monument does not establish one specific identity such as Thainess or northern Thainess, but promotes an engagement towards the future, rather than a focus on the past and its preservation.

Localism

Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul (ธงชัย วินิจกุล) says that “the current globalization has its twin, which is the other side of the same moment or process, namely localization.”³⁴ Localism pertains to notions generated from the concept of ‘local’, such as ‘locality’, local knowledge, community, local economy etc. Much like globalization, localism is a complex term without a fixed definition. It has become an open signifier approached from different angles and by different methodologies. Yet, as will be explored here, most studies on localism invariably include aspects of dissociation from a given center. Studies on Thai localism are no exception.

Locality/community/agency

The difference between community and locality is elusive, as different branches of learning will use the terms somewhat differently. Community has been used in the humanities and social sciences for some time. Yet, it fell out of favor in the 1960’s for two main reasons. First, it was seen as a result of categorization and determinism instead of being used as a tool for analysis. “[O]ne of the fundamental

³⁴ Thongchai Winichakul, “Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia,” in *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History*, ed. Abu Talid Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 8.

mistakes in the use of the concept [of community] had been to elide [place and social life], thus *identifying* places with forms of life and so committing what came to be seen as the heinous crime of spatial determinism.”³⁵ Second, it was seen as being outdated and inadequate to refer to ‘living’ communities. Taking from Marx, Weber and Durkheim, Cooke explains the ‘community’ as a pre-modern social bond between “peasantry or small holding agriculturalists to the land, to each other, and to their landlord”.³⁶

Yet important concepts pertaining to the ‘old’ term – community – such as the spatial importance of social formation processes, still had theoretical value. The term ‘community’ however had still a somewhat negative connotation of determinism and many theorists tried to avoid it. To fill the gap, the concept of ‘locality’ was introduced into the academic jargon in the 1980s.³⁷ For scholars like Cooke, locality can be seen as a product of modernism, while community is pre-modern.³⁸ Though the ‘local’ affects it, locality is not dependent on territory. In other words, local space is neither contingent nor delimited to a specific physical place; it is an effect of social relations using a space. Yet, it has powerful social, even political weight.

Nevertheless, as Graham and Day write, “over time the term ‘locality’ has come to correspond more and more closely to some of the earlier meanings of community”, especially within circles of the growing, yet general concept of cultural studies.³⁹ Therefore, depending on the methodologies and topic of research, scholars will use the term ‘locality’ and ‘community’ interchangeably.⁴⁰ For example, when talking about globalization, the term ‘locality’ is preferred, to oppose

³⁵ Graham Day and Jonathan Murdoch, “Locality and community: coming to terms with place,” *The Sociological Review* 41, no. 1 (1993), 84.

³⁶ Philip Cooke, “Locality, Structure, and Agency: A Theoretical Analysis,” *Cultural Anthropology* 5, no. 1 (1990), 4. For him ‘community’ was destroyed by urbanization and industrialization with which social bounds became weaker, looser and fragile ‘associations’. According to Cooke, with the waning of the ‘communities’, we also lost the cultural practices based on its strong social bounds.

³⁷ Day and Murdoch, “Locality and community: coming to terms with place,” 82-111.

³⁸ Cooke, “Locality, Structure, and Agency: A Theoretical Analysis,” 3-15.

³⁹ Day and Murdoch, “Locality and community: coming to terms with place,” 86,92.

⁴⁰ Cooke, “Locality, Structure, and Agency: A Theoretical Analysis,” 3.

the global to the 'local', instead of the 'communal'. On the other hand, in cultural studies the term community is often preferred. As this dissertation includes different theoretical perspectives, the term 'local community' will be preferred. With this term, I do not intend any reference to determinism, but use it to refer to the spatial significance for social relations.

In his description of locality and community, Featherstone explains that these social relations can occur on a daily basis, yet also occur, often more strongly, by participating in ceremonies and rites.⁴¹ These ceremonies and rituals are very common and do not need complex settings. Singing national anthems, participating in thanksgiving family dinners and even pledging marriage vows, constitute such ceremonies.

Over time the intense sense of involvement and excitement which bound people together tends to diminish, yet the use of commemorative rituals and ceremonies can be understood as acting like batteries which store and recharge the sense of community.⁴²

Yet as Featherstone explains, this interest in 'recharging' a cultural core presupposes such a core. This has led scholars to look at the past to assess and describe it. Though Bhabha and Featherstone's studies do not necessarily contradict each other, Bhabha's interpretation of 'location' is more focused on the future rather than finding a legitimacy from the past. He sees location as a movement forward, which can be, and often is, influenced by previous assertions. Therefore, his work is geared toward, not a re-assertion of specificities, but toward an analysis of the different locations of assertions. These locations are not bound by geography but are ideological concepts based on spatio-political assertions of identity. This analysis of locality parallels Anderson's study of the *imagined community*. He says that "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."⁴³ Anderson's

⁴¹ Mike Featherstone, "Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity," in *Global-Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imagery*, ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

⁴² Ibid, 52.

⁴³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

interpretation of the community brings the importance of agency and the, conscious or not, choices people make when shaping their local identities. In other words, we should not concentrate our energies on finding and defining fixed local identities, but we should analyze the processes and acknowledge when a position of identity is taken.⁴⁴ Though Anderson focuses on the importance of the creative act of imagining for the formation of a nationalist consciousness, his premise implies that this imagining is equally important and also occurs for communities of any size. Therefore, local identity based on locality is not the product of an assumed core, but is an act of agency, a positioning in time and space.

Local community, directed towards the present rather than the past

In his study on globalization, Mike Featherstone sees the discourses related to localism as a desire to return home, where a locality is perceived as a bonded space where we can find a “cultural identity that is both enduring and unique.”⁴⁵ For Featherstone and others, this uniqueness is what holds the local community together. Diverging from this view, I believe we should understand locality and local community not in terms of uniqueness and differences, but in terms of agency. Of course agency can produce uniqueness and differences, yet by focusing on the development of these specificities the analytical system becomes dynamic instead of static, enabling changes and transformations. In other words, we should not try to study the local community’s perceived finite core, we should study its formation processes. Indeed Thongchai and Bhabha are preoccupied not with specificities, which can be seen as elusive and exclusive, but with moments of perceived change or hybridity. Yet these ‘locations’ and moments of change highlight, not only the forces at play bringing the changes, but also what was before and what is now.⁴⁶ When Bhabha talks about the location of culture, he does not talk about the veracity of history or the concept of genuine culture, or even about the conceptualization of

⁴⁴ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁵ Featherstone, “Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity,” 47.

⁴⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 1994); Homi Bhabha, “Location, Intervention, Incommensurability: A Conversation with Homi Bhabha,” *Emergences* 1, no. 1 (1989): 63-88; Winichakul, “Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia.”

culture; his focus is on the location of the individual asserting him or herself from a point of location, where changes can occur. Thongchai calls them interstices.⁴⁷ It is an elusive location, one that passes almost as soon as it is formulated. It allows, not for a romance of the past, but for an assertion of the present position, which will itself impact future locations.⁴⁸

Locality as an alternative to nation or globalization

Where scholars agree, either in their use of the term locality or community, is in their power to destabilize a larger social structure, such as the concept of nation-state or class structure. For example, Bhabha talks about the power of the community thus: “Community disturbs the grand globalizing narrative of capital, displaces the emphasis on production in ‘class’ collectivity, and disrupts the homogeneity of the imagined community of the nation.”⁴⁹ In other words, the agency practiced by a community/locality might differ and even work against established or endorsed associations, such as nationalism and heritage. Therefore, localism may result in processes of decentralization of national identity. Connors says that “[l]ocalism takes the idea of nationalism out of the bureaucratic offices that propagate national identity, and reconstructs it as a project relevant to everyday life”.⁵⁰

Discourses on localism are not necessarily against globalization, but are often related to it. Indeed, the more recent interest in localism seems to evolve from dissatisfaction with large political and economic systems. Such examples would be Starbucks in Chiang Mai and Hollywood or Bollywood movies available in ‘remote’ theatres, elements often seen as weakening the importance, sometimes even negating, the nation-states, with the reemergence of ‘transnationalism’ in the already overcrowded academic jargon. Indeed in Thailand the concepts of localism

⁴⁷ Winichakul, “Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia,” 14.

⁴⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 330.

⁵⁰ Michael K. Connors, “Democracy and the Mainstreaming of Localism in Thailand,” in *Southeast Asian Responses to Globalization. Restructuring Governance and Deepening Democracy*, ed. Francis Loh Kok and Joaking Ojendal (Copenhagen: Nias Press, 2005), 266.

are not against nationalism, yet they do not necessarily agree with what the Thai nation has become or, following Connors' statement, might result in forces destabilizing the apparent 'uniformity' of Thai nationalism. Indeed in Thailand the discourses on localism have retained a strong opposition to notions pertaining to globalization.⁵¹ These concepts of nationalism, community, locality and agency are important for our comparison of the two villages, as one upholds a mostly centralizing nationalist discourse, while the other tries to bring locality within it.

Literature Review

National History

The bulk of Thai studies and scholarly research centers on Thailand's national identity based on Bangkok's centrality, elite culture and history. This interest in Thai nationalism is visible in Thai as well as foreigners' studies, with publications on Thailand's formation through 19th century modernization, the nation's heritage and official history, starting with Sukhothai, then Ayutthaya, then Bangkok. It also asserts Thailand's strength and 'independence' from western colonialism; this is a clear historical grand narrative leading to the great Thai nation.⁵²

⁵¹ Ngaire Woods, "Globalization: Definitions, debates and implications," *Oxford Development Studies* 26, no. 1 (1998), 5. Researches of this nature focus on globalization's potential for advancement in cultural relations. It is believed that the 'local' would benefit from being part of a large nexus of relationships. Yet some of these researches do not take into consideration the drastic changes such forces might have on the local community.

⁵² Works by Prince Damrong Rajanubhap follow this teleological view of history. Batson, "Sources of Thai history: The Papers of Prince Damrong," 334-42; Bunnag, *The provincial administration of Siam, 1892-1915: the Ministry of the Interior under Prince Damrong Rajanubhab*; Rajanubhab, *A History of Buddhist Monuments in Siam*; Barmé Scott, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the creation of a Thai identity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993); David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); David K. Wyatt, "The Bangkok monarchy and Thai History," *Crossroads* 2, no. 2 (1984): 131-46; *The Nan Chronicle*, trans. David K. Wyatt (Ithaca, N.Y: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1984). As Thongchai Winichakul mentions, though some Thai scholars deplore western – primarily from the United-States – involvement in Thai studies, many western studies follow the same centric and elitist view on Thai history. Indeed Thongchai believes that more often than not, the contemporary western scholars follow the lead of the Thai scholars when it comes to Thai history, identity and nationalism. David Wyatt's works are a good example, with a history of Thailand centered on dynastic changes with an emphasis on royal chronicles. Winichakul, "Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia," 21-22.

Charnvit Kasetsiri (ชาญวิทย์ เกษตรศิริ) wrote an important paper reviewing the historiography from a central/orthodox standpoint, titled 'Thai historiography from Ancient Times to the Modern Period,' published in 1979. Charnvit divides the historiography of Thailand in two; one written by a Buddhist society (15th to 17th century), while the other, starting around the middle of the 19th century, 'makes do' with western concepts of history and builds a new historiography around the State. Luang Wichit Wathakan was a major player in the promotion and creation of Thai national identity. Wichit is seen as a propagandist who helped define Thainess through an intensely militarized and centralized Thai administration. Scot Barmé wrote about Wichit's career and cultural aim at national unity, in his book *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai identity*, published in 1993. Barmé reviews Wichit's career from its beginning under the absolute monarchy and most importantly after the coup of 1932. This administration encoded Thainess with certain behaviors, dress codes, language, even appropriate daily activities etc.

Yet some scholars have challenged this historical grand narrative, especially after the 1973 and 1976 political troubles.⁵³ The first step was to expose the grand narrative as a construct. A good example of this type of scholarly publication would be Nidhi Eoseewong's (นดิธิ เอื้อยวศร์วรงค์) *Pen & Sail, Literature and History in Early Bangkok*, especially his chapter six, where he exposes the construction of historical Thai chronicles by showing how the history of Bangkok finds its way in Ayutthan chronicles, which is an interesting chronological anomaly.

Another way to expose the grand narrative as a construct is to expose its usage in the modern era. For example, in his article entitled 'State-Identity Creation,' in the previously mentioned edited book *National Identity and its Defenders*, published in 1991, Chai-anan Samudavanija (ชัยอนันต์ สมุทวณิช) explores the administrative aspect of the state and its different discourses. For example, prior to the 1932 coup, Chai-anan explains that the political administration based itself on the concept of

⁵³ For an overview of the cultural changes leading to the political crisis of 1973 and 1976, see Morell and Chai-anan's *Political Conflict in Thailand. Reform, Reaction Revolution* (1981). For an overview of the different post-1973/1976 discourses on Thai history, see Thongchai Winichakul publication, 'The Changing Landscape of the past' (1995).

‘national’ whereas the post-1932 administration based itself on state identity devoid of cultural specificities, but based on an ethnic and geographic basis (Thai-land). In his article, Chai-anan therefore looks at national and state identity as an ‘inside-job,’ where the political power, whether royal or state government, wanted to secure their own power and position. For a different nuance to the political discourses on the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see Thongchai Winichakul’s book *Siam Mapped* of 1994. Thongchai Winichakul examines the national identity formation, yet his modernist nuances provide a different kind of analysis. While previous publications show that external threats forced Siam/Thailand to modernize itself, Thongchai argues that modernization was achieved to gain acceptance and respect in a new world order. In other words, the first interpretation focuses on modernization as a defense mechanism, while Thongchai sees modernization as a potential source of power. On the other hand, threats of colonialism were used to the elite’s advantage, so they could build and enforce the national administration that best suited the elite and the military.

One important source of criticism of the grand narrative is its ethnic overtone, an aspect also explored by Chai-anan and Thongchai in their works previously mentioned. In an essay published in the edited book *National Identity and its Defenders* (1991) Sulak Sivaraksa (สุลักษณ์ ศิวรักษ์), a supporter of revisionist history and great critic of Wichit’s politics, revisits processes of national identity formation from King Mongkut (พระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว)⁵⁴ and the post 1932 period. He criticizes the 1932 coup and the propaganda of Thai national identity, such as changing the name of the country from Siam to *Thailand*,⁵⁵ for being modeled on western concepts of democracy (which failed) and dictatorship. He also criticizes the notion of ethnicity associated with the national identity. Gehan Wijeyewardene in his paper ‘Thailand and the Tai: versions of ethnic identity,’ of

⁵⁴ King Mongkut’s full title is พระบาทสมเด็จพระปรเมนทรมหาอานันทมหิดล พระอัฐมรามาธิบดินทร .

⁵⁵ Adjarn Charnvit Kasetsiri of Thammasat University in Bangkok has launched a campaign to change the name of the country back to Siam. ‘Thailand’ implies an ethnic prejudice towards other ethnic groups in Thailand, such as Malay in the South, Sino-Thai, Laos, hill-tribes etc.

1990 as well as David Streckfuss, in his article '*The Mixed Colonial Legacy in Siam Origins of Thai Racialist Thought, 1890-1910*,' published in 1993 also study Thai (rather than Tai or Siamese) national identity. In his study Streckfuss looks at how the Thai ethnicity was constructed by including all other Southeast Asia ethnicities within the territory.

Yet though ethnicity is an important aspect of Thai nationalism and the State, and scholars have tried to expose its usage in the political discourses, it has not challenged the grand narrative per se. One of the strongest challenges to this grand narrative is coming from localism, which will be studied in a subsequent section.

Traditional Thai Buddhism

Buddhism is the dominant religion of Thailand and is intimately associated with the nation-state and nationalism. Most publications on Buddhism and royalty follow the orthodox Thai historical grand narrative, where kings acquire legitimacy through historical association with previous kings and kingdoms, such as the historical kingdom of Sukhothai or even King Asoka of 3rd century BCE, India. Tambiah's *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* published in 1976, is a major publication on the relation between Buddhism and Thai politics. Tambiah gives an account of the ideological relations between the kings' positions at the center of the kingdom and the historical, yet highly mythologized, king Asoka the Great. Tambiah shows how religion was used as part of politics and not as a separate entity outside the secular world. He presents the argument that the secular political realm, either the absolute monarchy or a post 1932 government, had important relations, indeed had direct influence and power over the *Sangha*, leading to different *Sangha* reforms. John Butt arrives at the same conclusion in his paper 'Thai Kingship and Religious Reform,' where he says that King Thaksin's⁵⁶ loss of power was partly due to his unwelcome religious reforms that were too modern. In his book *Buddhism, legitimation, and Conflict*, Peter A. Jackson also looks at the relation between Buddhism, the Sangha and the Thai government. Jackson looks at the governmental

⁵⁶ King Thaksin the Great was the only Thai king of the 'kingdom' of Thonburi established after the fall of Ayutthaya. He was deposed and Rama I, Chakri dynasty, took the Siamese throne and established Bangkok as the capital.

control of the Sangha in relation to the different Sangha acts, but also looks at different religious reformists such as Buddhadasa and Devavedhi, and explains that Thai reformist monks rejected, among other things, traditional Thai Buddhist principles that separated the lay from the monk communities.

Like art, Thai Buddhism and the *Sangha* went through different reforms and adaptations. Craig Reynolds's publications⁵⁷ highlight the modernization of Buddhism in Thailand. For example he studied king Mongkut's desire to suppress superstitious Buddhism, including the importance and relevance of the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*⁵⁸ (31 different realms of the Thai Buddhist cosmology which are divided between three Worlds; the World of Desire, the World of Form and the World of Non-Form).⁵⁹ Along the same line, in their article titled 'Cosmologies, Truth Regimes, and the State in Southeast Asia' (2000), Reynolds and Tony Day reevaluate the rise and fall of the 'traditional forms of knowledge' in relation to modern politics in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, in his articles 'Thai-Buddhist Identity, debates on the Traiphum Phra Ruang' of 1991, 'Re-Interpreting the Traiphum Phra Ruang: Political Functions of Buddhist Symbolism in Contemporary Thailand of 1993, Peter A. Jackson shows that even after the fall of the absolute monarchy, the Thai government used the *Traiphum* to legitimize modern Thai moral values. The government also reinforced the concept of rebirth in different realms depending on 'good' and 'bad' actions. "The Traiphum Phra Ruang shows what will result from

⁵⁷ Craig J. Reynolds, "Buddhist Cosmography in Thai History, with Special Reference to Nineteenth-Century Culture Change," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (1976): 203-20.

⁵⁸ See pages 75-80 of this dissertation.

⁵⁹ Peter A. Jackson, "Re-Interpreting the Traiphum Phra Ruang: Political Functions of Buddhist Symbolism in Contemporary Thailand," in *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, ed. Trevor Ling (Singapore: ISEAS, 1993); G. Coedes and C. Archaimbault, *Les trois mondes (Traibhumi Brah Ruan)*, vol. LXXXIX (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1973); Frank E. Reynolds and Mani B. Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang. A Thai Buddhist Cosmology* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press/Motilal Banarsidass, 1982). Many scholars believe the *Traiphum Phra Ruang* (*Traiphum* in short), or 'the three worlds cosmography of Phra Ruang,' to have been written in 1345 CE, by Lithai, a second king in Sukhothai. A year later, in 1346CE, he became first king of Sukhothai, which he ruled until 1374. Yet doubts have recently been cast on the *Traiphum*'s origin, "because its complicated style of language does not show convincing antiquity as old as that of Sukhothai. Doubts have not been settled, however, whether it was a late Ayutthaya or early Bangkok work." Mukhom Wongthes, *Intellectual Might and National Myth. A Forensic Investigation of the Ram Khamhaeng Controversy in Thai Society* (Bangkok: Matichon Public Co., Ltd, 2003), 3.

doing good and performing evil [...] which lead one to be born in one realm or another.”⁶⁰ While the “conservative, officially-sponsored images of Thai identity” support the *Traiphum*, Jackson explains that some post-1973 reformists have questioned the *Traiphum*’s face value, yet still use it as a metaphor for ideal ethical and political conditions. Frank E. Reynolds comes to the same conclusion in his article *Sacral Kingship and National Development* (1978).

For a study of the Sukhothai king Lithai’s (พญาลิไท) *Traiphum*, see Coedes *Les Trois Mondes* (1973) and Frank and Mani Reynolds’ *Three Worlds According to King Ruang. A Thai Buddhist Cosmology* of 1982. The Reynolds show that Lithai’s aim at writing the *Traiphum* was most likely political, trying to legitimize the centrality of Sukhothai over the surrounding regions.⁶¹ Another important work on the *Traiphum* by King Lithai is Coedes *Les Trois Mondes* (1973).

Thai Localism

In his publication ‘Writing at the Interstices’ (2005), Thongchai Winichakul revises the problematic of local Thai history. The political crises of 1973 and 1976,⁶² and the financial crisis of 1997 gave strength to revisionist history and publications on the local. The first wave of localism, after the 1973/1976 political crises, was historical, where Thai scholars offered alternatives to the Thai historical grand narrative, sometimes by showing the construction and/or ideologies behind the grand narrative or

⁶⁰ Sangiam Sawatdikaan, quoted in Peter A. Jackson, “Thai-Buddhist Identity: Debates on the Traiphuum Phra Ruang,” in *National Identity and its Defenders. Thailand, 1939-1989*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds, Monash papers on Southeast Asia, no.25 (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1991), 207.

⁶¹ Soren Ivarsson, “The Study of the Traiphum Pra Ruang,” in *Thai Literary Traditions*, ed. Manas Chitikasem (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1995); Wongthes, *Intellectual Might and National Myth. A Forensic Investigation of the Ram Khamhaeng Controversy in Thai Society*. Like the Ramkhamheang inscription, some scholars believe the work was written in the 19th century. See note 59 above.

⁶² Thongchai Winichakul, “Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past. The Ambivalent Memories of the October 1976 Massacre in Bangkok,” in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory. Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002). On October 6th 1976, almost three years day for day after the first political crisis of 1973, a crowd of roughly five thousand, mostly students, were gathered at Thammasat University and Sanam Luang (an open field near the Grand Palace and the Emerald Buddha temple), to protest the return of Marshal Thanom, head of the military junta for 10 years, between 1963 and 1973. He was ousted after the first public protest and subsequent massacre in October 1973 and was then living in exile.

tried to show Thai history from a regional perspective, rather than a central one. The second wave of localism, strengthened by the 1997 financial crisis, was more akin to a cultural revolution centering on Buddhism, the economy, ecology, and community culture.

In his book *Tamnan and Tamnan History* (1982) Thida revises Thai history by starting at the local level. He sees local perspectives as being rooted in the population and calls for a social history focused on the masses. This social history would then question the ideological and centralistic view of Thai national history. One of the important revisionists in Thailand is Srisak Wanliphodom (ศรีศักร วัลลิโภดม), an archaeologist whose publications seriously question the master narrative of Thai national history. What has been dubbed the Ram Khamhaeng Controversy is also an example of revisionism, where the revered Sukhothai inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng was called into question. Chamberlain's edited book *The Ram Khamhaeng controversy* (1991) is an important publication explaining the controversy regarding the stele. These papers are scholarly and exhaustive, yet they are focused on the past. In other words, as Reynolds mentions,⁶³ they do not take into account how the controversy over the Ram Khamhaeng's historical authenticity has strained the national pride. In her book *Intellectual Might and National Myth* (2003) Mukhom Wongthes studies the social implication of the controversy and shows how the debate over the stele affected national identity.

Michael Connors' 'Democracy and the Mainstreaming of localism in Thailand' (2005), is an overview of the 'second wave' of localism pertaining to contemporary applications rather than a revision of history. Connors stresses the fact that most studies on Thai localism are not against globalization or nationalism. On the contrary, localism promotes an ethical application of economic forces at the local level, to nurture community and to promote self-sufficient economy. Kevin Hewison comes to the same conclusion as Connors in his 'Localism in Thailand' (1999) when he says that discourses on localism come from disenchantment with the Thai

⁶³ Craig J. Reynolds, *Seditious Histories. Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006),vii-viii.

capitalist structure. Hewison warns us, however, that Thai discourses on localism are kept within the realm of ideologies and are often criticized for their lack of applicability within a contemporary society.

Indeed, revisionist histories as well as other discourses on localism are not always welcome. In *Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past* published in 2002, Thongchai explains how the events of 1976 were silenced in discourses on Thai democracy and history. The traumatic events of October 1976, where the military opened fire on a crowd of students, was drastically different from the master narrative of the Thai nation, where the elite works in harmony and for the good of the nation. Instead of spearheading a revision of history, Thongchai believes that the events were deliberately ‘forgotten’. It took 20 years for the silence to be broken and the voices of the students to be heard.

Furthermore, some local histories, coming out of the post-1970’s historical revision, were not critical of the Grand historical narrative, but were simply applying it to a local perspective. For example, Sarassawadee Ongsakul (สร้อยสวัสดิ์ อ่องสกุล) published *Prawattisatlanna [History of Lan Na]* in Thai in (2001) and in English in 2005, where local histories parallel the national one, using the same model of elite culture, yet on a smaller scale. Sarassawadee’s history is based on royal chronicles following the rise and fall of the kings of the Chiang Mai dynasty (as opposed to the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Bangkok dynasties for the paradigmatic national history). Sommai Premchit (สมหมาย เปรมจิตต์) is an important historian of northern Thai history and some of his publications follow this format. See his book *The legend of Queen Cama*, published in 1998, a translation and discussion of royal chronicles pertaining to Queen Chamathewi’s reign as the ‘founding mother’ of the kingdom of Haripunchai.⁶⁴

The second wave of localism in Thailand went beyond Thai revisionist history brought by the post-1973 intellectual revolution, and a decade later it includes cultural studies, especially what is termed *wathanatham chumchon*/ วัฒนธรรม

⁶⁴ See page 59 of this dissertation.

ชุมชน or community culture.⁶⁵ “The discourses made the *community* central both as a source of value and as a political construct.”⁶⁶ Community culture is understood as a reality of the past, where small communities were self-sufficient and working in harmony and balance with nature and Buddhism. Thai community culture is partially based on an idealization of the historical village and the communities of the past.⁶⁷ Chatthip Nartsupha’s (ฉัตรทิพย์ นาถสุภา) book *The Thai Village Economy in the Past*, first published in Thai in 1984 and in English in 1999 is an account of self-reliant economy of the historical village. He also has written an article, ‘the community culture school of thought,’ where he writes an overview of the term. He explains that in the past, objects had no monetary value and that people were occupied in the production of rice, textile making, farming their own animals etc., in other words, the “basis on internal production was subsistence.”⁶⁸ Yet in her dissertation, *Peasant perspectives on the political economy of the northern Thai kingdom of Chiang Mai*, written in 1988, and in her article ‘Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy,’ of 1992, Bowie offers a different account of the past, where the villagers were not self-sufficient, neither at the village nor at the household levels. Bowie shows how the ‘goods’ of nature were difficult to obtain and many villagers were lacking in food and cloths. Yet it is the idealistic golden age of the historical Thai village, as it is often assumed in publications pertaining to localism. This idealization of the past is one of the reasons Hewison questions the

⁶⁵ Chatthip explains that four important scholars or writers are responsible for the development of the community culture discourses in Thailand, namely father Niphot Thianwihan (who is acknowledged as coining the term at a seminar in 1981), Bamrung Bunpanya, Aphichat Thongyu and Prawasee Wasi. Chatthip Nartsupha, “The Community Culture School of Thought,” in *Thai Construction of Knowledge* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1991).

⁶⁶ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand’s Crisis* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000), 195.

⁶⁷ Nartsupha, “The Community Culture School of Thought,” 118-41.

⁶⁸ Chatthip Nartsupha, *The Thai village economy in the past*, trans. Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), 24.

concept of localism in Thailand, which is criticized for not being applicable to our contemporary era.⁶⁹

It appears that Thai scholarship on community culture sees the historical village as a whole, an entity held together through Buddhist ethics and closeness to nature. Therefore, in a post 1997 era, localism and community culture were not only used as an alternative to the historical grand narrative, but most importantly as an alternative to capitalism and a resistance to globalization.

Engaged Buddhism

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (พุทธทาสภิกขุ) (1906-1993) was a Buddhist practitioner who has influenced the merging of Buddhism, social engagement and community culture.⁷⁰ Buddhadāsa Bikkhu believes that society should be based on a state of nature (balance), instead of excess and greed; cooperation instead of exploitation should be the bond holding society together. As the population is based on a balanced state of nature, it too should not be exploited. The post-1997 interest in localism is associated with engaged Buddhism and a balance with nature, yet with an interest in asserting location geared towards the future rather than based on an idealization of the past.

Sulak Sivaraksa's edited work *Radical Conservatism, Buddhism in the Contemporary World, Articles in Honour of Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa's 84th Birthday Anniversary* (1990) was written in honor of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu.⁷¹ Buddhadāsa

⁶⁹ Kevin Hewison, "Localism in Thailand: A study of globalisation and its discontents," *CSGR Working Paper* 39/99 (1999).

⁷⁰ See for example Sulak Sivaraksa, et al., eds. *Radical Conservatism, Buddhism in the Contemporary World. Articles in Honour of Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa's 84th Birthday Anniversary* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development. International Network of Engaged Buddhists, 2533). See also Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadāsa. Theravada Buddhism and Modernist reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003).

⁷¹ For Buddhadāsa Bikkhu's works on socially Engaged Buddhism as well as the importance of nature and insight, see Arnold Kotler, "Buddhism Must Be Engaged," in *Radical Conservatism Buddhism in the Contemporary World Articles in Honour of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's 84th Birthday Anniversary* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Deveopment and Internationl Network of Engaged Buddhists, 1990); Santikora Bhikkhu, "Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Life and Society Through the Natural Eyes of Voidness," in *Engaged Buddhism. Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, ed. Christopher Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany: State

Bhikkhu's own words can also be read in *Handbook for Mankind* (1985), *Practical Buddhism The Legacy of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu* edited by Koffman and Thitikwan (2006) and *The Truth of Nature* (2006), *Me and Mine*, edited by Donald Swearer (1989).

Prawase Wasi (ประเวศ วะสี) is an important intellectual, MD⁷² and social commentator who publishes on community culture as an alternative to globalization.⁷³ He too believes that the historical village is the epitome of a golden age now gone, because villagers practiced self-sufficient economy, lived according to Buddhist morals ethics and in harmony with nature. See his 'Alternative Buddhist Agriculture' (1990) where he explains that Buddhist agriculture is an agriculture not centered on the market, but where people have enough to eat and live and where only surpluses are sold, as it is assumed to have been in the past. Though he gives some examples of direct applications, the text is somewhat idealistic, with the idea that Buddhist agriculture eradicates violence and crimes and where culture could be sustained rather than lost through modernization. Nonetheless, Prawase calls for an application of a Buddhist ethic of restraint over greed. In his articles ศาสนากับเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง/Sasanakabseathakitpopiang (religion and sufficient economy) and เศรษฐกิจพอเพียงภาคปฏิบัติ/seathakitpopiangphakpatibak (practical sufficient economy), Prawase says that to be able to apply 'sufficient economy' people need to understand that capitalist economy, consumerism and greed is at the basis of unhappiness. To gain happiness, people should practice Buddhist virtues of kindness, restraint and mutual help. The Thai political administration also needs to change and give greater power and responsibility to the provinces. Only then will the exploitation of human beings and the environment end. Social stability will only occur with a greater importance and respect for agriculture, as it is a stable

University of New York Press, 1996); Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadasa. Theravada Buddhism and Modernist reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003).

⁷² He is a hemoglobin specialist.

⁷³ He was on the *The Nation's* list of 35 most influential Thais of the past 35 years published in 2006 for the occasion of *The Nation* newspaper's anniversary. "35 most influential Thais over the past 35 years," *The Nation*, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/specials/35persons/> (accessed November 4th, 2009).

employment. He also wishes for a greater communal interaction, with trans-community networking between professions, such as hospitals, nurses, monks etc.

Sulak Sivaraksa, a controversial Buddhist thinker and social activist, has published a number of articles and books pertaining to engaged Buddhism, western economic and cultural exploitation, environmental degradation due to capitalism etc. He is also the co-founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists.⁷⁴ See his publications *Siam in Crisis* (1980), *Seeds of Peace. A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society* (1992), *Conflict, Culture, Change. Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World* (2005), *Building Trust Through Economic and Social Development and Ecological Balance: A Buddhist Perspective* (1990). His studies on Engaged Buddhism owe much to Buddhādāsa Bikkhu's socially Engaged Buddhism.

Methodologies

This dissertation is the product of fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2007, winter of 2008 and spring of 2010. It relies primarily on visual observations, interviews and surveys of historical and contemporary art in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Lamphang, Laphun, Phayao and Chiang Kham. The case-studies in this dissertation rely primarily on personal observations of the artworks at different stages of production, as well as interviews. The analysis of the cultural context informing the two temples' locations and their productions is realized through these interviews, available publications, discussions at conferences and my own experience in Thailand and northern Thailand. Though I do not consider myself a 'home' Thai scholar,⁷⁵ I am not an absolute outsider and my experience of Thai and northern Thai culture is based on my experience as a student in Thailand in 1992-1993, my

⁷⁴ <http://www.inebnetwork.org/> (accessed November 4th, 2010).

⁷⁵ Winichakul, "Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia,"; O.W. Wolters, "Southeast Asia as a Southeast Asian Field of Study," *Indonesia* 58 (1994): 1-17. Though I believe a two-sided – foreigner/Southeast Asian – production of knowledge is not desirable, Wolters and Thongchai assert that 'home scholars' have advantages over foreigners when it comes to 'regional studies'. The debate on the question of scholarship legitimacy when it comes to 'home' scholars versus outsiders is not new. See Kirin Narayan, "How Native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?," *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 3 (1993): 671-86. Yet being a 'home' scholar is contingent to neither location nor ethnicity.

subsequent stays in 1995, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2008 and 2010 as well as my continuous interaction with Thai citizens residing in Thailand.

The challenges regarding interviews were varied. The first interviews were realized with the help of a translator. Though I do speak Thai and understand the northern Thai language, I felt more confident with the presence of a translator. This position was quickly abandoned however as I quickly realized that direct communication with the artists, in Thai but also in English when further explanations were needed, was a better alternative.⁷⁶ The fieldwork was completed in a relatively short time span, four and a half months in the summer of 2007, one month in December 2008 and two weeks in March 2010. The interviews were scheduled according to the artists, interviewer and translator's availabilities. One of the artists interviewed is well known in Thailand and is infrequently in residence in Chiang Rai, rendering subsequent interviews difficult to schedule, even well in advance. Furthermore, some interviews were scheduled with the Fine Arts Department of Thai Government, yet when further communications needed, they were realized via emails and phone calls, either from different regions of Thailand or from Canada. The last fieldwork in March 2010 and further communications with artists and government officials were difficult due to the political situation in Thailand, especially in Bangkok. The Thai government was closed for several days and phone interviews had to be rescheduled or more often abandoned entirely.

The most problematic of realities, however, is that both temples are still under construction and apparently will be for a long time. An evaluation of the feasibility of the dissertation using these temples as objects of analysis was therefore important. The first question raised was whether such incomplete projects could be the subjects of a dissertation. Though art historians usually examine 'final works', these works might not be complete, especially when it comes to historical art and archaeology, where partial remains are more often available than intact ones. A state of 'wholeness' is therefore not necessary, yet it is usually

⁷⁶ Each interview with the individual artists was first conducted with the help of a translator. If subsequent interviews were needed, as was the case for the two artists responsible for the projects, the interviews were conducted without the help of the translator.

avored for sake of scholarly accuracy. On the other hand, when dealing with an unfinished ‘contemporary work,’ one could observe the creative processes leading to the completion of the work, including the social relations and social forces at play during its construction. Furthermore, the accuracy of the project can be verified in interviews with artists rather than relying solely on the objects themselves.

The second question was whether the state of completion of the two works would be an absolute necessity to their analysis. The two artists responsible for the temples have made clear their underlying designs and goals for their respective projects; therefore, a general description of elements not yet in place was often available. Furthermore, one of the temples, Wat Rong Khun, is at an advanced stage of production, with all major buildings but one already in place, yet many of them still lack decorative elements. In 2007, when I first visited the second temple, Wat Pa’O Ram Yen, most of the buildings were still missing, yet the artist explained the overall plans for the temple grounds. When I subsequently visited the temple in 2008 and 2010 new buildings were in place, including two of three of the main buildings (the *chedi* and the *ubosot*). Schematic blueprints of the final project as well as the different missing buildings were available. Though the construction is still ongoing and the state of completion is probably now more advanced than what is conveyed in this dissertation, I feel confident that the overall project, goals and underlying artistic principles were evident during my fieldwork and warrant analysis.

Finally, would it have been preferable to wait and analyze the two projects in their complete states? I quickly rejected this idea as an impossibility. First, Chalermchai Kositpipat, the artist responsible for Wat Rong Khun, has made it clear that his project would take years to reach completion. He even predicts that his death will arrive before the temple is completed. As he was only 56 in February 2010, waiting for the full completion of the temple is impossible. As for the second temple, it is my conclusion, as will be presented in chapter 6, that the temple will *never* be finished. This reality does not emerge from a lack of responsibility, cohesion or organization, but from a desire to acquire an ongoing continuity, rather than to reach finality. Waiting for the completion of the project is therefore fruitless.

Chapters summaries

Chapter 2 provides the context for the two temples and the two artists. The chapter will therefore include an overview of the contemporary artistic scene in Thailand and more particularly in Chiang Rai, as well as an analysis of the two artists' positions *vis-à-vis* these two artistic scenes. The contemporary Thai artistic scene will be explored, with particular attention to the artistic tensions between a desire to be modern and a desire to preserve traditions as a sign of national identity and attachment. For reasons which will become apparent, neo-traditionalism will be explored in more depth than other modern and contemporary artistic styles found in Thailand, which have been featured more prominently in the scholarship and curatorial projects. This chapter will expose the central artistic discourse on neo-traditionalism and its association with central Thai nationalism.

Chapter 3 is an overview of Lan Na history in relation to Thailand's history, leading to the contemporary political, social and cultural debates of 1973/76, 1997 and 2010. The chapter will look at historical Lan Na prior to modern Thailand, as well as Thailand's centralization and its impact on northern Thailand. The chapter will include an analysis of Thai Buddhism and its contribution to Thailand's centralization as well as its enforcement in northern Thailand. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the current social and political conflicts in Thailand. This chapter is important as it provides the historical context behind the Thai and northern Thai identity formations and their respective conflicts *vis-à-vis* one another. This contextualization will help situate both artists and temples' positions within contemporary Thailand.

Chapter 4 is an overview of northern Thai art and architecture. This chapter will serve as a basis for artistic comparison for the two case studies, the temples of the village of Rong Khun and the village of Pa'O Ram Yen. First the architecture of Lan Na prior to the territory's unification to Thailand will be studied, with a particular emphasis on the *wat's* different monuments and their respective importance and meaning within the *wat's* compound. Then an analysis of the architectural changes brought by Thailand's modernization and centralization will be studied. This chapter is important as it emphasises the differences and

similarities between modern Thai and historical Lan Na art and architecture. As the two temples studied in this dissertation are visually drastically different, we need to be able to understand their respective artistic appropriations and dismissals of the different modern and historical artistic styles from both northern and central Thailand.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of Wat Rong Khun. This chapter includes a short biography of Chalermchai Kositpipat, the artist responsible for the project; including a short overview of another temple project he was involved with, Wat Buddhapadipa in England. Wat Rong Khun is an interesting artistic and spiritual development from Wat Buddhapadipa and a short analysis of the latter helps understand Chalermchai's artistic journey. Then the small northern temple of Rong Khun will be analyzed. As will be explained, the temple is an interesting mixture of novelty and orthodoxy, both in terms of artistry and spirituality. The temple is divided in three different sections: the *Kharawat* or section for the laity, the *Sanghawatt* or section of the monks and *Buddhawatt* or the section for the Buddha. Each section will be studied separately with a formal description and analyses. The *Sanghawatt* will be studied in greater details than the other two sections, as it is the section that is more advanced but also is the most complex in terms of artistic novelty, iconography and national connotations. This chapter shows that even with artistic novelty, Chalermchai's concept at Wat Rong Khun follows a standard centralist view of Thai nationality and Thai Buddhism. Indeed, though the temple is a complex amalgamation of northern and central artistic elements, Chalermchai does so without destabilizing Thai nationalism based on notions established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during Thailand's administrative centralization and national institutionalization seen in chapter 3.

Chapter 6 is an analysis of the second temple, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen. This chapter includes a short biography of Somluk Pantiboon, the main artist responsible for the project. Somluk's artistic vision will be explained, including his interest in historical art, his respect for nature and interest in the community/locality. Then the small northern temple Wat Pa'O Ram Yen will be studied with formal descriptions and analysis of the different architectural monuments. As is the case

with Wat Rong Khun, the temple is an interesting amalgamation of novelty and traditionalism. However, the artistic program expressed at Wat Pa'O differs from Thai nationalism based on a central administration and institutionalization of Thai identity and Thai Buddhism. The temple is also northern in appearance; in other words, the architectural elements follow traditional Lan Na architecture. However, preserving the past is not Somluk's intention. On the contrary, he is trying to build a temple best suited for the locality and which would promote communality. He therefore chose traditional Lan Na architecture as his artistic model, since it seemed best suited to promote local connections. Furthermore, I argue that Somluk's program parallels the contemporary Thai discourses on localism, with an emphasis on ecology, engaged Buddhism and local identity. However, I believe the project does not negate national identity, though it destabilizes the centrist institutionalization of Thai nationalism. Therefore, this temple has the possibility of countering the criticisms of the discourses on localism in Thailand, which assume that the discourses are based on idealization of the past and have no contemporary applications.

The last chapter of this dissertation offers comparison of the two case studies, reiterating the different arguments presented in the previous chapters. In this final chapter, the complexity of Thailand's contemporary debates on nationalism and localism will be exposed through the juxtaposition of these two architectural case studies.

Chapter 2 Contextualizing Wat Rong Khun and Wat Pa'O

This dissertation is a comparative analysis of two northern temples found in the suburb of Chiang Rai, the second largest city of northern Thailand.¹ The two temples are structures combining both contemporary and traditional influences. This chapter is an attempt at situating the relation or tension between the modern and the traditional in contemporary Thai art historical discourses and to locate the two temples within these discourses. Furthermore, Chiang Rai holds a special position in Thailand due to the high number of artists residing either in the city itself or in the vicinity. This chapter will therefore include a section on Chiang Rai's artistic scene.

Modern and Contemporary Art in Thailand

When trying to define modern Thai art Apinan Poshyananda, a respected Thai art historian, explains that:

Throughout modern times, Thai artists have been faced with the dilemma of choosing between a need to be modern and a desire to preserve national identity and traditional values. As a result, there is no dominant style or uniformity in modern Thai art.²

Yet this tension between tradition and the need to be 'modern' is still visible today in how contemporary art is presented, expressed and accepted by different Thai institutions, such as art schools, large corporations and art galleries.

Modern art in Thailand is relatively new, starting in the early 20th century. Though Thailand was influenced by Chinese and European artists in the late 19th century CE, modern art expressed by Thai artists, not foreign artists visiting Bangkok, started in earnest in the early 20th century CE.³ The emergence of modern art in Thailand went hand in hand with the modernization of the country through state programs and administrative reforms. Indeed "[d]uring the 1930s and 1940s,

¹ The first city of northern Thailand is Chiang Mai, the acknowledged capital of the ancient kingdom of Lan Na. See next chapter for a history and definition of Lan Na.

² Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, xxiii.

³ *Ibid*, 1-27.

the modernism and nationalism in Thailand progresses simultaneously.”⁴ The profound and rapid cultural changes Thailand underwent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries CE resulted in diverse and multifaceted artistic expressions.⁵

The first art institutions of the early 20th century were officially created to preserve ‘Thai art’ and promote a modern Thai State. King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) founded the Fine Arts Department of Thailand in 1911, to safeguard Thai art and culture, with divisions of sculpture, painting, music, dancing, rhetoric, architecture and liberal arts.⁶ The Poh Chang school of Arts and Crafts was founded two years later, in 1913. It was originally founded to revitalize traditional art, which was believed to be under threat from intense western influences during the early 20th century. It was also a place where future teachers would learn different Thai crafts.⁷ Yet we cannot forget however that King Rama VI also continued his father’s (King Chulalongkorn) intense modernization, which was influenced by the kingdom’s relation with western countries. King Rama VI was therefore active on two cultural fronts; first he wanted to preserve Thai traditional crafts, yet he also embraced the modernization of Thailand.⁸

The Silpakorn school⁹ of art was then founded in 1934, after the 1932 coup ending the absolute monarchy. Though the school was founded under a new state, the head of the school was the Italian expatriate Silpa Bhirasri, who previously

⁴ Ibid, 57.

⁵ The modernization of Thailand and its effects will be studied in the next chapter.

⁶ Vichoke Mukdamanee, “Development of Contemporary Art in Thailand,” in *Educating in the Arts*, Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects (Springer: Dordrecht, 2008), 135.

⁷ Ahmad Mashadi, “Brief Notes on Traditionalism in Modern Thai Art,” in *Modernity & Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art*, ed. T.K. Subapathy (Singapore: Singapore Art museum, 1996), 62; Mukdamanee, “Development of Contemporary Art in Thailand,” 136; Michaelsen, “State Building and Thai Painting and Sculpture in the 1930s and 1940s,” 62.

⁸ See Michaelsen, “State Building and Thai Painting and Sculpture in the 1930s and 1940s,” 62. Michaelsen informs us that King Rama VI’s successor, King Prajadhipok made drastic changes in the royal budget regarding art and culture, yet it was mainly traditional art which suffered, with the cancellation of both the annual Arts and Crafts Fair and the Siamese Kingdom Exhibition. The Western influences on large State projects were unmarred.

⁹ See Mukdamanee, “Development of Contemporary Art in Thailand,” 136. Silapakorn was first a school of Fine Arts, with the prime interest in producing craftsmen to promote the political regime. It was transformed into a University in 1943.

worked for the kings of Thailand.¹⁰ His situation in a post-1932 era was relatively unchanged. Prior to 1932, he promoted a modern and unified Thai identity under the absolute monarchy; now he would promote it under a new regime. The new schools – Poh Chang in 1911 and Silpakorn in 1934 – were expected to make art in the “spirit of the Thai modernization programme.”¹¹ In other words, Poh Chang would ‘train’ new art teachers who would then teach art around the country and therefore promote State approved arts and crafts, while Silpakorn school would serve national interests with public art that would promote nationalism and record important events of Thai history. Examples of such nationalist movements would be the *Democracy Monument* (1939-40) after the end of the absolute monarchy, and the *Victory Monument* after the French bombing of Nakhon Phanom and the brief fighting between French Indo-China and Thailand.¹² [Fig. 1 and 2]

Modernity in Thai art, what worked, what did not

Apinan explains that the first generation of students at Silpakorn were encouraged to look at modern European movements, yet to paint with a Thai ‘spirit’ based on Thai nature and context.

This would translate into a ‘formal’ foreign influence, visible with the paintbrush and the use of colors for example, yet the subjects would often be Thai landscapes and scenes of everyday life. Rarely would the representations of the effervescence of modern Bangkok be painted. Damrong Wong-Uparaj (ดำรง วงศ์อุปราช a National Artist since 1999)¹³ and Prayat Pongdam (ประยัต พงษ์ดำ, a National Artist since 1998) were amongst the first Thai artists to receive accolades for painting ‘Thai’ scenes, such as villages and temples, using a ‘modern’

¹⁰ Ibid; Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 31-33.

¹¹ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 45.

¹² Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 37-41. Nationalist propaganda was also found in architecture see Noonbanjong, “Power, Identity, and the Rise of Modern Architecture: From Siam to Thailand,” 251-78.

¹³ Fine Arts Department, “Thai National Artists,” <http://art.culture.go.th/> (accessed Feb 14th, 2010). ‘Thai national artist’ is a title given to important Thai artists whose career greatly influenced and supported Thai culture. National artists can be writers, architects, singers, painters, sculptors etc. The Fine Arts Department of the Thai government awards the titles each year.

brushwork.¹⁴ Prayat experimented with colors and brushwork reminiscent of Gauguin, while Damrong experimented with impressionism while painting ‘Thai life’. This did not prevent critics from questioning these painting’s *Thainess*, as they did not see enough difference between an Impressionist or Cubist work by a Thai artist and one by a foreign artist.¹⁵ Impressionism and Cubism were the two styles in favors in the 1950’s and 1960’s in Thailand. Yet Apinan warns us that a direct and strict comparison between the Thai movements and the Parisian and European movements would be a mistake as the artistic goal and contexts surrounding their respective productions were very different.¹⁶

After Impressionism and Cubism, Surrealism is another important and accepted influence in Thailand.¹⁷ Thawan Duchanee (ถวัลย์ ดัชนี) is probably the most recognized artist in Thailand and he has explored surrealism since the 1960s. Although he is now one of the most famous artists in Thailand – he also was named national artist in 2001 – his first experimentations with the style were not always without problems. Indeed, he had 10 of his works destroyed by students in 1971.¹⁸ Though the works represented Buddhist themes, the images were energetic and were deemed erotic, for they showed muscular naked bodies. A group of roughly 80 students slashed 10 of his works exhibited at the Christian Center in Bangkok. The students believed that such representations were sacrilegious and degrading.

¹⁴ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 68-92. Apinan explains that modern art in Thailand was first confined to a few styles, of which Impressionism and Cubism were the most popular.

¹⁵ See Ibid, 68. An obvious distinction would be that Cubism and Impressionism in Europe were anti-establishment, while Silpakorn University was encouraging such brushwork.

¹⁶ In this dissertation I use the English terms cubism, surrealism and impressionism rather than Thai translations. These movements were introduced from the West and I am not aware of unique Thai words that could be substituted. In Thailand when the terms are ‘translated’ no unique word is used, but rather a definition of the artistic movements is given. For example, The New Model English-Thai Dictionary, library edition compiled by So Sethaputra translates Surrealism as ลัทธิศิลปะที่มุ่งมาจะแสดงความรู้สึกภายในของมนุษย์, which could be translated as ‘an artistic movement pertaining to the ‘inner emotion’ or psyche of a person’.

¹⁷ See Ibid, 141. Yet again, Apinan warns us against searching for a direct and strict relation between the Surrealist movements in Thailand and in Europe, the latter taking from André Breton, psychoanalysis and automatism. In Thailand, it was the idea of an image ‘beyond’ reality or what we see, which was embraced by Thai artists.

¹⁸ Ibid, 149.

Indeed artistic conventions in Thailand ask that Buddhist characters be depicted in a calmed and subdued manner, to show that they are indeed on a higher path and are not emotionally affected by their surroundings.¹⁹

This incident shows how difficult it is to represent traditional themes, such as Thai Buddhism, in an unconventional manner.²⁰ Yet Thawan soon received important recognition for his artworks, which display powerful lines and brushworks, a mixture of East Asian calligraphy and Thai *imaginaire*.

Contrary to the figurative art just mentioned, abstract art has had a different reception in Thailand. Except for a few exceptions, which merge abstraction and Buddhism,²¹ abstract art has not received the acclaims of other modern styles. Damrong who in the late 1960s was moving away from impressionist representations to explore abstract art, was an important voice within the Thai artistic community seeking freedom of expression for young artists, away from the restraints of cultural ideologies.²² Yet, after his first accolades for his early paintings of recognizable 'Thai' subjects, his experimentation with abstract art was not well received.²³ For its lack of explicit Thai representations, abstract art has never received the support other styles have had in Thailand.

Neo-Traditionalism

Since the late 1970's and more importantly in the 1990's, neo-traditional (new traditional) art in Thailand has received recognition and is acknowledged by art historians, both foreigners and Thai, as an institutionalized art movement promoting Thai nationalism. As will be explained, neo-traditionalist Thai art is now, according to Thai and foreign art historians, the quintessential institutional and revivalist art in Thailand.

¹⁹ That is not to say however that all characters are represented as calm mannered. Indeed scenes of the everyday lives can sometimes depict humans in very 'earthly' situations and expressions, such as people fighting, flirting, stealing and even in the mist of explicit fornication. See Utong Prasasvinitchai, *For Eyes that See. An Alternative Reading of Thai Mural Paintings* (Bangkok: Namrin, 2003).

²⁰ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 149.

²¹ Ibid, 134-40; Mashadi, "Brief Notes on Traditionalism in Modern Thai Art," 63-64.

²² Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 101, 112-14.

²³ Ibid, 114.

Thawan's art, though surrealist, brought back an interest for the narrative and the didactic. Indeed the first wave in the late 1970's of neo-traditional art in Thailand was more didactic and had narrative potential; the artwork was telling a story, rather than simply depicting a scene.²⁴ This led the way for a new and important movement in Thailand, neo-traditionalism, with artists Chalermchai Kositpipat and Panya Vijnthanasarn (ปัญญา วิจินธนสาร) as the leaders of this new 'didactic' movement.²⁵ This interest in didactic art is note worthy, as landscape art was previously favored to represent Thainess.²⁶ Indeed Chalermchai saw neo-traditionalism as a way to save 'Thainess' and Buddhism from consumerism and western influences.²⁷

Having said that, neo-traditionalism is still difficult to define. John Clark defines the style thus:

It would be a rough compromise between accepting the legitimacy of past forms and techniques and an attempt to reinvent the context from which that legitimacy is drawn. The definition of neo-traditional art involves a reinterpretation of the formal value systems that govern art, ones usually denoted by a set of style markers, or by technique or content[...] Neotraditional art has seen several positions develop from which to assert its quest for legitimacy. One is that of nationalism, the claim to represent in a modern form the aesthetic values of a past but in a way suited to modern conditions [...]²⁸

This definition of neo-traditional art, more socially and even politically explanatory, points to the difficulty of a formal description. Yet this also means that

²⁴ Mashadi, "Brief Notes on Traditionalism in Modern Thai Art," 65.

²⁵ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 197.

²⁶ J.M. Cadet, *The Ramakien: the Thai epic* (Tokyo and Palo Alto: Kodansha International, 1971). *Jataka* tales are the stories of the previous lives of Gotama Buddha. The *Ramakien* is a Thai adaptation from the *Ramayana*, focusing on royal regalia and royal duty. Though previous texts probably existed, they were destroyed when Ayutthaya burnt in 1767. The *Ramakien* used today was composed during the reign of Rama I.

²⁷ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 197; Sandra Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 126. Though Chalermchai indeed raises his voice against foreign influences, Sandra Cate also indicates that his 'anti-western' discourse is also selective, as he has driven both Harley-Davidson and Mercedes Benz.

²⁸ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 73,75.

Thai neo-traditionalism is more a movement than a particular style. “Paintings in the ‘new’ traditional style are extremely eclectic and wide-ranging.”²⁹ In other words, for Apinan and Clark, the ‘style’ of the work is secondary to its expression of Thainess. Indeed an important sector of the contemporary Thai art scene favors and promotes artworks displaying ‘Thainess’, whatever this ‘Thainess’ might be. This interest parallels the original motivation behind the establishment of Fine Arts institutions, such as Silpakorn University. Indeed Apinan Poshyananda, says that :

Contemporary Thai art is geared toward political correctness. Art institutions, competitions, and exhibitions are all organized to cater to consensus art. The consensus is that such art must reflect characteristics that are uniquely Thai.³⁰

Therefore, neo-traditionalism often represents themes such as Buddhism, royalty, images, historical monuments or the ‘quietness’ of everyday life in rural Thailand.³¹ These representations are used to strengthen national identity and generally not used to question it. In other words for art historians, neo-traditionalism does not generally question the concept of Thainess, but helps define and uphold it, by using similar vocabularies found in the historical grand narrative. The art is part of the national drive for national identity.

Neotraditional Thai art is expected to instruct viewers in the highly revered and uncontaminated values of nationhood. Therefore, contents and qualities that are regarded as non-Thai or anti-Thai are suppressed or forced through a systematized process of self-censorship.³²

For example, royal imagery would never be used to question the concept of royalty, for reasons of self-censorship and *Lèse Majesté* (lese-majesty). Buddhism is also usually not questioned in neo-traditional art, but is represented and emulated

²⁹ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 176.

³⁰ Apinan Poshyananda, “Contemporary Thai art: Nationalism and sexuality à la Thai,” in *Traditions/Tensions. Contemporary Art in Asia*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York: Asian Society Galleries, 1996), 104.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 106; Phillips, *The Integrative Art of Modern Thailand*,

³² Poshyananda, “Contemporary Thai art: Nationalism and sexuality à la Thai,” 107.

by it, a lesson learned by Thawan Duchanee in 1971 and more recently learned by Anupong Chantorn in 2007.³³

Up-and-coming Thai artist Anupong Chantorn (อนุพงษ์ จันทน์) who graduated in 'Thai art' from Silpakorn University in 2004,³⁴ learned about the difficulties of painting unconventional Buddhist imagery the same way Thawan did with the destruction of his works in the 1970s. Anupong won the silver medal at the 51st National exhibition of Art, then gold at the 52nd.³⁵ He received great recognition for his unconventional, yet understandable and respectful Buddhist representations pertaining to the idea of *kamma*,³⁶ with human bodies being pestered by crows, humans transforming into animals, or human figures represented as hungry ghosts etc. Yet at the 53rd National Exhibition, where he again won the gold medal, one of his paintings caused social protests.³⁷ The painting is similar to other works he did the previous year, except for the protagonists and the media used [Fig. 3]. The protagonists of the 2007 painting, the ones changing into crows, were monks. Furthermore, the painting was produced on the outer robe of a monk's habit, a sacred artifact and one of the few possessions monks are allowed. Though Anupong won the gold medal, the painting, which they saw as shaming the *Sangha*, outraged some Thai visitors as it was making a relation between bad *kamma* and monks, and was dishonoring a venerated object, a monk's robe. Though exposing human vices and the consequence of bad *kamma* in general was acceptable in 2005 and 2006,

³³ There are other examples of popular outrage at the use or misuse of Buddhism in Thailand. For example the Buddha image at Wat Sanam Chan is controversial. Taylor informs us that the statue has received criticism because the representation is not dignified as it apparently breaks the sanctity of a Buddha statue. Indeed the Buddha stands upright with his right foot rested on a globe, while his right arm is erect in the air. The Buddha statue has been dubbed the Super-Man statue, due to its 'hero' like posture. See James Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 78-85; Sirikul Bunnag, "Sangha calls for statue to be changed," *Bangkok Post* (1998); Sirikul Bunnag, "Changes to wat images spelled out," *Bangkok Post* (1998).

³⁴ Andrew J. West, "Art Thermometer. New group exhibition 'Artitude' tests Thai art market with confident artwork prices," *Bangkok Post Art & Culture* (2007).

³⁵ *The 51st National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: Art Center, Silpakorn University, 2005); *The 52nd National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: Art Center, Silpakorn University, 2006).

³⁶ *Kamma* is in Pali, *karma* is in Samskrit. Unless indicated otherwise, this dissertation will favor the Pali terms rather than the Sanskrit term, as it is the norm in Thailand.

³⁷ Naiweb, "Anupong refutes humiliating the Buddha. The painting of 'monks and crows' and Silpakorn's answer," <http://www.phrathai.net/node/139> (accessed Feb 15th, 2010).

exposing the possible vices of monks and their pending *kammic* demise as well as dishonoring a sacred artifact were not permitted in 2007.³⁸ Again, neo-traditionalism should not defame nationalism, and since Buddhism is the country's religion, a painting that would defame the hierarchical Buddhist order is deemed inappropriate.

Recently, art has also come to the aid of nationalism. Cate mentions that the first art auction sale at Christie's in Bangkok in 1998 attracted a lot of curiosity in the capital. The objects for sale, most of them paintings, but also small collectibles were the former assets of companies that had declared bankruptcy due to the Asian financial crash of the previous year. Though there were some controversies regarding the quality of the works, Chalermchai Kositpipat appeared on television to promote the auction.³⁹ At the said auction, Chalermchai received a standing ovation after one of his paintings was auctioned off for 12 850\$. Cate describes his status at the auction of that of a national hero. The auction was important in the 'post-traumatic stress' of 1997, as it would assert the importance and status of Thai Art in the world – after all Christie's is internationally known – and would boost Thai national pride.⁴⁰

Furthermore, an impressive circle of patrons, primarily the tourist industry, but also major corporations and even the king of Thailand, support neo-traditionalism.⁴¹ Indeed key Thai corporations support the arts in general and specific artists in particular, foremost among them, Chalermchai Kositpipat. Chalermchai has used nationalism as an inspiration for the majority of his works, yet not exclusively, with images of both the king and of various aspects of Buddhism. Yet he has also used nationalism to sell them. Interestingly, Chalermchai's art has reached such national attention that many people who buy his art do it to gain national recognition themselves.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 151-52. Cate mentions that the managing director of Christie's Singapore noted widespread disagreement as to the quality of the pieces for sale and characterized the group as "mixed". Yet an art professor at Silpakorn University characterized the works as cultural patrimony.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 85.

One of the most significant neo-traditionalist patrons is the His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand. His majesty has translated and published the *jataka* story of King *Mahajanaka*, with significant changes at the end of the story. Indeed King *Mahajanaka* was supposed to abandon his kingdom after seeing two mango trees, one broken because people had climbed in it to pick its many fruits, while the second was barren of fruits, yet unbroken. Seeing the mango trees, the King realized that possessions would only bring pain so he then abandoned his kingdom as well as his wife and son. The king of Thailand changed the story so that king *Mahajanaka* would restore the mango tree with modern methods, and only when he fulfilled all his worldly duties, would he leave his kingdom.⁴² His majesty asked eight painters to illustrate the story. Among them are Panya and Chalermchai. The other six are also neo-traditionalists, most of them focusing their careers on Buddhist art.⁴³ Neo-traditionalism could not receive a higher ‘praise’, official acknowledgement and institutionalization than being supported by the king of Thailand.⁴⁴

Furthermore, as Clark indicates, neo-traditionalism is also favored by the tourist industry. Indeed the tourist industry favors neo-traditionalism, as it represents recognizable aspects of Thai culture, something the tourist industry would want to promote.⁴⁵

Although Thai neo-traditional art is *the* institutional art in Thailand since Silpakorn University opened a program in Thai Art, of which Chalermchai and Panya were amongst the first graduates in 1978, it is not the only form of visual artistic expression. Vichoke explains that after the 1973 and 1976 political problems in

⁴² His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, *The Story of Mahajanaka* (Bangkok: Amarin, 1997), 10.

⁴³ The other painters are Netikorn Chinyo, Jintana Piamsiri, Prayat Pongdam, Pichai Nirand, Teerawat Kanama and Preecha Thaothong. All the eight painters are graduates from Silpakorn University, though from different generations of artists, Prayat being the oldest, born in 1934, Jintana and Netikorn being the youngest, born in 1966. Ibid.

⁴⁴ Yet it is interesting that the new moral of the story promotes or supports ‘modern’ methods to ameliorate one’s situation, yet all the artists who helped with the illustrations are neo-traditionalists. Indeed in the *new* version of the story, the king modernized the country, hence helping his subjects, before retiring. Again, we see a tension between the modern and the traditional in art.

⁴⁵ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 85.

Thailand, some artists prefer to raise social issues in art, such as political injustice, shady business corporations and new urban identity. Their preferred medium for such non-traditional questioning is a heteroclitic mixed media often presented in installation works.⁴⁶ Apinan also makes the distinction between the institutionalized neo-traditional paintings and ‘radical’ Thai artists, who are often, yet not exclusively, installation artists daring to expose political issues and social scandals.⁴⁷

By commenting on the crisis of Thainess, many installation artists hope that their works will motivate viewers to redefine fixed values and stereotypes. Instead of blindly condemning Western culture as the cause of the decline of morals and spiritual faith, these Thai artists question the necessity of conforming to dogmatic beliefs in an age of globalization and technology.⁴⁸

Interestingly, the distinction between painting and mixed media in Thailand is also institutionalized. Fine Art institutions recognize installation works and multimedia, yet these forms are secondary to painting. Like the European Art Academies of the 19th century, the National Exhibition is hierarchically divided with four categories: painting, sculpture, graphic art and mixed media. Yet painting is the most prestigious art medium exhibited. Indeed, the gold medal winner is generally a painter.

Furthermore, graduates from Silpakorn, and most importantly those who are neo-traditionalists, are often favorites to win at competitions and win awards. Winning prizes at art exhibits is highly regarded amongst Thai artists, especially ones from Silpakorn University, and is generally an assured way to start a career, though it is not enough to maintain it.⁴⁹ It has become an ‘orthodox’ or conventional way to gain recognition as an artist. However, as Apinan Poshyananda explains,

⁴⁶ Mukdamanee, “Development of Contemporary Art in Thailand,” 141.

⁴⁷ Poshyananda, “Contemporary Thai art: Nationalism and sexuality à la Thai,” 107-09. Yet it would be difficult to support an absolute dichotomy. For example, Pinaree Sanpitak does installation works, yet does not question Thai cultural specificities, but expresses them through femininity.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 108.

⁴⁹ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 173-74.

these exhibits work more as business transactions than art competitions. Most jurors are classically trained from Silpakorn University and tend to reward artists they know or with whom they have familiar artistic connections. To win at a Thai art exhibit, young artists must ‘woo’ the jurors as much as produce ‘good’ art works.⁵⁰ To gain recognition Chulalongkorn graduates have found alternatives to award competitions, such as opening contemporary art galleries or art cafés. Indeed Bangkok has an impressive number of small private galleries exhibiting non-traditional artists.⁵¹ It appears that the Bangkok art scene is split in half, one half centered on orthodoxy in art production and exhibition, while the other is more avant-garde and relies on self-promotion.

Therefore, within the central art institutions in Bangkok, neo-traditional art is seen as being the quintessential form supporting and promoting Thainess. In other words, it seems that a mixed media is generally preferred when questioning

⁵⁰ Ibid. Even today, Chalermchai will often mention his early winning at Bua Luang, as a proof of his artistic merit, though many artists from Silpakorn have, in their career, won more prizes than Chalermchai has. Many young artists win prizes at the national competition many years in a row. For example, only for the annual National Exhibition of Art, Anupong Chatorn won 2nd prize in 2008, 1st prize in 2007 and 2nd prize in 2006. Uttaporn Nimmalaikaew won 1st prize in 2008 and again the 1st prize in 2005. Thanarit Thipwaree won the 3rd prize in 2007, the 3rd prize in 2006 and again 3rd prize in 2004. Roong Trirapichiat won 3rd prize in 2007, 3rd prize in 2006, 2nd prize in 2004, 3rd prize in 2003, 3rd prize in 2001, 2nd prize in 2000 and again 2nd prize in 1999. *The 43rd National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 1997); *The 44th National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 1998); *The 45th National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 1999); *The 46th National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 2000); *The 47th National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 2001); *The 48th National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 2002); *The 49th National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 2003); *The 50th National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 2004); *The 51st National Exhibition of Art*, ; *The 52nd National Exhibition of Art*, ; *The 53rd National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: Art Center, Silpakorn University, 2007); *The 54th National Exhibition of Art* (Bangkok: The National Gallery of Art, 2008).

⁵¹ Chulalongkorn University is the most important University in Bangkok and has three departments offering classes related to the arts: the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, the Department of Arts and the Department of Communicative Arts. The University’s artistic education focuses mostly on new media, such as photography, movies, performance arts, installations etc. There is also the BACC to Bangkok Art & Culture Centre that not only have many rooms for exhibitions, but also rent space of artists, artisans, art suppliers etc. “BACC,” <http://www.bacc.or.th/> (accessed May 30rd, 2010); “Rama IX Art Museum,” <http://www.rama9art.org/artisan/galleries/index.html> (accessed May 23rd, 2010).

Thainess, while people will generally expect painting, especially art categorized as neo-traditional, to support Thainess.⁵²

The long standing tension between the traditional and the modern has transformed and molded the Thai artistic scene with expectations as to which art form could emulate or question social issues. This is the assumed and accepted dichotomy within the central Thai art historical scene. Furthermore, the expected traditional Thainess is usually not questioned and is usually based on Thailand's nationalist grand narrative, supporting and emulating Thailand's three pillars: the Monarchy, Buddhism and the Nation.⁵³ Yet, I believe that the question of Thainess in art would profit from a discussion outside the central grand narrative as well as the Bangkok art scene and explore other avenues for neo-traditionalism. Indeed part of the main argument in this dissertation is that, on the one hand, Wat Rong Khun fits the neo-traditional trajectory already established and acknowledged by art historians, while Wat Pa'O Ram Yen destabilizes the assumed restrictions of neo-traditionalism as promoting a unique and central Thai national identity. It does so, not by openly challenging and subverting Thainess, but by expressing Thainess within the frame of more recent social and Buddhist inquiries regarding Thai national identity. Yet I believe this awareness of a shift within neo-traditional art, at least with Wat Pa'O, is only possible if one goes beyond the Bangkok art scene. It is important to acknowledge however that regional neo-traditional art is a growing presence. Indeed more artists from the provinces are practicing what can often be categorized as neo-traditional art, such as Isaan artist Teerawat Kanama and northern artists Pongchai Jaina, Songdej Thipthong and Prasong Luenmuang to name a few. Studies of neo-traditional art can only progress if we explore neo-traditional artworks from the regions. Yet many of these neo-traditional artworks, though focusing on local cultural details such as the representations of provincial *wat* or small local villages, still often represent idealized sceneries and fixed characteristics, and therefore

⁵² I am grateful to Dr. Sandra Cate for her comments of the issue.

⁵³ Wyatt, *Thailand, a Short History*, 216; Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1978), xvi, 139-40. It is King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) who elaborated the three pillars of Thai nationalism.

somewhat fixed, though regional, identities. Many of these works do not necessarily question central Thai identity, but are rather idealized, ‘non-threatening’ representations of Thailand’s regions. Though they indeed emphasize local identities, a contemporary local agency seems somewhat lost. Indeed as explained before, one of the main problems of Thai localism, why it is often brushed aside and ignored, is its assumption of an ‘idealized’ past. Many local neo-traditional works seem to reinforce these idealized images of local culture and therefore do not necessarily support, though do not negate, contemporary local agency.

Chiang Rai Art scene

The North of Thailand is composed of nine provinces.⁵⁴ It is a mountainous region where cities are found in river valleys between mountaintops. Though mobility was relatively restrained even in the early 1990s, the region’s many highways have now facilitated the accessibility of major towns and cities. When travelling from city to city, the deforestation of northern Thailand is painfully visible and the changing economy is also observable, with an expansion of the production of crops that might not have been present, at least to this extent, in the 19th and even early 20th centuries.⁵⁵ [Fig.4]

Chiang Rai is an important city in northern Thailand, second only to Chiang Mai, the acknowledged capital of northern Thailand. When it comes to contemporary art, Chiang Rai has a special position in Thailand. Indeed, the artist/population ratio is probably the highest in the land. Thawan Duchanee once said that nearly 70% of all the Thai artists are from the region.⁵⁶ Furthermore, some of the most acclaimed and recognized Thai artists are from Chiang Rai, such as Thawan, Chalermchai and Damrong. Though the actual statistic escapes us, it is true

⁵⁴ Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lamphun, Mae Hong Son, Uttaradit, Phrae, Nan, Phayao, Chiang Rai.

⁵⁵ A good example would be the tea agronomy in northern Thailand. The tea industry started as a royal project to eradicate opium production in northern Thailand. The Hall of Opium at Doi Thung, an agro-economical project launched by the late Princess Mother, explains the importance of the different royal projects to eradicate the production of opium in the region, by providing alternative sources of income, including agro-economical ventures, such as tea production.

⁵⁶ Chalong Phinituwan, *ศิลปิน-ศิลปะ : บทความสาระนั้นรู้ทางศิลปะและศิลปิน/ Artists and Art: essays on art and artists* (Bangkok: Inter Publishing, 2004), 157. My translation.

that an impressive number of artists live in and around the city of Chiang Rai. Chalong Phinituwan, himself a respected artist in the city, explains that Chiang Rai is particularly well suited for the arts for three reasons: its natural beauty, historical artistic heritage and contemporary artistic legacy.⁵⁷

The city of Chiang Rai lies in a small valley surrounded by a scenic mountainous setting. The region's landscape is acknowledged to be so beautiful that it is where the late Princess Mother, H.R.H. Princess Srinagarindra (สมเด็จพระศรีนครินทราบรมราชชนนี), established herself at Doi Toung roughly 40 km north of Chiang Rai city. Chalong explains that this beautiful landscape is favorable to meditation and to the imagination, which he believes are essential for artistic creativity.⁵⁸

Furthermore, the city is only a short distance from Chiang Sean, which has an impressive artistic heritage.⁵⁹ Though Chalong does not make a specific and direct relation between contemporary artists and possible forefathers of the Chiang Sean era, he believes that the artistic heritage of the region is a valuable inspiration for young aspiring artists, as they are surrounded not only by natural beauty, but by artistic beauty as well.⁶⁰

The city also has a strong and impressive contemporary artistic lineage. As already mentioned, two important and respected early Thai artists who moved away from "trends and fads of modern Western art," are from Chiang Rai.⁶¹ Damrong Wong-Uparaj (1936-2002), who was mentioned earlier in this chapter, was one of the first to merge the "modern movement with the traditional Thai spirit," bringing him great recognition and respect in Thailand.⁶² Though Damrong was originally from Chiang Rai, after moving to Bangkok for his study he did not return to live in the northern province. Therefore, although Damrong is well known

⁵⁷ Ibid, 157-58. My translation.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 158. My translation.

⁵⁹ The importance of Chiang Sean as a historical city will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 92.

⁶² Ibid. Yet, as was explained earlier, when he moved away from traditional representations and explored abstract art, he also experienced hardship.

in Thailand, Chalong sees another artist as the major source of artistic lineage in Chiang Rai: Thawan Duchanee. Unlike Damrong, Thawan was and still is active in the region, though he too now has a house in Bangkok.

As already mentioned, Thawan is one of the best-known artists in Thailand and has received a lot of media attention. Yet he also participated in events specifically targeting art and culture of northern Thailand, especially of Chiang Rai. He organized the first exhibit of contemporary Chiang Rai artists in 1992CE, which exhibited in Chiang Rai and Bangkok. The exhibit was small, with only nine artists, yet it was successful in bringing a sense of artistic community in Chiang Rai.⁶³ This artistic community grew and is now proud to have amongst its rank another artist of national recognition, Chalermchai Kositpipat. Chalong explains that the imposing artistic careers of previous generations of artists such as Thawan and Chalermchai have inspired young aspiring artists to either stay in Chiang Rai or establish themselves there.

Furthermore I see an interest in ‘promoting’ art in Chiang Rai, which includes the opening of locally owned galleries and the establishment of an association of Chiang Rai artists. For example, Chalong has transformed the front section of his house into a small gallery where local artists can exhibit their works. Angkrit Ajchariyosophon, another artist in Chiang Rai, has opened a gallery so that his fellow artists would have a place to exhibit their artworks.⁶⁴ Artist Sompong Sarasap (สมพงษ์ สารทรัพย์) has also opened *Gallery 9*, where many of the local artists have had exhibitions, though he does not exclusively cater to Chiang Rai artists. Thawan Duchanee’s house complex, called the *Black Village* due to its imposing number of buildings, most of them painted in black, on site (37 main buildings) was also, in part, built as a meeting place for the artistic community. He has also, in part, built his *Black Village* so the artistic community of Chiang Rai could have a place to gather and hold meetings. The *Black Village* is in fact his Chiang Rai home, yet it constitutes

⁶³ Phinituwan, ศิลปิน-ศิลปะ : บทความสาระน่ารู้ทางศิลปะและศิลปิน/ *Artists and Art: essays on art and artists*, 160. My translation.

⁶⁴ Angkrit Ajchariyosophon, interview by author, Chiang Rai, December 20th, 2008. “Angkrit’s gallery,” <http://angkritgallery.com/main.html> (accessed December 20th, 2008).

a small village of its own due to the numerous buildings the complex comprises. These buildings are mainly houses, bathrooms and rooms used as meeting places. He is therefore seen as being interested in promoting Lan Na culture. Furthermore, during my research I discovered, along with these galleries managed by Chiang Rai artists, a strong artistic community with their own artist association and group meetings. Until recently some Chiang Rai artists even launched a project to build a contemporary art museum in Chiang Rai, though as I understand it, the project is now at a standstill.

Chalong has also published books on the artists and artisans around Chiang Rai, a project he completed with the help of Thawan Duchanee.⁶⁵ The goal was to commit to writings and therefore preserve the memory of traditional northern Thai craftsmen, craftswomen and artists, such as dancers, weavers, musicians etc. Yet Chalong also wanted to recognize the important new artistic generation, regardless of their choice of media.⁶⁶ He therefore published a second volume dedicated to Chiang Rai's contemporary art scene. This artistic scene is vibrant and multifaceted. Interestingly, the relation amongst Chiang Rai artists does not seem to be contingent to styles or media used. Indeed potters, acrylic painters and mixed media artists will find themselves converging to the same artistic circles rather than having neo-traditionalist painters only conversing with other neo-traditionalists. Having said that, an overwhelming number of artists are either landscapists, painting the mountainous North, or are neo-traditionalists, focusing on Buddhist representations

⁶⁵ Phinituwan, ศิลปิน-ศิลปะ : บทความสารระนำรู้ทางศิลปะและศิลปิน/ *Artists and Art: essays on art and artists*, ; Chalong Phinituwan, สล่ำพื้นบ้านพื้นเมือง : สารคดีชีวิตบุคคลทางด้านศิลปวัฒนธรรมและภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่น / *Local artists: Biographies on art and local wisdom* (Chiang Rai: Inter Print, 2003).

⁶⁶ It is interesting that Chalong has separated the traditional crafts from the modern art, publishing two separate volumes consecrated to the Arts from region of Chiang Rai. Phinituwan, ศิลปิน-ศิลปะ : บทความสารระนำรู้ทางศิลปะและศิลปิน/ *Artists and Art: essays on art and artists*, ; Phinituwan, สล่ำพื้นบ้านพื้นเมือง : สารคดีชีวิตบุคคลทางด้านศิลปวัฒนธรรมและภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่น / *Local artists: Biographies on art and local wisdom*,

or mythological creatures. Only a limited few are abstract and mixed media artists. Yet these artists are also part of the artistic community.⁶⁷

The education of Chiang Rai's artists also varies. As previously explained winners at Thailand's National Exhibitions are usually Silpakorn University graduates. Yet important members of Chiang Rai's artistic community have graduated from a range of art schools, such as Silpakorn University, Chiang Mai University and schools of technologies in Chiang Mai. Whereas the highest echelons of the national artistic scene are usually reserved to Silpakorn's graduates, Chiang Rai's population is not as restrictive and many artists coming from different educational backgrounds will mingle and collaborate with each other.

As mentioned earlier, Chalong has given three main reasons as to why Chiang Rai is an important artistic center. Yet the relations between different artists are strengthened by different motivations and expressions. Indeed, though Chiang Rai was an important city as historical Lan Na, not all artists in Chiang Rai express a Lan Na identity, or if they do, they might express it differently. For example, Thawan, Chalermchai and Raywat Deekaew (เรวัตร์ ดีแก้ว) are three artists who are known for using accepted or assumed Lan Na paraphernalia, such as the indigo garments of the peasantry or *mor hom*.⁶⁸ Also, Chalermchai often wears a red sash made of northern Thai textile, while Thawan and Raywat might wear necklaces made from the fangs of wild animals.⁶⁹

This 'Lan Na' identity has also been used as an important public relation, especially for Thawan and Chalermchai.⁷⁰ Chalermchai is a master at using complex displays for publicity reasons. Cate mentions the opening of an exhibit of five northern Thai artists he organized in 1994 as an example of such display of Lan Na

⁶⁷ For example Sompong Sarnsap (สมพงษ์ สารทรัพย์), an abstract artist, has opened *Gallery 9* mentioned earlier and Angkrit Ajchariyosophon (อังกริช อัศจรรย์โสภณ), a mixed media and performance artist, has opened a gallery on the second floor of his restaurant, where unconventional artists may find a space to exhibit.

⁶⁸ Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 127-32.

⁶⁹ Since northern Thailand is perceived as being rich with forest, it is also seen as having, or at least used to, have more wild life.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 127; John Hoskin, "A Question of Attitude. Chalermchai Kositpipat and Panya Vijinthanasarn," *Art and Asia Pacific* 2, no. 3 (1995): 42-49.

paraphernalia.⁷¹ As Cate describes it, the opening ceremony in Bangkok was lavish and displayed northern Thai elements such as music, textile, lanterns etc. Yet Chiang Mai artist Mir Jai-In crashed the party when he distributed pamphlets condemning Thawan's 'exploitation' of northern identity for publicity and capital gain.⁷² Another example of use of northern imagery was the opening of the 1994 exhibit. Here Chalermchai wore tailored silk *mor hom*, while in reality the peasant's garment is made of sturdy cotton. Cate explains that he is

simultaneously identifying with, but elevating himself above, the Thai peasantry in a manner appealing to his sponsors. [...] In so doing he manipulates and even inverts both older and newer Thai hierarchies of taste and status: displaying the brand names that attain status among the new Bangkok elite, but maintaining a fashionable quality of being "authentically" Thai.⁷³

Indeed Chalermchai plays with northern identity because it can potentially be seen as a source of tradition and authenticity in Thailand. Indeed, as will be explained later, one of the reasons the modernization of Thailand in the 19th and 20th centuries was seen as necessary was so that the regions of Thailand could stay strong and intact. Apinan sees the use and display the northern Thai paraphernalia by some of these artists as part of the nationalist discourses found in contemporary art today.⁷⁴ In other words, it is a source of national ethnic purity; in this context Lan Na identity upholds the central Thai grand narrative. Though Apinan sees Thawan and Chalermchai's displays of Lan Na identity as being relatively similar, in other words both use Lan Na identity for capital gain and recognition, I believe Thawan's place in Chiang Rai is somewhat different than Chalermchai's. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Thawan has worked with Chalong to commit to memory the important northern Thai artists and craftsmen of the region around Chiang Rai.

Yet most Thai artists in Chiang Rai do not share this 'staged' identification with Lan Na expressed by Thawan and Chalermchai. Though many Chiang Rai

⁷¹ Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 127-28.

⁷² Apinan Poshyananda, "Smile-a-while campaigns for cultural correctness," *Art and Asia Pacific* 2, no. 3 (1995), 40.

⁷³ Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 126.

⁷⁴ Poshyananda, "Smile-a-while campaigns for cultural correctness," 34-41.

artists will paint northern scenes or recognizable northern Thai elements, most will not personally express such lavish displays of Lan Na Thai identity. The association with northern Thailand is felt through their art, not through their clothes and accessories.⁷⁵

The two villages/The two artists

The two temples this dissertation focuses on are in the province of Chiang Rai, both only few minutes away from the capital of the same name. Both temples are located in small *mooban*/หมู่บ้าน or village adjacent to the capital city, Rong Khun being roughly 13km South of the city, while Pa'O Ram Yen is roughly 15km North of it.

Each of the two temples are seminal artistic projects by two well-known and respected Chiang Rai artist who have each received accolades from diverse members of the Chiang Rai artistic community. Yet outside Chiang Rai, the fame of the two artists is drastically different. As already explained, Chalermchai is well known (he is in fact a Thai national star) while Somluk has received less attention on the national front. Having said that, relatively few Thai artists, Thawan Duchanee being one, have received more public attention than Chalermchai Kositpipat.

Indeed the original project for this dissertation was a monograph on Wat Rong Khun and Chalermchai. His temple has received much publicity and my original project was to look at the 'democratization' of neo-traditional 'high' art in Thailand. Yet when I settled in Chiang Rai in the summer of 2007, I quickly realized that Wat Rong Khun was only one of many architectural and artistic projects warranting academic investigation around the northern city. While Thai national attention and the touristic interest was riveted on Wat Rong Khun, many members of the Chiang Rai artistic community acknowledged the importance of Wat Pa'O and were interested in its promotion. As will be explained later, some of these artists are also participating, in various ways, in the promotion and artistic production surrounding Wat Pa'O.

⁷⁵ It is very interesting that Thawan and Chalermchai associate themselves with Lan Na through their attires, yet in comparison to other Chiang Rai artists, their artworks do not 'obviously' display Lan Na elements.

After visiting the two temples, it was obvious that they stand apart from each other on many levels, including religious expression, national and local recognition, and artistic visions. Visually, the two temples are very different, and yet both allegedly express 'traditions' in a contemporary context. After interviewing the two artists responsible for the projects, it became apparent that not only would the two temples be visually different, but also that their respective places within the contemporary Thai artistic scenes, would also differ. This dissertation explores these differences. The two temples are similar as they are both 'living spaces,' in other words spaces that not only reflect, but help to materialize social processes and therefore help create spaces which promote acts of agency. Yet I believe, as will be explained shortly, that Wat Rong Khun promotes a more individualized religious experience, where one's path to salvation is an individual endeavor and social positioning, while Wat Pa'O promotes a more communal one.

The two temples are also the projects of two northern artists and both projects seem, at first glance, to be remarkably different from other Thai temples, yet they also retain enough traditional aspects to be recognized as *Thai*. They are therefore original works of neo-traditional art and architecture. Yet, as will be explained, the interests in 'originality' differ with both artists. Chalermchai wants, among other things, for his temple to *be* different and be recognized as such. The interest in originality is therefore a basic principle behind Chalermchai's work. Yet, though Somluk's work is also original and differs from other Thai temples, *originality* itself was not his initial goal, but is rather a derivative of his main goals, a by-product. These aspects will be studied in greater details in subsequent chapters.

Wat Rong Khun has received important national and even international attention (mostly via tourism). In the summer of 2007, the temple received approximately 700 visitors per day; two thirds of these visitors were Thai, the other third were foreigners, most of them part of organized tour groups visiting northern Thailand.⁷⁶ Therefore, on any given day, the number of tourists visiting the temple, both Thai and foreigners, is far greater than the number of Rong Khun villagers, who

⁷⁶ On a two weeks observation, from dawn till dusk, I never computed more than 800 visitors and on other days the number was closer to 600.

would be going to the temple for religious reasons.⁷⁷ These tourist visitors, both Thai and foreigners, were often not prepared to visit this religious site. Indeed in the summer of 2007, white sarongs were offered to visitors wearing shorts or inappropriate dresses. Though foreigners often needed those sarongs, Thai visitors often needed them as well, as they were wearing garments they might not have chosen if visiting a temple on a religious occasion. It is my impression, which was confirmed by conversing with Thai students in Chiang Rai, Bangkok and Victoria BC, who also had visited the temple, that visitors often went to the site to see the artwork of a famous Thai artist, not to go to a temple. Their primary interest was not religious.

At Wat Pa'O, the effervescence of Wat Rong Khun is left behind. Many days can pass without much activity, yet when the community gets together, the ground is animated with people. It is also my impression that this project is first and foremost a religious site. The artworks and monuments are forged to answer religious and communal needs. In other words, the art and architecture are secondary to religious and communal interests. This also makes the temple's position in Thailand very different from Wat Rong Khun's. Indeed, outside both the villages' communities and parts of Chiang Rai's artistic community, the temple is little known, as its purpose is experienced and expressed locally. Wat Pa'O's importance lies at the local community level, while Wat Rong Khun's is at the national level, making the temples' positions within the nation quite different.

Summary

Modern Thai art is the product of a tension between the desire to be modern and the wish to express and preserve tradition. In Thailand, there is a strong relation between the State and art promoting nationalist sentiments. It started during the

⁷⁷ The Buddhist inhabitants of Wat Rong Khun and its surroundings are roughly 450 in number, with 130 households. Yet during my 2007 field research, I witnessed that although the number of inhabitants at Rong Khun is relatively great for a *moo ban*, the devotional activities by the villagers were minimal in comparison to the number of visitors to the temple. For example, besides the important morning alms giving and the occasional visit to the abbot, the number of local Buddhist practitioners visiting the temple for religious reasons was far less than the number of tourists. Such a visit would occur on average, every other day.

absolute monarchy with the Poh Chang School, yet achieved institutionalization with the opening of Silpakorn School. The art curriculum at Silpakorn was based on European modern movements as source of artistic explorations, yet only a few styles prevailed in Thailand: Impressionism, Cubism and to a certain extent, Surrealism. Yet the most important and recognized style in Thailand is currently Neo-Traditionalism. It is generally perceived as being a movement that supports, teaches and upholds a unified Thai identity. However this analysis is based on Bangkok's assumed hierarchy of art and expectations regarding artworks coming out of the University of Fine Arts (Silpakorn University). New studies on neo-traditionalism need to go beyond the Bangkok art scene and look at how art is presented, expressed, but also experienced in different locales.

Chiang Rai is an important artistic center in Thailand. Some of the most important artists in Thailand are from the city or its vicinity and some of these artists have openly embraced Lan Na identity as part of their nationalist discourses. Yet not all Chiang Rai artists do so. Indeed the Chiang Rai artistic community is relatively strong and shows an interesting variety of styles and media, though the most important are landscape art and neo-traditionalism. Many paint images and landscapes inspired by the region and city. Yet the nationalist fervor, artistic hierarchical divisions and expectations found in Bangkok are left behind. For many Chiang Rai artists, the northern Thai identity is something to explore rather than assert. The comparison of the two temples must therefore take into perspective the artistic relations and expressions found in Chiang Rai. Indeed some artists employ Lan Na identity as a promotional tool and yet paint images that appeal to patrons from Bangkok. Others explore and promote Lan Na identity and the Chiang Rai artistic community. Shared visions or shared artistic goals can transform into artistic camaraderie and assistance with different projects.

Chapter 3 History of Lan Na

This dissertation focuses on two contemporary temples located in northern Thailand, yet both artists responsible for the temples take very different approaches to Lan Na and Thai identities, alternating between disruption and embrace of different positioning of identity formation based on either local or national/central perspectives. The discussion will highlight the fluctuating relations between peripheries and centers in Lan Na and Thailand. This chapter will show how the relations between Thailand's center and its peripheries have changed over time, enlightening the distinctive positions taken by the two artists. This chapter will first offer an historical account of Lan Na prior to the integration to Siam, and, second will provide an analysis of the northern regions' place within modern Thailand, including a new look at the periphery/center relations since the 1997 financial crash. While this dissertation focuses on two contemporary Buddhist temples, it is important to look at historical components, as they are part of the identity formation and identity location of contemporary Thai and northern Thai populations, including the artists responsible for the two projects analyzed in this dissertation.

The modern relations between Thailand's center of power, Bangkok, and its northern regions, the historical territories of the Lan Na city-states, have changed according to Thailand's cultural and political transformations. Depending on the historical circumstances, Bangkok's vision of Lan Na ranges from social utopia, political disregard, to moral idealization. Yet historical circumstances, such as the threat of colonialism and financial debacle, also forced the peripheries to reevaluate their own identity formation and their relation to Thailand's center of power and social order.

History of the North

Haripunchai

Though people have lived in the northern valleys between the rivers Salween, Ping and the Mekong [Fig. 5] since prehistoric Stone and early Metal Ages,¹ the first major political organization in the region was the kingdom of Haripunchai, ruled by the Mon of Lamphun. Founded around 750CE² where legends say the Buddha rested during his voyage in the region,³ Lamphun's first ruler was from Lop Buri.⁴ Though most of the lower Chao Phraya river valleys became part of the Khmer empire as early as the 9th century CE, Lamphun was never subjected and remained independent. It did however have to fight to stay this way.⁵ At the same time that the Khmer empire fell (13th century CE), people of the Tai ethnic group⁶ arrived in the valleys⁷ in small groups, from the North and East. The main Tai group that settled in the region was originally from Yunnan, South China and somewhat lower, where contemporary Laos, Myanmar and Thailand meet. The first acknowledged ruler of Lan Na, king Mengrai, was a relative of the Tai Lu of Chiang Rung, south China.⁸

¹ Hans Penth, *A Brief History of Lan Na. Civilizations of North Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000).

² Ibid. Different chronicles give different dates for Lamphun. The Chiang Mai and Nan chronicles give 87 BCE, the *Jinakalamali* chronicle gives 661 BCE, while the History of Nang Jam Thewi gives 767 CE.

³ Swearer, Donald K, Sommai Premchit and Phathjooon Dokhuakaew, *Sacred Mountains of Northern Thailand and their Legends* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004). Burmese and Lan Na legends say that the Buddha traveled to the region.

⁴ Sarassawadee Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, trans. Chitraporn Tanratanakul (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), 32; Donald K. Swearer and Sommai Premchit, *The Legend of Queen Cama. Bodhiramsi's Camadevivamsa, a Translation and Commentary* (New York: State university of New York Press, 1998); Penth, *A Brief History of Lan Na. Civilizations of North Thailand*, 6; Swearer and Premchit, *The Legend of Queen Cama. Bodhiramsi's Camadevivamsa, a Translation and Commentary*.

⁵ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 32-38. This constant threat probably weakened the state since its Golden Age (1157-1292) started only after the decline of the Khmer empire and before Mengrai, the first Tai king in Lan Na, marched on the city.

⁶ The term Tai is used to indicate the Tai ethnic group, while Thai is used to identify the modern national identity.

⁷ The mountainous regions are separated by valleys around river flows, see Ibid, 14.

⁸ Penth, *A Brief History of Lan Na. Civilizations of North Thailand*, 39.

Lan Na

The translation of Lan Na or Lan Na Thai (ล้านนาไทย) is generally accepted as *Land of a million rice fields*.⁹ Though many publications talk about *the kingdom* of Lan Na, it would be more accurate to use the plural, as Lan Na was not only one kingdom, but a conglomerate of city-states mostly, yet not unequivocally, under the suzerainty of Chiang Mai. The political boundaries of the Lan Na kingdoms are elusive; chronicles and historical accounts give different limits to their territories. For example, one northern chronicle describes Lan Na Chiang Mai's territories as "The realm of the King, the ruler of Lan Na-Chiang Mai, borders in the south on the territory of Muang Rahaeng (Tak), in the east on the Mekong, and to the west on the Salwee."¹⁰ A Chinese chronicle of the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty describes its boundaries thus: "In the east of the land [of Babai] is Laowo [Laos], in the south Bole barbarians [Sukhothai], in the west Da Gula [Pegu], in the north Menggen Prefecture [Muang Khun or Chiang Tung]."¹¹

Though Lan Na's circle of power is generally accepted as being centered in Chiang Mai, it did not have a strong centralized government. The king of Chiang Mai directly controlled only two cities or *muang* (เมือง),¹² Chiang Mai and Lamphun, as well as the territories and population between the two cities. The different secondary rulers had absolute power over their own territories and the people

⁹ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 5-7, 11-13; Hans Penth, "On Rice and Rice Fields in old Lan Na. Text, translations, interpretation," *Journal of Siam Society* 91 (2003): 90-188. Though this translation is generally accepted, it is difficult to be certain, since different tone marks would give different significations. The first writings in northern Thai did not use tone marks, so the oral term *Lan Na* has generated some debates amongst historians.

¹⁰ From the *Chiang Mai chronicles*, quoted in Volker Grabowsky, "Population and State in Lan Na prior to the mid-sixteenth century," *Journal of Siam Society* 93 (2005), 3.

¹¹ Xin Yuanshi quoted in *Ibid.*

¹² The term *muang* is difficult to unequivocally translate. Nonetheless, it is associated with a 'center' of power. Indeed historical territories are not defined by their borders, but by their centers. *Muang* can therefore be used to describe a capital, yet also the territory under its power. The term *muang* can be used for community (small or large), one or a group of city/ies or town/s and even a larger entity such as a territory or even country. *Ibid.*, 4; Alexander Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Pact Between Sukhodaya and Nan: Epigraphic and Historical Studies, No.3," *Journal of Siam Society* 57, no. 1 (1969): 57-107. Though the Thai language acknowledges 'plurals', there are no distinction in the spelling of a word if it is singular or plural. For example: one *muang* is the same as two *muang*. In this dissertation, when a Thai term is spelled with a non-Thai alphabet, the Thai convention will be kept even if it refers to a multiplicity.

living in it, whether slaves or low born.¹³ Yet, only the king of Chiang Mai could appoint rulers to the different *muang* under his circle of control; this appointment was the only true power Chiang Mai had over regions beyond Chiang Mai and Lamphun. Therefore, Lan Na was loosely formed by satellite cities ideally ruled by members of the king's family; for example the king's son usually ruled Chiang Rai, a city founded by king Mengrai in 1262.¹⁴ There were also tributary states further away from the center. These states could keep their independence as long as they sent tributes every year.

Having said that, the city-states of Lan Na under Chiang Mai suzerainty were an important, relatively defined entity, yet not entirely cohesive.¹⁵ It helped the Lao in Lan Xian to defeat the Dai Viet in the 15th century, it assisted the Shan *muang* or principalities against the Burmese, and it stayed independent of Ayutthaya's expansion, a rival Tai kingdom in the lower Chao Phraya river basin, on numerous occasions [Fig. 5].¹⁶ Yet their involvements in the conflict between the Shan *muang* and the Burmese kingdom of Ava (Innwa) partially contributed to their loss of independence. Indeed in the 16th century CE, the Burmese King Bayinnyang (1551-1581) of Ava invaded Lan Na's territories to put a stop to Lan Na's interference and

¹³ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 94-95. The difference between slaves and low born is not clear and Sarassawadee comes to the conclusion that there were probably not much difference. Slaves were of three kinds, either working at the palace, working in villagers or were *wat* slaves. Palace slaves were often individuals or families, some of them becoming slaves on their own accord, while slave villagers were often relocated villagers, where the entire population of a village was moved. The third group was the *wat* slaves, that is slaves who were given to temples to take care of the materiality of the royal temples. See also J.C. Shaw, *Northern Thai ceramics* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford, New York, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981), 17.

¹⁴ The city is named after him; Chiang Rai means Mengrai's city.

¹⁵ Grabowsky, "Population and State in Lan Na prior to the mid-sixteenth century," 11-12. King Tilok (พระเจ้าติโลกราช) is different from many Chiang Mai kings because he wanted to be seen as a *Dhammaraja*. He also wanted a certain common identity based on Buddhism and importance of accumulated merit, amongst rulers. The worship of important northern relics by local rulers became important elements of the elite's identity formation.

¹⁶ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, The kingdom of Ayutthaya (อาณาจักรอยุธยา) was briefly discussed in chapter 1. The kingdom of Ayutthaya was an important Tai Siamese kingdom in the lower valley of the Chao Phraya River that was founded in 1350. It is part of the grand narrative of Thailand's history. It was destroyed by the Burmese army in 1767 and then abandoned. King Thaksin (c.1767-1782) moved the capital to Thonburi. When he abdicated, the new *Chakri* dynasty moved the capital to Bangkok (กรุงเทพมหานคร). Chronologically, the *Ratthanatokin* era is situated between the fall of Ayutthaya and the fall of the absolute monarchy in 1932.

support of the Shan states situated in what is now southern Myanmar [Fig. 5].¹⁷ Burmese interference resulted in dissent in Lan Na, mostly among the ruling elite. Some rulers did not accept Burmese regulations, particularly when it came to tributes and sending peasants to war, which diminished their wealth and incomes.¹⁸ On the other hand, some local rulers benefited from Burmese suzerainty and were able to assert their importance and position in the region.¹⁹ For example, during Burmese suzerainty, Chiang Saen grew in importance and in the early 18th century, it became the center of Burmese power in Lan Na, to Chiang Mai's detriment.²⁰

In 1767 CE the Burmese army marched south and destroyed Ayutthaya, the capital of the kingdom of the same name.²¹ Nine years later, the Siamese army marched north as retaliation against Burma, and also to block any other Burmese threats by securing Lan Na territories. To do so, they invaded Lan Na and 'liberated' Chiang Mai in 1776. Though Chiang Mai was liberated, other regions of Lan Na were not as quick to side with Siam. Indeed the first restored king of Lan Na Chiang Mai, King Kawila (พระเจ้าบรมราชาธิบดีกาวิละ, r.1782-1816) had to fight many *ban* (villages) and forcefully relocate the population around its own capital. Chiang Saen was taken in 1804 and only with the help of Bangkok, Vientiane and Lampang [Fig. 5].²² Its Thai Yuan population was then forcefully relocated around Chiang Mai. The length of time and strength it took Chiang Mai to assert control (forceful relocation

¹⁷ Ibid, 116.

¹⁸ Ibid, 116-22. In the 17th century, the Burmese had the strongest army in Southeast Asia, much stronger than Lan Na. Soldiers of conquered territories mostly formed this army.

¹⁹ Ibid, 122. Even before the Burmese southern expansion in Lan Na, Ayutthaya tried to gain power over Lan Na kingdoms. During the Burmese suzerainty however Chiang Mai asked the help of Ayutthayan troops against Burma. However, when troops from Ayutthaya arrived in Lan Na in 1660, Chiang Mai sided with Burma and turned against Ayutthaya. In retaliation, Ayutthaya sacked numerous *muang* during its retreat.

²⁰ Ibid. Yet, unanimity did not exist in Lan Na. Indeed, local leaders' discontent with Burmese suzerainty varied and many were busy fighting against themselves rather than fighting Burma. For example, Chiang Mai against Chiang Sean, and Lampang against Lamphun. In reality, Chiang Mai had never accepted losing its royal importance and trading opportunities to Chiang Sean.

²¹ See note 16 above.

²² Ibid, 133. King Thaksin of Thonburi appointed King Kawila ruler of Chiang Mai in 1782. Yet, people were still brought from Yong to Chiang Mai in 1813.

of entire *ban* or village and *muang* or cities) over the former city-states of Lan Na²³ is a testament to the mitigated response of the population and other local rulers to Chiang Mai regaining its central position in regional politics as well as Siamese suzerainty in Lan Na.

The point is that Lan Na was never a united entity experiencing a unique process of identity formation. A modern assertion of Lan Na identity location is therefore problematic.

Royal power in Lan Na

As previously explained, the historical Lan Na kingdoms or city-states are not easily defined. As in most states of mainland Southeast Asia prior to colonialism, kingdoms were not defined by fixed political boundaries; it was the power to rule people that determined the king's reach in the land.²⁴ Furthermore, concepts of kingship in Lan Na were generally different from the rival kingdom of Ayutthaya's vision of sacred kingship and centralized government, modeled on the Angkorian concept of the god-king (*devaraja* skt).²⁵ Lan Na kings did not take the name of Hindu deities, such as Vishnu, Indra or Rama as in the case in Ayutthaya and in contemporary Thailand.²⁶ They were named after specific regions within their territories;²⁷ the legitimacy of Lan Na kingship was primarily one of lineage and a show of secular power, rather than sacred power.²⁸

For example, the royal architecture of Ayutthaya was more grandiose and majestic than the dwellings of the commoners, effectively separating the two realms.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*,

²⁵ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 83. Indeed, as previously mentioned, the Khmer empire never conquered the northern territories.

²⁶ The current king of Thailand is known as Rama IX. It is King Vajiravudh who instigated the Rama designation for the Chakri kings. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, 136-37. For a study of Thai sacred kingship associated with Brahmanism, see Frank E. Reynolds, "Sacral Kingship and National Development: The Case of Thailand," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardewell L. Smith (Chambersburg: South and Southeast Asia Studies by ANIMA books, 1978).

²⁷ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 83.

²⁸ As will be explained later however, Buddhism was used to enforce the power of the king, yet the king was not associated with Hindu gods as was the case with lower regions of the Chao Phraya River which had previously been conquered by the Khmer empire.

Yet in Lan Na, houses of the royalty and of the commoners were relatively similar, differing only in size. Power was therefore expressed by other means, such as the 'space' one used, the artifacts one could buy and the leisure time one could afford.²⁹ For example, the ruling class could have leisure time, such as hunting and traveling, while commoners could not afford the luxury of free time, despite what the colonial travelers described.³⁰ The ruling elite also had monopoly over certain objects, such as lacquer trees, certain dyes for textile, honey, ivory from elephant or rhinoceros, deer hides and hooves as well as live elephants.³¹ These goods were not only used as royal paraphernalia, but were also sent to the market, ensuring that the ruling elite would have a steady source of income. The king of Chiang Mai *theoretically* laid claim on all the forests' goods, declaring himself sole owner of its products. Yet local rulers also collected the bounties of the forest, they simply sent a percentage of the profit to their overlord; on the other hand, commoners who 'stole' from the forest were severely punished.³²

²⁹ Charles F. Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula. Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: School of Hawaiian, Asian & Pacific Studies, University of Hawai'i, 1995), 76-77; Taylor Easum, "From Spaces of Legitimacy to Sites of Resistance: Sacred Space and the Chiang Mai State, 1883-1932" (Paper presented at the conference 'Engaging Southeast Asia: Centers and Peripheries,' Vancouver, 2009). Chiang Mai city also offers an interesting example of a royal space, as the city was considered royal. King Kawila's goal was to reestablish the city's glory and importance in Lan Na. He implemented old displays of power such as parading and crossing the gates of Chiang Mai, as well as old coronation ceremonies. The analysis of Chiang Mai city as a royal 'space' has been discussed in other studies and is too complex to recount in details in this dissertation. Suffice to say, as one example of the specialized demarcations of space, that the city was accessible by different gates. Yet these gates were used for different purposes and many taboos existed on the proper way to enter the city depending on the occasion.

³⁰ Katherine A. Bowie, "Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand," *Journal of Asian Studies* 1, no. 4 (1992), 799; Victor R. Savage, *Western Impressions of nature and landscape in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1984), 111, 117. French General Poivre talks of Thailand as a plentiful country, which is so prolific in rice, fruits, and fishes that people do not have to work to harvest these goods. Captain Alexander Hamilton gives a similar account of Thailand, describing the Thai people as lazy, indolent and suspicious, because they did not have to work hard to rip the bounty of nature. The reason behind these descriptions is the wish to colonize the region. By showing the country as lavish and populated by simple and lazy people, it would be easier to convince Europeans of the effortlessness of crossing the borders and 'invading'.

³¹ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 88; Grabowsky, "Population and State in Lan Na prior to the mid-sixteenth century," 9.

³² Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 87-88, 98-99.

Most of the larger *muang* were on important trading routes, including the Mekong, for Chiang Rai and Chiang Sean, and the rivers Kok and Ping, for Chiang Mai [Fig. 5].³³ That is also why Phrae was able to stay independent of Chiang Mai for a long time (it was brought under Chiang Mai suzerainty only in the middle of the 15th century CE) as it was closer to Sukhothai and had therefore fewer relations with Chiang Mai.

Buddhism in Lan Na

The elite also promoted and used Buddhism to express power. The royal elite patronized Theravada Buddhism and royal temples were lavishly decorated and imbued with both royal and religious power.³⁴ Theravada Buddhism was the predominant religion in Lan Na, and the form of Theravada Buddhism practiced in historical Lan Na was dubbed ‘Yuan Buddhism’ by William C. Dodd.³⁵ The Yuan Buddhism of historical Lan Na differs from the later central Thai Buddhism in the “script used for the sacred literature, in the structure and content of rituals, and in the organization of the Buddhist clergy.”³⁶

The royalty of Lan Na also expressed and ensured their positions of power using Buddhism. Indeed to avoid vassals gaining too much power, kings prohibited

³³ Grabowsky, “Population and State in Lan Na prior to the mid-sixteenth century,” 9. The promotion of trade and receiving rare forest goods, such as honey, ivory and incense, from vassal territories was also a major reason why Chiang Mai kept vassal territories. Furthermore, precious metal such as silver, copper and iron were also coveted tributes from the Shan states and even further north from Chiang Tung.

³⁴ Katherine A. Bowie, “Peasant perspectives on the political economy of the northern Thai kingdom of Chiang Mai in the nineteenth century: implications for the understanding of peasant political expression.” (University of Chicago, 1988), 64.

³⁵ William Dodd, *The Tai Race: Elder Brother of the Chinese* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996; reprint 1923); Charles F. Keyes, “Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 30, no. 3 (1971), 552-554; J.L. Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 25-27. William C. Dodd created the term in 1923. The Yuan is a Tai ethnic group (Tai Yuan) who lived where the four countries (China, Burma, Thailand and Laos) meet. Therefore Yuan Buddhism is not limited to the former territories of historical Lan Na. We find Yuan Buddhism among many Tai-speaking people in the Myanmarian Shan state of Kengtung, in northern Laos, and in the southern regions of China. Yet Taylor warns us that generalization of a pre-Sangha reform is probably misleading, as the monastic groupings were fluid, depending on different ascetic rules each group was following, their dwelling preferences and their pupilage.

³⁶ Keyes, “Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand,” 552.

large donations to monasteries; furthermore, all religious donations to monasteries were to be made in the name of the king. This was a way to ensure that political rivals would not be able to rise above their stations, since being allowed to make merit (tham boon, ทำบุญ) through activities such as patronizing monasteries, would not only show a patron's wealth, but also "increase their political reputation."³⁷ From the middle of the 15th century onward, the king was seen as *dhammaraja* or King of Dhamma who tried to unify his territories, even his extended ones, through Buddhism, by appropriating important statues of the Buddha in different regions and revering them in regimented ceremonies. The worshipping of important amulets and Buddha statues from the different corners of the land became 'state palladia' associated with the king.³⁸ Because of royal patronage, certain temples were distinctively royal, even recycling the material from the royal household into royal temples, and were therefore accorded higher standings.³⁹ Yet this did not mean that these temples became more popular, as they were then recognized as royal as well as religious spaces; they therefore were too powerful for the general population and were avoided as spatial taboos.⁴⁰

³⁷ Grabowsky, "Population and State in Lan Na prior to the mid-sixteenth century," 10.

³⁸ Ibid, 11-12. This relation between sacred statues and royalty still exists today, the best example being the Emerald Buddha at Wat Phra Keaw in Bangkok. Only the King or his representative can, during an elaborate ceremony, change the robes of the statue three times a year for the change of season.

³⁹ Bowie, "Peasant perspectives on the political economy of the northern Thai kingdom of Chiang Mai in the nineteenth century: implications for the understanding of peasant political expression," 61-65. For example, in the 15th centuries, two forest dwelling monasteries, the *Wat Suan Dok* or Temple of the Flower Garden (วัดสวนดอก) and *Wat Pa Deng* or Temple of the Red Forest (วัดป่าแดง), were founded by royal patronage and became rivals. Furthermore, they both claimed the Sinhalese authenticity of their respective teachings and practices. Daniel M. Veidlinger, *Spreading the Dhamma. Writing, Orality, and Textual transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2006), 65; Donald K. Swearer and Sommai Premchit, "The Relation Between the Religious and Political Orders in Northern Thailand (14th-16th Centuries)," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma* (Chambersburg: South and Southeast Asia Studies, ANIMA Books, 1978); Anne M. Blackburn, "Localizing Lineage. Importing Higher Ordination in Theravadin South and Southeast Asia," in *Constituting Communities. Theravada Buddhism and the Religious Cultures of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. John Clifford Holt, Jacob N. Kinnard and Jonathan S. Walters (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 22, 140-43.

⁴⁰ Bowie, "Peasant perspectives on the political economy of the northern Thai kingdom of Chiang Mai in the nineteenth century: implications for the understanding of peasant political expression,"

On the opposite scale of Lan Na royal temples were the village temples. Those temples were constructed by the villagers and the monks themselves, and were an integral part of the village life. Village monks were therefore close to the community and most often from the village itself or nearby. Therefore, the local monk was not above the community, but part of it. Villagers would know the monks and would not accept inappropriate behaviors.⁴¹ In other words, the monks were also accountable to the villagers. As integral parts of village life, temples were also used as

town hall for meetings, a school, a hospital (monks provided herbal medicine and took care of the sick), a social and recreation center, a playground for children, an inn for visitors and travelers, a warehouse for keeping boats and other communal objects, and a wildlife refuge (if the wat was near a forest).⁴²

As Kamala explains, this close relationship between the villagers and the monks meant that monks were part of this world; it was a syncretic relationship.⁴³ Monks “organized festivals, worked on construction projects in the wat, tilled the fields, kept cattle or horses, carved boats, played musical instruments during the Bun Phawet festival, taught martial arts”.⁴⁴ They were active members within a symbiosis, not unmovable iconic fixtures of unshakable moral superiority. In his study of Buddhist social ethic, Tavivat maintains that in historical Thailand, Buddhist temples were at the heart of village life.⁴⁵ Yet a nuance could be made. In historical Lan Na city-states, the village monk was an essential part of village life, yet

63-65. Bowie gives the example of a former royal temple in a state of disrepair at Mea Rim. The villagers said that the temple was not kept in good conditions because the spirit of the temple would not allow commoners to enter the ground and touch the buildings, as it was a royal temple. To touch the royal temple would be to transgress a powerful taboo, that is the physical separation of the royal from the common.

⁴¹ Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollection. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 23.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁵ Tavivat Puntarigivat, “Toward Buddhist Social Liberation” (Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 6th international conference on Thai studies Theme I. Globalization: impact on and coping strategies in Thai society, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1996), 233.

although he was the religious representative of the village, it was not at its 'top-center'. In other words, the monk was not separated from the rest of the people and the village life.

Up until the early 20th century, different monks of different *nikai*⁴⁶ were living in the same regions in relative harmony.⁴⁷ Chiang Mai or the other city-states were not trying to control or restrict the different Buddhist traditions. Each district was allowed to ordain monks in its own traditions. Indeed, within Yuan Buddhism, there were many different regional schools, lineages or *nikai*.⁴⁸ In Chiang Mai alone, there were 18 attested different *nikai*, their recorded names often highlighting their origins, such as Chiang Mai *nikai*, Chiang Saen *nikai*, Nan *nikai*, Lawa *nikai*, Phrae *nikai* etc.⁴⁹ Neither through Chiang Mai or any other northern city-state, were the many *nikai* of northern Thailand following the same organization. Each temple was relatively independent and autonomous. "Power to ordain monks and novices belonged to the senior monk in each temple and he in turn could pass this power on to one of his followers when he was near death."⁵⁰ Each *nikai* was loosely organized around district abbots who were able to attract young monks.

⁴⁶ A *nikai* is a religious order or lineage of monks following its own ordination tradition. Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism. A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 111. In contemporary Thailand there are two recognized *nikai* of Theravada Buddhist monks in the land, the *Mahanikai* and the *Thammayut nikai*.

⁴⁷ Veidlinger, *Spreading the Dhamma. Writing, Orality, and Textual transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand*; Paul T. Cohen, "Buddhism Unshackled: The Yuan 'Holy Man' Tradition and the Nation-State in the Tai World," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (2001): 227-47. Veidlinger's book is an analysis of the transmission of the *Dhamma* in Lan Na, where some *nikai* or groups of monks might have experienced rivalry with the coming of written texts. As Veidlinger explains, prior to the writing of manuscripts, monks would know parts of the *Tipitaka* by heart, having a full oral *Tipitaka* amongst many monks. The coming of writing in the 15th century might have lessened the importance of the oral *Tipitaka* and of the monks who knew them.

⁴⁸ Dodd, *The Tai Race: Elder Brother of the Chinese*. Though scholars favor the term *Yuan Buddhism*, using the term *Tam* script (*Dhamma* script) Buddhism might be more accurate, since it does not refer to any ethnicity and is a script that was used by different temple and *nikai*.

⁴⁹ Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 5, 303 note 12.

⁵⁰ Keyes, "Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand," 552.

Bangkok as a new center of Power

The Bangkok society that asserted its authority over Lan Na was a product of modernization. In the Ayutthaya period the social structure was based on 'bonds of personal subordination'. For example rice farmers were bond to the ruler of the local *muang*, junior noble to senior noble, tributary lord to king etc.⁵¹ The king and the high nobility accumulated prestige, money and resources mostly through trade and warfare. Towards the end of the Ayutthaya period however (second half of the 18th century CE), commerce was expanding, though it was still administered by the Thai aristocracy. When Ayutthaya was destroyed in 1767 and the capital was moved to Bangkok, the market economy continued to grow and gave rise to a new market society. This new market society grew parallel to the older and more rigid social hierarchy. Indeed central Thailand was still mostly based on a system of servitude within a rigid social hierarchy. However the new capital now also included a growing political administration, yet senior members of this administration were still recruited following the established social hierarchy. In the late 19th century and early 20th, Bangkok was mostly populated by Thai aristocrats, officials and bureaucrats. Nonetheless, in the 20th century, the market society continued to grow, and in combination with a stronger educational system, gave rise to a strong middle-class society. This middle-class society finds itself outside of the traditional social hierarchy.⁵² As will be explained in this section, the new administrative body of Bangkok had a tremendous social and cultural impact on northern Thailand.

As explained earlier, the first Thai king in Chiang Mai following the end of the Burmese suzerainty was King Kawila (r.1782-1816). At first, when Lan Na found itself under Siamese rule, Chiang Mai was able to regain some control over much of Lan Na's former territories and stay independent of Siam. However, an increasing involvement of Siam in Lan Na soon followed due in part to the threat of colonialism, both French and English.

⁵¹ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, second ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24

⁵² See page 79 of this dissertation.

Indeed, though King Kawila's new dynasty, the Chao Chet Ton clan, tried to re-establish Lan Na's former administrative and political independence, it was short lived. In the last quarter of the 19th century, Siam tried to impose a stronger control over what was now considered the northern region of Siam, instead of an independent territory. When communication with Bangkok took months (it took three months for missionary Sanel McGilvary to reach Chiang Mai by boat from Bangkok via the Ping river),⁵³ it is understandable that Bangkok would allow Lan Na *muang* certain liberties. As long as the 'new' northern regions were sending tributes and were defending the center/Bangkok against external threats, the *muang* were allowed their autonomies. Yet, following the conventional Thai historiography of Siam's modernization and involvement in the regions, the expansion of the British Empire in Burma and France in Laos, forced Siam to change its political leniency.⁵⁴ Britain and France were decisively greedy to acquire territories, especially for primary sources such as wood and salt, and simply took territories that were not 'formally' claimed [Fig. 6].⁵⁵

As noted earlier, Chiang Mai never had complete control over *muang* outside the Ping river region, which allowed the French to lay claim on the Nan river territories, even if it had previously accepted the region as being Siamese.⁵⁶ With

⁵³ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 149.

⁵⁴ Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for "Siwilai": A geographical Discourse of Civilizational thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th c. Siam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2000): 527-49; Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002); Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, Lan Na was not the only region experiencing the political pressure; Isaan (northeastern Thailand) also suffered from colonial encroachment by France and then experienced Siam's increasing control over its administration. The conventional Thai historiography sees the threat of colonialism as the driving force behind Siam's modernization and centralized administration. To see a different explanation for the monarchical modernization, see Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*; Peleggi, *Lords of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*. See Stengs for a relation between modernization, public relation and the cult of king Chulalongkorn. Irene Stengs, *Worshipping the Great Moderniser. King Chulalongkorn, Patron Saint of the Thai Middle Class* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009).

⁵⁵ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 175; Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, chapter 3.

⁵⁶ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 177. A treaty acknowledging the Nan riverbank territories to Siam was signed in 1893. France ignored their own treaty and took the territory between the Nan and Meakong rivers in 1903.

this, Lan Na and Siam lost their previous territories on the west bank of the Mekong River, which had previously been the formal separation between Nan (tributary to Chiang Mai) and Luang Prabang (capital of the independent kingdom of the same name). The same thing happened with Britain in the north.⁵⁷ For example, disregarding prior agreements between Burma and Siam,⁵⁸ the *muang* east of the middle of the Salween River (south of Chiang Tung) [Fig. 6] were taken by England because it ‘wanted’ them and therefore informed the Siamese foreign minister that it simply took the *muang*: “the queen’s government wanted to have these five territories under British control and therefore had already declared this to be the case.”⁵⁹

According to the Thai historical grand narrative, because of the pressure of imperialism, with France and Britain encroaching on Siamese territories for commercial gain (France wanting salt wells and Britain wanting logging territories), Siam was compelled to enforce control over its peripheral territories, which it was slowly yet systematically losing to imperial intrusion.⁶⁰ Pressed between two covetous imperial powers, Siam had to quickly change its management of peripheral territories, such as the Lan Na city-states. Indeed, the two imperial powers worked with strict political boundaries, while the regional powers were used to having centers of power with more or less effective spheres of powers and domination.⁶¹ Yet Thongchai Winichakul also claims that Siam’s modernization was also due to a desire by the Siamese elite to be part of a New World order. In the 19th century

⁵⁷ Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, 108; Chandra Jeshurun, “Anglo-French Declaration of January 1896 and the Independence of Siam,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 28, no. 2 (1970): 105-26. Yet, the relations between Siam and England were not the same as between Siam and France. Siam’s interest for a political alliance definitely inclined towards England rather than France and they even hoped that England would help ease the tension between France and Siam.

⁵⁸ Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 171. An agreement was reached in 1809 between Mueang Yang Daeng and Chiang Mai. All the *muang* east of the river were under Chiang Mai’s jurisdiction, while the western *muang* were under Mueang Yang Daeng of Burma.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 173.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 167-79.

⁶¹ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994a), 62-80.

[f]or a country to survive, it meant the ruler could maintain or enhance his superiority. Siam could not longer confirm its relative superiority and its meaningful existence by claiming the lineages to the traditional cosmic origins. In order to survive, not from colonialism but from indignity and inferior existence, and to remain majestic, Siam needed a confirmation according to the new ethos of civilization that it measured up to other leading countries.⁶²

Therefore, the quest for civilization and modernization, often called the neo-colonialism of Thailand, was not only an answer to the threat of colonialism, but also a dual quest for superiority; superiority or importance within the New World order, where the ‘civilized’ Europe was now the self-acknowledged center, but also a superiority within Thailand. This internal superiority was centered on the urban ‘civilized’ elite over the peripheral uneducated village or even worse, the uncivilized, wild forest inhabitants. Just as with colonial discourses, one’s position is often secured by an *Other* in a position of inferiority. As such, the local villagers, but also the rural elite had become the Siamese’s *Other*.⁶³

Whether Siam centralization around Bangkok was an answer to outside threats or a desire to gain world recognition (most likely it was both), the result is the same: Lan Na and the independent *mueang* would never be the same, with administrative constraints imposed by Bangkok, such as Siamese commissioners having jurisdiction and power of taxation in Lan Na, an imposition of central Thai language and the centralization of the *Sangha*.⁶⁴ In time, Lan Na nobles gave up their rights to taxes and *corvée* and accepted a small monthly allowance from

⁶² Winichakul, “The Quest for “Siwilai”: A geographical Discourse of Civilizational thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th c. Siam,” 534.

⁶³ Ibid; Thongchai Winichakul, “The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910,” in *Civility and Savagery. Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. Andrew Turton (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000). Yet the Thai villager was not the most ‘un-civilized’ in Thailand; the ‘wild’ hill tribes were. See also Ronald D. Renard, “The Differential Integration of Hill People into the Thai State,” in *Civility and Savagery. Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. Andrew Turton (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000).

⁶⁴ Reginald le May, *An Asian Arcady. The Land and Peoples of Northern Siam*, Third edition ed. (Bangkok: White Lotus Co, 1999), 37.

Bangkok.⁶⁵ Laws and regulation, the collection of taxes, the regulations of import/export, the supervision of land development etc. were now under the central government's control. Yet, Bangkok's administrative reach went beyond executive politic to encompass cultural changes as well, in the idiom of modernization.

Wanting to appear *siwilai* (civilized), Siam imposed dress codes, such as European hats and shirts for men, and gloves and blouses for women. It also emphasized the importance of cleanliness and the preference for white teeth, rendering the chewing of betel leaves uncivilized. Foreign etiquette was also imposed, such as having multiple dinner courses served with western cutlery and dinnerware.⁶⁶ Dress codes were not only limited to the everyday attire but also included western outfits for official positions. For example, judge would wear black robes with white collars (no wigs) and high members of the army and some administrators wore hats reminiscent of British colonial pith helmet.⁶⁷ The use and display of these western paraphernalia would separate the modern Siamese from the uncivilized *Other* or local villager. How an individual expresses oneself, including the origin of the artifact used to express one's identity is therefore important for a contemporary analysis of identity and artistic formation.

Sangha Reform

"The Siamese rulers' preoccupation with order, harmony, national unity, and modernization led them to believe that monks as well as lay people – regardless of their ethnic identities – should have a common religious outlook."⁶⁸

The centralization of power thus also included the centralization of the *Sangha*.⁶⁹ Though the first *Sangha* reform was promulgated in 1902, it was

⁶⁵ Bowie, "Peasant perspectives on the political economy of the northern Thai kingdom of Chiang Mai in the nineteenth century: implications for the understanding of peasant political expression," 6.

⁶⁶ Sulak Sivaraksa, "The Crisis of Siamese Identity," in *National Identity and Its Defenders, Thailand, 1939-1989*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds (Clayton, Vic.: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991), 49; Winichakul, "The Quest for "Siwilai": A geographical Discourse of Civilizational thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th c. Siam," 538.

⁶⁷ Wyatt, *Thailand, a Short History*, 191.

⁶⁸ Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*, 8.

implemented more strictly in the north only from 1910 onward, due in part to the difficulties for Bangkok monks to access the remote northern regions. The central *Sangha* had different strategies to gain control over the regions, including using the local *wat* as the center of their national integration. For example, all monks were to use the same texts, approved by the central *Sangha*.⁷⁰ They were also to use central language in their sermons, since using local Tai language was deemed improper. They were also forbidden to integrate local beliefs such as those of spirit cults in their Buddhist practices and teachings. To entice monks into accepting a centralized *Sangha*, Bangkok also offered rewards and titles to monks complying with the reform.⁷¹

Furthermore, the *Sangha* reform also forbade abbots to ordain new monks in their own traditions. Bangkok made sure that abbots would have to defer most of their powers of ordination to their superiors, who were Bangkok trained. “Before the imposition of this rule, local custom permitted monks who had been ordained for ten years to perform ordinations [...] Since 1902, only those abbots appointed as preceptors by Bangkok authorities have been allowed to perform ordinations.”⁷² This had a negative effect on the relation between villagers and local temples, as the latter were no longer the centers of religious ceremonies of the former. “Now ordainers had to meet educational standards and ordination sites needed royal approval.”⁷³

Furthermore, the centralized *Sangha* coming from Bangkok was adverse to manual labour; they believed that temples should receive gifts, money and have the lay community work and maintain the grounds and take care of its material aspects. As we have seen, Lan Na village monks were previously responsible for the

⁶⁹ Chamluang Wuttichan, “The Sangha Administration in Thailand” (Paper presented at the World Fellowship of Buddhist (13th: 1980: Chiang Mai).

⁷⁰ Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*, 8-9. Those texts were put together and printed by Wachirayan, abbot at Wat Bowonniwet in Bangkok. He was a half-brother to King Chulalongkorn.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 40.

⁷² *Ibid*, 41.

⁷³ Richard A. O’Connor, “Interpreting Thai Religious Change: Temples, Sangha Reform and Social Change,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 24, no. 2 (1993), 334.

maintenance of their own temples.⁷⁴ However, the new Bangkok *Sangha* thought that it was undignified for a monk to be working with his hands, so it prohibited manual labours within and outside the monastery.⁷⁵ Although the monks in Bangkok wanted to have temples and monasteries well maintained, they did not think that this burden should be the monks'; instead it should be the responsibility of the laity. While the monks in small villages were from the regions, the monks in Bangkok were from the aristocracy. Kamala explains that the "Buddhist tradition that originated in the Bangkok court strongly discouraged manual work."⁷⁶ In fact, monks were supposed to be dignified and clean like *jao* (เจ้า/lords) and not get dirty like commoners.⁷⁷

Merit-Making and the *Traiphum*

The *Sangha* reform was not only designed to control monks and local village temples, but was also implemented to gain "the loyalties of the populace."⁷⁸ Official texts from Bangkok also enforced a new social organization and division, based on Khmer ideas about cosmology.⁷⁹ Though this social organization was new in Lan Na, it followed an enduring Buddhist social hierarchy already in place during the time of the Buddha. This new social organization was bilateral, divided between laity and monks, with the king at its center.⁸⁰ The new hierarchy of Buddhism was paralleling the structure of the Thai government, from the king to the ordinary monk or villagers. Promoting merit-making also reinforced this 'new' cosmology, as it justified the social hierarchy.⁸¹ Although promoting merit-making was part of

⁷⁴ Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*, 23-26. Royal monasteries had temple slaves however and monks were not required to work manually. See Grabowsky, "Population and State in Lan Na prior to the mid-sixteenth century," 9-11 for a description of the different categories of slavery in northern Thailand prior to Siam's centralization.

⁷⁵ Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*, 24.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

⁷⁷ Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*, 23-24.

⁷⁸ Keyes, "Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand," 560.

⁷⁹ Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State*, 26.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 25-28. Ashoka the Great

⁸¹ Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*, 10; Karuna Kusalasaya, *Buddhism in Thailand, Its Past and Its Present* (Bangkok: Mental Health

Lan Na Buddhism, the social structure was previously not as regulated as with central Thai social hierarchy. Though merit-making was, and still is of course, a spiritual and moral gesture, it seems that it had less of a political dimension in Lan Na.

King Chulalongkorn initiated the first *Sangha* act in an effort to centralize, unify and standardize Buddhism in Thailand. He also tried to “reinterpret the Buddhist Dhamma (Teaching) in more modern, “rationalistic” terms”⁸² with, among other things, the creation of the *Thammayut nikai*, the second accepted lineage of monks in Thailand. He also made efforts towards a reevaluation of the world’s cosmology, which included a re-examination of the *Traiphum*.⁸³ Yet his effort to eradicate the ‘metaphysical’ within his understanding of the world order did not render the *Traiphum* obsolete.

The *Traiphum Phra Ruang* is believed to have been written in 1345 CE by Lithai, future king of the Sukhothai kingdom.⁸⁴ The *Traiphum*, meaning three worlds, describes the 31 different realms of rebirth of the Buddhist Universe. The concept of the ‘three worlds’ was not Lithai’s invention. Early canonical Theravada literature also accepted the three worlds as the world of desire, form and non-form. Nonetheless, according to Reynolds and Reynolds, the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*, is the “first truly complete presentation of the Theravāda cosmological perspective.”⁸⁵ Reynolds and Reynolds indicate that Lithai based his writings on a limited number

Publishing House, 2001); Stanley J. Tambiah, “Sangha and Polity in Modern Thailand: An Overview,” in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg: ANIMA books, 1978), 116-23. The Sangha act also paralleled the secular and religious hierarchy of society. The 1902 paralleled the monarchical hierarchy, as the absolute monarchy was still in place. In 1941 a secular government was in place and the organization was reorganized so a larger group of senior monks would have power. The Sangha was reorganized once again in 1962 and now only a circle of elder is in charge, with a Patriarch and four to eight members as a council, which, incidentally, gave more power to the Supreme Patriarch, who often was of the *Thammayut nikai* and had strong aristocratic connections.

⁸² Reynolds, “Sacral Kingship and National Development: The Case of Thailand,” 102.

⁸³ Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, 45-47. Thongchai gives the example of the 1868 full solar eclipse at Wako, where the king’s predictions, based on western science and on a Mon script rather than the texts used by the royal astrologers, were more accurate than that of the royal astrologers’.

⁸⁴ Lithai reigned between c.1346 and 1368/1374. Wyatt, *Thailand, a Short History*, 309.

⁸⁵ Frank E. Reynolds and Mani B. Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang. A Thai Buddhist Cosmology* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press/Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), 18.

of texts (scriptures, commentaries and treatises) that had been endorsed by Theravāda elders and had been transmitted to Sukhothai. Though we cannot be certain of the exact texts he used, cosmological concepts, such as the different heavens accessible either through meditative experience or in a future rebirth as a reward for great acts of merit, were already part of the early Theravadin before it reached Sukhothai. Indeed Mahāmoggalāna, one of the Buddha's disciples had acquired great supernatural powers, such as visiting different realms of existence, through meditation.⁸⁶

Though the exact texts Lithai used elude us, the Reynolds indicate that he probably had access to a variety of canonical texts that included cosmological elements, but he most likely had also access to specifically cosmological treatises.⁸⁷

Because of the inclusiveness of Phya Lithai's perspective, and the religious insight and skill that he used in weaving the various cosmological, cosmographic, and cosmogonic elements into a single literary work, the *Sermon on the Three Worlds* represents what is clearly the high point of Theravāda cosmological expression.⁸⁸

These 31 realms are divided into three worlds: the lowest being the World of Desire with 11 realms, then the World of Form with sixteen realms and the World of Non-Form with the last four and highest realms. According to its *kammic* merit or demerit, a being will be reborn in one of these three worlds' realms. Lithai's text is basically a description of these 31 realms. There is also a section dedicated to the *mahacakkavattiraja* or cosmic ruler and a section regarding *Nibbāna*, which is described as distinct from the three worlds.⁸⁹ Though undeniably religious in nature, the *Traiphum* is understood as being a royal text as well. First, it is still widely believed to have been written during what is considered the historical

⁸⁶ Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, 15-16.

⁸⁷ Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, 18.

⁸⁸ Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, 18-19.

⁸⁹ Jackson, "Re-Interpreting the Traiphuum Phra Ruang: Political Functions of Buddhist Symbolism in Contemporary Thailand," 64-100; Coedes and Archambault, *Les trois mondes (Traibhumi Brah Ruan)*; Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*.

golden age of the Thai nation, the Sukhothai period.⁹⁰ Second, it is “permeated with royal interests and themes.”⁹¹ For example, it presents the king as the central and highest being in the human world. The *Traiphum* is also part of Thai national identity since it is considered to be one of the most important historical texts written in Thai.⁹² Therefore though the text is primarily religious in nature, the text speaks strongly of a hierarchical social order.

Indeed, prior to the ‘modernization’ of Siam, Jackson informs us that the Thai kingdoms of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Bangkok were consciously using the *Traiphum* as their political and social structural models. “In these kingdoms the structure of the Buddhist cosmos, in particular, its hierarchical, merit-determined order, was reproduced at the level of human social and political organization.”⁹³ During the second half of the 19th century however new intellectual traditions based on empirical knowledge destabilized “traditional Buddhist metaphysics, including the cosmography described in the *Traiphum*.”⁹⁴ Yet the ethical aspects of the *Traiphum*, *kamma*, the act of merit-making and rebirth were still acknowledged as valid and having socio-political significance.⁹⁵ In other words, though the cosmological aspect of the *Traiphum* was questioned, its ethical teaching was upheld.

In 19th century and early 20th century Siam as well as in contemporary Thailand, the act and concept of merit-making is still closely related to power and social hierarchy. Indeed, even within modern Thailand, the political elite needs to patronize the *Sangha* to support and legitimize its political position.⁹⁶ Merit-making

⁹⁰ Wongthes, *Intellectual Might and National Myth. A Forensic Investigation of the Ram Khamhaeng Controversy in Thai Society*, 3.

⁹¹ Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang. A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*, 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹³ Jackson, “Re-Interpreting the *Traiphum* Phra Ruang: Political Functions of Buddhist Symbolism in Contemporary Thailand,” 72.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁹⁶ Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State*, 291. For a comprehensive analysis of merit making and the relation to Thai social hierarchy, see L.M. Hanks, Jr., “Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order,” *American Anthropologist* 64, no.6 (1962): 1247-61.

has therefore a direct political and social significance.⁹⁷ Even with the emerging of the Thai middle-class, which is outside the elite social strata, merit-making is used to balance and strengthen its increasing power. As Taylor explains, for the urban middle-class “merit-making [is] a means of converting this new-found wealth into status, with the king as matrix and traditional élite as ideal type and orthodoxy.”⁹⁸

It is important to note that this importance of hierarchy and merit-making associated with social hierarchy is given from an elite/centric perspective, both historical and contemporary. Indeed Bowie sees a difference between the act of merit at the village level and at the elite/central level. At the village level, she sees a strong interest in acts of merit that would benefit the community on an every day basis, rather than to benefit single individuals, including monks. At the village level, merit-making is not separated from the everyday life. For example, nearly half of the villagers she interviewed said that building lavish and expensive temples was unnecessary and that giving to schools and hospitals was an important act of merit, some even believed this was more important than to give to monks.⁹⁹ The majority of the villagers she interviewed did not believe that monks should only work at their personal salvation, but rather work “toward improving society.”¹⁰⁰

For Bangkok society, merit-making and wealth went hand-in-hand, while in the regions Lan Na and Isan, “Buddhist lay asceticism was of paramount importance.”¹⁰¹ Kamala gives the example of the *Kathin* ceremony, where lay people give robes to monks. In Bangkok, the ceremony has become a lavish display of wealth and rank, while in the north, “common people offered robes anonymously by

⁹⁷ Let us not forget however that the political aspect of merit-making does not negate the profound religious and moral aspect of merit-making for the general Thai population.

⁹⁸ Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State*, 282. See also Taylor’s work on post-modern Buddhism in Thailand. Taylor has studied contemporary religious movements and Buddhist sects in Thailand, including the *Dhammakaya* movement that approach merit making as “an investment that will pay dividends, either in wealth, beauty, career success, longevity, protection and the like.” Taylor claims that the *Dhammakaya* movement appeals to the urban middle-class as it approaches merit making with systematic capitalist interpretation. Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space*.

⁹⁹ Katherine A. Bowie, “The Alchemy of Charity: Of Class and Buddhism in Northern Thailand,” *American Anthropologist* vol.100, no.2 (1998), 471.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections. Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*.

leaving cloth near the monks' huts or walking routes."¹⁰² Bowie demonstrates that outside the official elite and urban middle class view of making merit, the importance of the *Traiphum* and social advancement are somewhat left behind; merit-making remains a spiritual and moral act that can help both individuals and the community as a whole. As will be explained in chapter 6, this resembles Somluk Pantiboon's view on merit-making and social relations at Wat Pa'O, while, as will be demonstrated in chapter 5, lavish displays of wealth and an emphasis on the *Traiphum* are present at Wat Rong Khun.

Ton Bun

In northern Thailand, there is a strong tradition of *Ton Bun* or Holy man.¹⁰³ These holy men are seen as charismatic monks, often having miraculous powers and, though practicing seclusion and meditation, are active in the community, including the construction of religious and lay buildings. Cohen associates the importance of *Ton Bun* in northern Thailand with the revivalism of Buddhism, a Buddhism that "transcends the sovereignty of the nation-state and proclaims the supremacy of Buddhist morality."¹⁰⁴ A good example of a modern charismatic *Ton Bun* would be Phra Khruba Siwichai¹⁰⁵ who, during the early 20th century, was against the centralization and domination of a central Bangkok *Sangha*.¹⁰⁶

As Cohen explains, this charismatic figure not only refused Bangkok's new authority, but also continued to act within the community even when the central Bangkok *Sangha* banned it. Following a more communal view on merit and social relations, Khruba Siwichai was responsible for numerous building constructions, including reliquaries. He rebuilt his hometown temple after he was appointed abbot. This project was the first, yet not the last of his career as a respected monk. As Cohen explains

¹⁰² Ibid, 39.

¹⁰³ A *Ton Bun* is a monk, no female *Ton Bun* therefore exist.

¹⁰⁴ Cohen, "Buddhism Unshackled: The Yuan 'Holy Man' Tradition and the Nation-State in the Tai World," 227.

¹⁰⁵ Keyes, "Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand," 553.

¹⁰⁶ Cohen, "Buddhism Unshackled: The Yuan 'Holy Man' Tradition and the Nation-State in the Tai World," 228.

[o]ver a period of more than 30 years *Khruba* Siwichai was responsible for more than a hundred constructions; these were mostly religious though some were non-religious ones of public benefit including roads[...]. These construction activities were usually followed by a festival (*poi luang*) and the preaching of a sermon (*thet tham*) that marked their importance both as a form of merit-making and as a communal endeavour.¹⁰⁷

In northern Thailand, *Khruba* Siwichai is remembered as a monk who stood against the *Sangha*'s centralization around Bangkok and worked amongst the people instead of working solitarily towards his own enlightenment. This social emphasis on merit-making is also paralleled at Wat Pa'O. Yet, as will be explained, I believe that Chalermchai Kositpipat also draws on the importance of the *Ton Bun* in northern Thailand.

Since 1997. Financial, political and social crises in Thailand

This next section will briefly summarize the political and social conflicts at play in Thailand over the last thirteen years. It is not intended as a comment on the political situation, but attempts to expose some of the tensions of the political, social and cultural discourses currently at play. Much of the discourse on localism is colored by utopia and romantic beliefs of the past, leading to serious and well-founded apprehensions regarding its potential application. On the other hand, other discourses of the local border on disdain, showing the rural community as backward, centered on the past and averse to modernization. Both of these discourses are based on ideologies and conceal the complexity of the current situation. These discourses are produced from a center and do not represent what is currently at play in village communities. These discourses will serve as comparative material for the two case studies. I argue that these two types of discourses are expressed from external positioning and are therefore lacking in some degree of relevance and applicability. In chapter 6 I propose a third approach, where community and social relations at the community level are analyzed from a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

local perspective and will show that utopia and a romanticism of the past is not part of Wat Pa'O's foundation.

Thailand's current political and social situation is strenuous. Indeed in December 2008, yellow shirts¹⁰⁸ protested against the then leading political party, the PPP (Power People's Party); then through the months of March through May 2010, the red shirts¹⁰⁹ protested against the then leading political party, the Democrats. Though these events took place in the first decade of the 21st century, the financial crisis of 1997 served as a political and social catalyst, leading to the current political situation, as well as the strengthening of the ideologies currently at play. To understand the current social and political crisis, we therefore need to look at the 1997 financial debacle and its social and political implications.

As explained earlier, in the 19th century, the cultural elite gained recognition within the New World by using modernization. In the 20th century elite and middle class gained international recognition with the globalization of the market. Then as now, the local village was left outside the social, financial and cultural discourses on modernism; it was a *memento* used as a reference when needed as part of the national identity formation.¹¹⁰ The industrial transformations of Thailand over the last decades led to the country's important economic growth. As Hewinson explains Thailand's economy had been steadily growing for the last 40 years prior to the financial debacle, with the last decade 1987-1997, characterized as an economic boom, "with Thailand achieving some of the highest growth rates in the world".¹¹¹ The distribution of wealth and industrialization was uneven, yet it had a profound impact on Thailand's ecological and social landscape.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Also known as the PAD or People's Alliance of Democracy.

¹⁰⁹ The Red shirts are also known as the UDD, or United front for Democracy against Dictatorship.

¹¹⁰ Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space*, 12-13.

¹¹¹ Hewison, "Localism in Thailand: A study of globalisation and its discontents," 6; Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand's Crisis*, 1-3. Thailand's economical boom was largely due to foreign investments, especially East Asian investors reassured by a fixed exchange rate.

¹¹² Hewison, "Localism in Thailand: A study of globalisation and its discontents," 6; Connors, "Democracy and the Mainstreaming of Localism in Thailand," 262; Suthy Prasartset, *Democratic Alternatives to Maldevelopment: The Case of Thailand* (Yokohama: International Peace Research

The economic boom did not last however, and like a bubble, it burst, leading the way to a deep recession.¹¹³ In 1998, unemployment was the highest ever recorded – two million – and the poor saw their incomes reduced by up to 25%, while the cost of living increased by 40%.¹¹⁴ For Pasuk and Baker the financial crisis led to a profound reevaluation of the national identity of a magnitude unheard of since the threat of colonialism.¹¹⁵ A major questioning of Thai values and Thai identities unfolded. On his birthday, on December 4th 1997, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej gave a now famous speech to the Thai population regarding the financial crash and local production.

Being a tiger is not important. What is important is to have enough to eat and to live; and to have an economy which provides enough to eat and live. Having enough to eat and to live means supporting oneself to have enough for oneself [...] I have said before that this sufficiency does not mean that each household has to produce its own food, weave its own cloth. That is too much. But within a village or district, there must be a certain amount of self-sufficiency. Anything which can be produced beyond local need can be sold, but maybe not sold too far away, to minimize transport costs[...] If we can change back to a self-sufficient economy, not completely, even not as much as half, perhaps just a quarter, we can survive[...] But people who like the modern economy may not agree. It's like walking backwards into a *khlong*. We have to live carefully and we have to go back to do things which are not complicated and which do not use elaborate, expensive equipment. We need to

Institute Meigaku (prime), Meigaku University, 1991), 6-8; Susan M. Darlington, "The ordination of a tree: The Buddhist ecology movement in Thailand," *Ethnology* 37, no. 1 (1998), 2. The pre-1997 economical growth in Bangkok accounted for 50% of the national GDP, while only 10% of the population resides in the capital. Furthermore, while households' income increased in Bangkok as well as in the countryside, the household expenditure also increased, yet it increased disproportionately in the countryside, where most households found themselves in deficit, even with an increase of income. Also, in the 1960's 80% of the population was employed in the agricultural sector; in 1997, this number had dropped to 48%. Manufactured good represented only 1% of Thailand's overall exports, while it represented 80% of the exports in the mid-1990's. People working in the agronomy industry were left out of the economical 'renewal', yet were suffering the ecological changes. In 1913, 75% of the country was covered by forest; in 1961 (when significant economical development began in Thailand) 53% of the country was covered by forest; while in 1986, only 25% of the country was forest. In the mid-1990, NGOs estimated that only 15% of the country was now covered by forest.

¹¹³ Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand's Crisis*, 1-13.

¹¹⁴ Hewison, "Localism in Thailand: A study of globalisation and its discontents," 7.

¹¹⁵ Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand's Crisis*, 177-79.

move backwards in order to move forwards. If we don't act like this, the solution to this crisis will be difficult.¹¹⁶

This royal speech had a profound impact on the Thai population and it quickly led to a reevaluation of personal relations and positions within the economic structure. This next section will look at the discourses on localism after the financial crash.

Utopia, from the center

When facing an external threat such as colonialism or financial difficulties, the memory of the 'margin' or the local often becomes a seed for the burgeoning of nostalgia. In his study on Buddhism in a post-modern Thailand, Taylor speaks of the nostalgia of locality as a consequence of globalization with "certain kind of religious imagining where the divergence between reality and representation is hierarchical and unequivocal."¹¹⁷ Taylor speaks of a nostalgia experienced by displaced northern Thais who now live and work in Bangkok, and who are 'holding-on' and fetishizing paraphernalia brought from the northern home.¹¹⁸ After the 1997 crisis,

¹¹⁶ H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 4 December 1997, taken from Ibid, 193. See also Porphant Ouyyanont, "The Crown Property Bureau in Thailand and the Crisis of 1997," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008): 166-89; Michael K. Connors and Kevin Hewinson, "Introduction: Thailand and the 'good coup'," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008): 1-10; Tatiana Serafin, "The World's Richest Royals," <http://www.forbes.com/2009/06/17/monarchs-wealth-scandal-business-billionaires-richest-royals.html> (accessed August 19th, 2009). As some have noted, it is interesting that the King's discourse called for a 'return' to an inward looking economy and having enough to eat (which is akin to survival), while the CPB's (Crown Property Bureau) fortune was estimated at 41 billion USD by Porphant Ouyyanont in 2007 and more conservatively at 36 billion by Forbes Magazine (2008). In June 2009, the *Forbes* magazine unveiled his "World's richest royals", where King Rama IX still leads, with 30 billion USD. In other words, though there seems to be a few billion dollars differences between the publications and the years, the Thai king is still the richest royal and in fact one of the richest person in the world. The CPB's investments are with some of the largest companies in Thailand, including insurance and development companies. In other words, there are no doubts that the CPB follows aggressive capitalist strategies. It is important to note however that the CPB is not the king's personal money; the CPB's fortune is an institutional wealth (royalty being the institution).

¹¹⁷ Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space*, 200-01.

¹¹⁸ May Adahol Ingawanji, "The Rural as Modern Thai Cinema's Pastoral," in *Representing the Rural. Space, Place, and Identity in Films about the Land*, ed. Catherine Fowler and Gilian Hetfield (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 85,90. May Adahol Ingawanji also sees an emergence of post-1997 cinema, characterized by Pen-ek Ratanaruang's movies, such as *Fun Bar Karaoke* and *Mon-rak Transistor*. Although movie plots had often used the juxtaposition of

an increased desire for ‘country things’ was palpable in the urban metropolis, a ‘nostalgia’ for a lost golden age, experienced by displaced people from the countryside now living in the capital.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, during the recession that followed the 1997 financial crash, many saw localism as an answer to the much-damaged national pride. Connors explains that “the ascendancy of localism may partly be understood as a kind of psychological healing for people ‘in denial’ of their national failing”.¹²⁰

Before the 1932 coup that put an end to the absolute monarchy, the countryside’s well being was associated with the monarchy. To criticize the former, was to criticize the latter. Indeed, under the threat of colonialism and as a way to assert their legitimacy, the monarchy and the central power looked back at history (or fabricated history)¹²¹ to validate their expending powers in the regions and to legitimate their control.¹²² Indeed the golden age of Thailand is seen as being Sukhothai, partly due to the inscription I, allegedly found by King Mongkut at Wat Mahathat while he was a monk in residence. If genuine, the stele might date to the late 13th century. However, the stele is highly controversial, as its authenticity has now been questioned. Though many historians still believe the stele to be partly or fully authentic – that is written during the second half of the 13th century CE – some now believe it to have been written entirely during Mongkrut’s time. The debate is

the countryside and the city, it often was, especially in the 1980’s, portraying a disconnected relation with the rural and the urban, and “concerned with establishing sympathetic auto-ethnographic observations about the socially insignificant”. In Pen-ek’s movies, the rural life retains ‘charms of pastness’ yet it is also shown as having been permeated by capitalism and rural populations are shown as ‘subordinated consumers’. The countryside in Pen-ek’s movie *Mon-rak Transistor* furthers the threat and instability of the post-1997 era, by showing an affected countryside. It leaves the viewer destabilized because it negates the acknowledged local/urban dichotomy and pastoral idealization of the periphery. As May explains, it leaves the viewer with a sense of ‘unfinished business,’ which is concurrent with the unfinished political unrest of a post-1997 Thailand, culminating in the 2008 protests and 2010 riots.

¹¹⁹ Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space*, 10.

¹²⁰ Connors, “Democracy and the Mainstreaming of Localism in Thailand,” 265.

¹²¹ See Wongthes, *Intellectual Might and National Myth. A Forensic Investigation of the Ram Khamhaeng Controversy in Thai Society*,; James R Chamberlain, ed. *The Ram Khamhaeng controversy: collected papers* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1991).

¹²² Bowie, “Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand,” 797-823.

more than a simple question of authenticity, but a question of nationalism. This dialectic of the bountiful country, indeed a pastoral utopia under a just ruler, can be found on the *Ramkhamheang's* stele but also in the *Traiphum*,¹²³ two important markers of Thai national identity formation. This iconography of the king working for the idyllic countryside is still evident in Thailand today.¹²⁴ Indeed, the royal family, especially the king, is seen as having a strong relationship with the countryside, helping with different projects for the good of the people.¹²⁵ As Taylor explains, “[t]he current monarchy has become re-sacralized precisely because of its devotion to local traditions.”¹²⁶

The fall of the absolute monarchy did not change this idyllic representation of the countryside; it remained an important part of Thai identity formation. However, the prosperity of the nation, including the rural community, was now dependent on the city-center.¹²⁷ After the 1997 financial debacle, as happened in the 19th century, localism again became a force against foreign domination; then colonialism, now globalization, which was believed to have led to the 1997 financial crash. In the 19th century and prior to the financial crisis, rural life was still part of the national identity formation, yet it was seen as the backbone of Thailand, while the urban center was the leading head towards modernism.¹²⁸ The ‘nation’ needed

¹²³ Wongthes, *Intellectual Might and National Myth. A Forensic Investigation of the Ram Khamhaeng Controversy in Thai Society*, 3-4. Interestingly, both are now suspicious and are believed by some to have been ‘created’ in later times. The *Traiphum* might be from the late Ayutthaya or early Bangkok period, while the inscription I, as explained in the previous notice, might be an early 19th century work.

¹²⁴ Bowie, “Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand,” 797-823.

¹²⁵ Any cinemagoer in Thailand will have a blatant reminder of this image. Indeed before a movie is presented, there is a short presentation with a song, “We love the King”, where we can see the King of Thailand in the countryside, wearing rubber boots in rice fields and other rural settings, where he works to improve the life of rural folks who are showing gratitude and respect to His Majesty.

¹²⁶ Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space*, 13.

¹²⁷ Bowie, “Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand,” 801; Anuman Rajadon, *Life and ritual in old Siam: Three Studies of Thai Life and Customs* (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1961), 47.

¹²⁸ Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space*, 12.

to be strong and unified, so the local regions could stay intact and unchanging. Yet after the financial crash, the leading head had been cut-off, or was at least suffering from a major migraine, leaving only the backbone of the nation, the rural life, to support its national pride. Therefore, one of the early consequences of the financial crash was a resurgence of national interest in the rural life.

Indeed in the immediate post-1997 discourses, the local community was presented as a moral (personal) and ethical (social construct) starting point for the much-needed elaboration of a different financial plan of recovery for the nation. The local community became an ethical and moral construct much the same way 'nature' or the 'state of nature' is pinned against culture or society.¹²⁹ The type of discourse that emerged immediately after the 1997 crisis was primarily based on an assumed abundance of the past and the perceived degenerative exploitation of rural life by modern industries and globalization. As Hewison shows, the discourse was strong in its utopian revivalism, where self-sufficient economy would lead to "peace and happiness"¹³⁰ and problems of "migrant labour, ... crime, narcotics and gambling ... [will] become less severe."¹³¹ Yet, as Bowie has shown, self-sufficiency never existed in historical Lan Na; the idealization, or even romance of the rural life was a product of an elite propaganda.¹³² The post-1997 local community discourse failed to dissociate itself from a 'moral construction', giving strength to the urban protesters who saw 'localism' as a veil woven through idealism hiding a corrupt local political structure.

Less than utopia, the post-Thaksin crisis

Compared with most of their neighbors the Thai people seem to have a strong and clear picture of what is needed to be a Thai, a perception maintained in popular culture and religious activities and passed on through the values

¹²⁹ Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand's Crisis*, 214; Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space*, 9.

¹³⁰ Hewison, "Localism in Thailand: A study of globalisation and its discontents," 13.

¹³¹ Kitahara quoted in *Ibid.*

¹³² Bowie, "Peasant perspectives on the political economy of the northern Thai kingdom of Chiang Mai in the nineteenth century: implications for the understanding of peasant political expression," ; Bowie, "Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand," 797-823.

and standards of parental and formal education. This fact is usually attributed to Thailand's relative ethnic homogeneity and the country's 'escape' from colonial subjugation. It is further related to a high identification with a specific cultural and traditional heritage, which is supported and strengthened by the ruling elite, whether it be the monarchy, the military or the business sector.¹³³

The current political situation is unstable to say the least,¹³⁴ with growing divisions of the population, not only between the yellow and red shirts, but also on an everyday basis in the Thai media, where the gap between Thai urban middle-class and the countryside is always present. With the current political and social situations, idealization of the countryside through nostalgia only went so far.

The situation in Thailand in the spring of 2010 was extremely volatile. In March 2010, tens of thousands of red shirts went to Bangkok and camped on *Ratchadamnoen Kland* road around the Democracy Monument [Fig. 7]. In May 2010 the situation escalated and there were violent altercations between the protesters and the army. The red shirts were protesting against the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva who *de facto* became Prime Minister in December 2008 after the dissolution of the PPP, the party in power since the general election of December 2007. The PPP was dissolved in 2008 after the yellow shirts effectively blocked both *Suvharnabhumi* and *Don Muang* airports. The yellow shirts were then protesting against the PPP, a party associated with the now defunct Thaksin

¹³³ Hans-Dieter Bechstedt, "Identity and Authority in Thailand," in *National Identity and its Defenders. Thailand, 1939-1989*, Monash papers on Southeast Asia, no.25 (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1991), 294.

¹³⁴ It is true that Thai politics have a long-standing history of 'instability'. Thai politics since the end of the absolute monarchy has oscillated between periods of autocratic regimes and democratic political institutions. However I believe the post-1997 political and social situation is somewhat different from previous political conflicts due to the unprecedented extensive popular involvement. See James Ockey, "Change and Continuity in the Thai Political Party System," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 4 (2003): 663-80; Robert B. Albritton, "Political Parties and elections in Thailand in an era of globalization: no longer a semi-democracy" (Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 6th international conference on Thai studies Theme I. Globalization: impact on and coping strategies in Thai society, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1996); David Morell and Chaianan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution* (Cambridge: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1981).

Sinawatra's TRT [Thai Rak Thai/Thai Love Thai] party.¹³⁵ Indeed the yellow shirts saw the PPP as being too close to Thaksin, who was then living in exile. Thaksin was deposed in 2006, after the 2005 election where he was elected for a second term. In 2006, the yellow shirts were protesting against Thaksin's government due in part to Thaksin's then alleged corruption.¹³⁶ He was first elected as Prime Minister in 2001 as the public distrust of the Democrat Party increased. Indeed the Democratic Party was in power in 1997 when the financial crisis happened. They further antagonized the popular vote during the aftermath recession due in part to their support of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) plan of recovery.¹³⁷ As Pasuk and Baker explain, in 1998 the rural level of distrust of the Democratic Party, which was embracing the IMF's proposed changes, grew to unprecedented levels in Thailand and numerous protests and marches were organized.¹³⁸ This led the way for the TRT party to emerge victorious in the 2001 election. Thaksin's TRT Party's first agenda was to help small and medium businesses to reemerge from the remnants of the 1997 economic crisis; yet he also had an electoral platform focused on the countryside, with low-cost health care (30 *baht*¹³⁹ per visit) and agrarian debt relief, where farmers with debts would receive direct financial help.¹⁴⁰ Some scholars as well as cultural and economic analysts saw Thaksin's policy as the first to actually apply

¹³⁵ When the TRT party was banned, some of its members regrouped and formed the PPP party.

¹³⁶ Thaksin has now been accused of corruption in February 26th 2010 by Thailand's Supreme Court. *Bangkok Post* Daily News Editorial (2010). See also, "Judgement Day: Aftermath," <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/thaksin-judgement-day/timeline.html> (accessed June 4th, 2010); A Hicken, "Party fabrication: Constitutional reform and the rise of Thai Rak Thai," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6, no. 3 (2006), 382, 396-97; Ukrist Pathmanand, "A different coup d'état?," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008), 124.

¹³⁷ Duncan McCargo, "Thailand's January 2001 General Elections: Vindicating Reform?," in *Reforming Thai Politics*, ed. Duncan McCargo (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2002), 247; Hewison, "Localism in Thailand: A study of globalisation and its discontents," 9. The IMF response to the financial crisis was to increase foreign investments, increase financial liberalism and economical openness. People believed that many Thai enterprises would end-up in the hands of foreigners. In other words, IMF's answer seemed to ask for 'more of the same' of what seemed to have led to the problem.

¹³⁸ Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand's Crisis*, 143-48.

¹³⁹ As of May 31, 2010, the exchange rate between the CAD\$ and the Thai *Baht*, is 1CAD = 31.23 *Baht*.

¹⁴⁰ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, "Taksin's populism," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008), 72.

real concrete measures, leading to significant effects for the rural population.¹⁴¹ And indeed, Thaksin was re-elected in 2005 mostly due to the regional electoral vote from northern and northeastern Thailand.¹⁴²

Although he still maintained a strong electoral vote in the countryside in 2005, the urban elite, the military and other circles including royalists, were growing discontented due mostly to alleged corruption within Thaksin's government.¹⁴³ A coup was staged in 2006 and the TRT was dissolved.¹⁴⁴ One of the reasons why the military junta gave for the 2006 coup was that Thaksin had "caused an unprecedented rift in society", in other words, the established social order was disturbed.¹⁴⁵ With the 2006 coup and 2008 political dissolution of the PPP party, the regional communities were again seen as the *Other*. While in the 19th century they were seen the uncivilized Thai while in a post Thaksin era they are presented as backward, uneducated and easily bought by politicians.¹⁴⁶

The 2008 special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, dedicated solely to the 2006 coup shows how intricate the *coup d'état* was, with different players ranging from the urban middle class, to the monarchy, to the military and provincial politicians etc. Though I do not want to argue with the intricacy of the political coup

¹⁴¹ Ibid.; Connors, "Democracy and the Mainstreaming of Localism in Thailand," 259-86.

¹⁴² Somchai Phatharathananunth, "The Thai Rak Thai party and elections in North-eastern Thailand," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008): 106-23.

¹⁴³ Pathmanand, "A different coup d'état?," 1240142; Michael K. Connors, "Article of faith: The failure of royal liberalism in Thailand," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008): 37-41; Kevin Hewison, "A Book, the King and the 2006 Coup," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008): 190-211; Oliver Pye and Wolfram Schaffar, "The 2006 anti-Taksin movement in Thailand: An analysis," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008): 38-61; Phongpaichit and Baker, "Taksin's populism," 62-83.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 72; Pye and Schaffar, "The 2006 anti-Taksin movement in Thailand: An analysis," 38-61. For an analysis of the 2006 coup, see the 2008 special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. Recent works have shown that the rise and fall of Thaksin in Thailand is complex and cannot be fully explained using a simple urban/local axis. For example, his strict 'war on drug' (strict to the point of abuse) was not well received in Thailand, a country otherwise pride of its action against drug traffic. However, Thaksin has reemerged on the political front at red-shirts rallies (always on screens, as he is still in exile) that are against the current government (2009 and 2010) under Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva.

¹⁴⁵ Phongpaichit and Baker, "Taksin's populism," 62.

¹⁴⁶ Thanong Khanthong, "Who's who among the reds," *The Nation Opinion* (2010); Connors and Hewinson, "Introduction: Thailand and the 'good coup'," 4; Andrew Walker, "The rural constitution and the everyday politics of election in Northern Thailand," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008): 84-105.

or the current situation, on the contrary, I want to indicate that though the political situation was, and still is complicated, media coverage and the popular response is relatively centered on one aspect: the division of the rural versus the urban. During the 2008 yellow shirt protests, Sondhi Limthongkul, leader of the PAD (People's Alliance for Democracy), said that democracy was not possible in Thailand because "most people outside the middle class lack sufficient knowledge to understand how power can be abused."¹⁴⁷ The only way democracy could still be possible in Thailand is if rural communities are educated about democracy and how one should properly vote. He envisaged a 'pro-democracy' policy that would surely educate the rural poor by leadership, exemplified by disinterested democratic values, by sending "politically aware urbanites" into the countryside,¹⁴⁸ especially in northern Thailand, where the villagers were 'kind-hearted' yet 'soft-headed'.¹⁴⁹ This type of rhetoric is alarmingly close to colonialist discourses of the 19th century.¹⁵⁰ In his work on new-geography, Lefebvre says that even within a global market, where the boundaries between urban and regions become blurred, the division still exists, mainly because of the division of labor and in a certain way, imagined hierarchy. The separation and almost incompatibility of the two is "played out everyday in the Thai media, education, economy, and politics, so that Thais are always aware of these spatial differences."¹⁵¹

Therefore, following the 1997 financial debacle, the regions became simultaneously centers of morality, imagined modern embodiment of an idealized past, and centers of political corruption due to local communities' lack of education regarding politics. Of course the current political and social situation cannot be explained solely with this simplified dichotomy. Yet, as Connors explains, it is this

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Walker, "Charles Keyes on Sondhi Limthongkul," <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/rmap/newmandala/2006/11/17/charles-keyes-on-sondhi-limthongkul/> (accessed Sept 1st, 2009).

¹⁴⁸ Walker, "The rural constitution and the everyday politics of election in Northern Thailand," 85.

¹⁴⁹ Andrew Walker, "What about Some Political Education for the Elite?," *New Mandala*). This type of rhetoric is still present in Thailand, see Khanthong, "Who's who among the reds,"

¹⁵⁰ See note 30 of this chapter.

¹⁵¹ Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand. The Religiosity of Urban Space*, 9.

dichotomy that is ever present in the media coverage and political façade. Yet these two positions are usually taken from an outsider's perspective. They do not generally represent the positioning experienced at the community level.¹⁵² By focusing on two contemporary northern temples, this dissertation sheds new light on this complicated matter.

Summary

The first section of this chapter began with the study of historical Lan Na, with a comparative emphasis on the royal elite, Yuan Buddhism and the general population of Lan Na. Regional and even local studies are changing and if we want to look beyond the official history, we need to look at history from the perspective of the non-elite population. Yet what is perceived as being Lan Na history is important, as it can affect how people forge their identities, taking elements from what is accepted as being part of Lan Na visual culture. However, as was explained in this first section, though Lan Na Chiang Mai did exist, it is difficult to see Lan Na as a politically, socially and culturally unified entity. This is important to establish for the analysis of the two architectural case studies to follow. Indeed as will be explained the two artists responsible for the construction of the temples focus on different aspects of the Lan Na identity.

The second section discussed Siam's modernization and how it affected the local communities in Lan Na, now northern Thailand, with an emphasis on the first *Sangha* reform of 1902. This section highlighted the importance of merit-making and social hierarchy from a central perspective. This analysis is important to our study of the White Temple. Indeed as will be explained Wat Rong Khun's artistic program focuses on merit-making and social hierarchy.

The last section emphasized the current localist discourses in Thailand, emphasizing the alternating discourses regarding local communities as either embodiment of 'true' national expression and moral superiority or as backward, wrongly idealized locals of political corruption. The study of the two case studies

¹⁵² Walker's study of northern politics is an interesting exception, as he unravels the political rhetoric from a regional northern perspective. Walker, "The rural constitution and the everyday politics of election in Northern Thailand," 84-105.

will illuminate the inadequacies of both discourses to reveal a third one: the process of localization coming from the periphery rather than a national center. This process is important for our analysis of Wat Pa'O and Somluk's interest in social relations at a community level.

Chapter 4 Buddhist monastic architecture

To highlight the continuities and changes made by the two artists in the conceptions, designs and artistic programs of the two temples which are the focus of this dissertation, the historical development and characteristics of local Buddhist architecture need to be introduced. This chapter will focus on the Lan Na monastery, its traditional forms and usage, bringing comparison and parallels with historical monastic monuments in central Thailand to explain and analyze the similarities, differences and changes in architectural traditions. These traditional forms will then be used as comparative material for the two contemporary temples analyzed in the next chapters.

In contemporary Thailand and historical Lan Na, a Buddhist monastery or *wat* (วัด)¹ is usually defined by five main monuments, the *stupa* (or *chedi*/เจดีย์ in Thai and *thaat* in northern Thai language), the hall of images or *vihara* (วิหาร), the hall for ceremonies or *ubosot* (อุโบสถ), the monks' quarter or *kuti* (กุฏิ), and a place for sermons or *sala kanparien* (ศาลากานเปரியญ). Though Lan Na monasteries have five main buildings or constructions, each can be categorized within the first three building 'types' of early Indian Buddhism, the *vihara*, the *chaitya* and the *stupa*.² As will be explained however, though the functions of Lan Na monastic buildings can still be associated with the early three building types in India, their nomenclatures have not followed their functions. The early Indian monasteries and the contemporary Thai monasteries also diverge in their spatial and functional divisions. Indeed the three early Indian monastic monuments, the *stupa*, the *vihara* and the *chaitya*, are respectively constructed, generally speaking, for sacred relics or memorabilia, for the monks and for the general population.

¹ Daigoto Chihara, *Hindu-Buddhist Architecture in Southeast Asia*, trans. Rolf W. Giebel (Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1996), 41. The term 'wat' is from the Pali 'vatthu', meaning plot or land.

² The three early monuments defining the Buddhist monasteries, the *vihara*, the *chaitya* and the *stupa* date back to the reign of King Asoka the Great (r. 268-232 BCE). Charles Prebish and Damien Keown, *Buddhism the eBook, an online introduction* (Journal of Buddhist Ethics Online Books, 2005), 128; Partha Mitter, *Indian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18.

The Three early Indian Buddhist monuments

Caitya-gr̥ha

The *chaitya*, *caitya* or *chaitya-gr̥ha* is the least specific of the three early monuments. It is understood as a general meeting place, a grove, a cave etc. In early Buddhist architecture of India, it refers to a relatively large structure housing an object of veneration, such as the statue of the Buddha or a small *stupa*. So the *caitya* is therefore accepted as a shrine.³ Generally speaking, contrary to the *stupa* – which will be studied later – the interior of the *caitya* is accessible to the worshipers. The *caitya* can be a freestanding structure such as a great hall, but it can also be a cave that humans have decorated and adapted to receive the statue of a god as well as worshipers. The Buddhist *caitya* also refers to a multifunctional Buddhist gathering place. This place could accommodate large congregations who went to a monastery to donate to the monks and gain merit. It was often a pilgrimage site for both monks and laity. The term *caitya* is therefore relatively non-specific, a structure with an interior or accessible space, which might hold sacred objects.⁴ A good example of this type of architectural monument would be the early *chaitya* caves at Bhaja, Maharashtra, India.

Vihāra

Vihāra (both in Sanskrit and Pali) means ‘place to pass time’⁵ and first designated a gathering place for wandering monks during the rainy season. Indeed, before the founding of large monasteries, renunciates wandered around the countryside except during the rainy season when they would gather in small clusters, when moving around was more difficult due to heavy rain and unsafe grounds. Even today, Thai

³ Chihara, *Hindu-Buddhist Architecture in Southeast Asia*, 39.

⁴ Ibid; Giuseppe Tucci, *Stupa. Art, Architectonics and symbolism* (New Delhi: Rakesh Goel, 1988); André Bareau, “La construction et le culte des stupa d’après les Vinayapitaka,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 50, no. 2 (1962), 240. Some authors use the term *caitya* to refer to the *stupa*, though it is not a common practice. However, Chihara sees the *stupa* as a possible *caitya*, even though its ‘interior’ space was not accessible to the community, because it can also be an object of worship. Indeed, Chihara uses interchangeably the housing structure and the ‘housed’ object of worship. Therefore, for Chihara, the *stupa*, as well as the *vihara*, can be included in the category of the *caitya*.

⁵ Chihara, *Hindu-Buddhist Architecture in Southeast Asia*, 34.

monks are forbidden to travel during the rainy season and are therefore confined to their monasteries. The original *vihāra* stood for the cluster of huts used by monks when their wanderings were at a stand still.⁶ As monasteries became more important, the term *vihara* was then used to designate the whole of the monastery. For example, the *Mahāvihara* (*mahā* meaning Great in Pali) was for a long time the monastic centre of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, from where the religion is said to have traveled north to mainland Southeast Asia.⁷ Therefore, and in general terms, the *chaitya* in South Asia was built for the lay congregation, while the *vihāra* was built for the monks. Good examples of early *vihara* are also found at the bhaja caves mentioned earlier.

Stupa and Chedi

Though it probably is the most recognizable Buddhist architectural monument, the *stupa* is not Buddhist in origin; it follows thousands of years old traditions of funerary monuments and grave markers. Indeed, tumuli or burial mounds were a common practice in India and in many parts of the world, without any connections to Vedic religions. The Sanskrit term *stupa* derives from the root ‘stup’ meaning ‘to collect’ or ‘to gather.’ Bénisti therefore defines the term *stupa* as a heap, mound or pile.⁸ Furthermore, Fussmann explains that the *stupa* is not a tomb, but rather a marker, a cenotaph or a memorial.⁹ In other words, a *stupa* is a form carrying a meaning more than a form ‘containing’ a meaningful object, though in practice both often coalesce.

Though relatively simple in form, the *stupa* hides a rich symbolism, as well as a complex terminology. It is also the symbolic and religious focus of early Indian and Sri Lankan monasteries. Due to its symbolic and historical importance, the *stupa* can be found in connection to Buddhism in all regions where the religion flourished, such as Sri Lanka with the *dagaba*, Myanmar and the *zedi*, Thailand with

⁶ Prebish and Keown, *Buddhism the eBook, an online introduction*, 116.

⁷ Ibid, 214.

⁸ Mireille Bénisti, “Étude sur le stupa dans l’Inde ancienne,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 50, no. 1 (1960), 47.

⁹ Gerard Fussman, “Symbolisms of the Buddhist Stupa,” *Journal of International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 2 (1986), 44-45.

the *chedi*, Japan with the *sotoba* and Lan Na with the *thaat*. The *stupa* has therefore experienced numerous regional developments, so much so that the physicality of the *stupa* as well as the different terms to identify the *stupa* itself, its different parts and even some of its symbolism, may vary greatly. Furthermore, as Tucci says in his study on the symbolism of the *stupa* (he uses the term *caitya*), it would be presumptuous to think that a *stupa* would mean and symbolize exactly the same thing in all the different branches of Buddhism.¹⁰

Once the possibility of interpreting symbolically any religious object is accepted, or which amounts to the same, of considering it as a materialized and therefore symbolic expression of doctrines and truths, it is obvious that such an interpretation may change from school to school. [...] [I]t is obvious that, [...] the various sects soon sprout from Buddhism – could see in the *caitya* the expression and the material and plastic images of different truths, although its origins could have been determined by a given motif which was responsible for a given architectonical shape and not for another one.¹¹

Yet scholars like Bénisti, Snodgrass and Tucci have established core symbolisms of the *stupa*, such as the *stupa* as a cosmogram, as the Buddha, as a symbol of Royal power and as the *Dhamma*.¹² Not all these symbols are without challenge, however, and not all scholars agree with a core symbolism that would precede the specific forms of the *stupa* (*stupa* around the worlds differ greatly from another) or the local or regional cultural backgrounds.¹³

¹⁰ Tucci, *Stupa. Art, Architectonics and symbolism*, 39-41.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 39-40.

¹² Bénisti, “Étude sur le stupa dans l’Inde ancienne,” 37-116; Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, Studies on Southeast Asia (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1985), 235, 237, 366; Hiram W. Jr. Woodward, “The Thai “Chedi” and the Problem of Stupa Interpretation,” *History of Religions* 33, no. 1 (1993), 83; Fussman, “Symbolisms of the Buddhist Stupa,” 37-53; Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 89-90, 96-117; George Michell, *The Hindu temple : an introduction to its meaning and forms* (London: P. Elek, 1977), 69-73. Even the core symbolism of the *stupa* vary depending on the scholarship, for example, Bénisti sees the three most important symbols of the *stupa* as the Buddha, the cosmos and the symbol of royal power, while Snodgrass sees them as being the Buddha, the cosmos and the *dhamma*.

¹³ There is a difference in the methodology of *stupa* studies. Scholars like Tucci and Snodgrass are more ‘universal’ in their interpretations, trying to define this symbolic ‘core’ of the *stupa*,

Though the *stupa* is the most recognizable Buddhist monument, the accepted Theravadin religious texts – the texts used in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Sri Lanka and historical Lan Na – scarcely mention the *stupa*, what it is, what it stands for and what it must look like. A rare mention is the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* or Discourse of the Great Deceased, which recounts the last days of the Buddha.¹⁴ In this *sutta* (DN16.5.12), the Buddha explains that the *stupa* is built for two main reasons, both of them related to the laity.

Ānanda, there are four persons worthy of a stupa. Who are they? A Tathāgata, Arahant, fully-enlightened Buddha is one, a Pacceka Buddha is one, a disciple of the Tathāgata is one, and a wheel-turning monarch is one. And why is each of these worthy of a stupa? Because, Ānanda, at the thought: “This is the stupa of a Tathāgata, or a Pacceka Buddha, [143] of a disciple of the Tathāgata, of a wheel-turning monarch”, people’s hearts are made peaceful, and then, at the breaking-up of the body after death they go to a good destiny and rearise in a heavenly world. That is the reason, and those are the four who are worthy of a stupa.¹⁵

In the earlier section (DN16.5.11), the Buddha explains that a *stupa* is also made so that the people would be able to acquire merit by placing garlands, flowers and other beautifications on it. “And whoever lays wreaths or puts sweet perfumes and colors there with a devout heart, will reap benefit and happiness for a long

across religious branches, religious texts as well as geographical and political regions. For example, Snodgrass has no qualms mixing religious texts from Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism to explain the *stupa*’s symbolism, or to explain the different parts of the *stupa*, be it from China, India and island Southeast Asia, although architecturally, the *stupa* from these regions vary greatly. See for example Tucci, *Stupa. Art, Architectonics and symbolism*. and Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*. Studies like the ones conducted by Fussman and Woodward are more specific or even ‘regional’ in nature, trying to define the meaning of the *stupa* in a specific time period and region. However, these types of studies are also problematic, since major texts or historical accounts about the *stupa* are scarce. The more focused a study becomes, the less material one can rely on to support one’s arguments. When it comes to studying the *stupa*, no ‘juste milieu’ has yet been reached. Fussman, “Symbolisms of the Buddhist Stupa,” 37-53; Woodward, “The Thai “Chedi” and the Problem of Stupa Interpretation,” 71-91.

¹⁴ Prebish and Keown, *Buddhism the eBook, an online introduction*, 131-32; Edward J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1963), 269-70.

¹⁵ *The Long Discourses of The Buddha (Digha Nikaya)*, trans. Maurice Walshe (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 264-65.

time.”¹⁶ Reading the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*, it is evident that the *stupa* was built for the lay people, not the monks, as the Buddha tells Ānanda not to worry about paying homage to it.¹⁷ Therefore, according to the scriptures, there are two underlying principles indicating that the *stupa* is a monument for the laity. First, by constructing and embellishing a *stupa*, people could gain merit; second, by looking at the *stupa*, the laity could become calm and it could help them achieving a good rebirth. Monks and nuns did not need the *stupa*, since they were already on a higher path and had understood how to reach *Nibbāna*.

Furthermore, the Buddha said that there are four men who are worthy of a *stupa* as their resting places: a universal monarch or wheel turning monarch, the Buddha, one who has attained enlightenment on his own and a true disciple of the Buddha. This also means that the *stupa* has a royal connection, since the only lay member of society who is worthy enough of a *stupa* is a king of kings. This royal connotation would only get stronger with King Asoka the Great (r.265-238 BCE). Furthermore, according to the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*, the Buddha acknowledges the *stupa* as a votive offering, a memorial,¹⁸ but also as a reliquary, as one *stupa* was to be built to contain the Buddha’s remains after cremation.¹⁹ Yet, as Bénisti mentions, this also means that only one reliquary *stupa* was to be built.²⁰ As we know, this did not happen and very soon, the Buddha’s bones and teeth were divided creating a multiplicity of reliquary *stupa*. The *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* (DN16.6.24-28) indicates that after the body of the Buddha was burnt, the 7 kings of India and the *naga* king, divided his remains between them. For each ‘part’ of the

¹⁶ Ibid, 264.

¹⁷ Bénisti, “Étude sur le stupa dans l’Inde ancienne,” 53; Prebish and Keown, *Buddhism the eBook, an online introduction*, 131-32.

¹⁸ Soon however, the *stupa* as a memorial was not only used to commemorate a person, but also historical events and geographical marker. For example, a historical memorial would be built to commemorate an important historical event, where the geographical marker was placed at a significant location.

¹⁹ Apart from the pre-Buddhist meaning of the grave marker, these are the *stupa*’s three functions generally given by scholars. Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, 353-59.

²⁰ Bénisti, “Étude sur le stupa dans l’Inde ancienne,” 48. Yet this also means that only one reliquary *stupa* was to be built.

remains, or relic, they built a *stupa*.²¹ Then, according to a passage of the *Asokavadana* (Tales of Asoka), which is more or less legendary in nature, and written in the 2nd century CE, nearly 400 years after the death of the king, it is told that Asoka the Great gathered the relics of the Buddha, which had been divided after his death.²² He separated them yet further and enshrined the ashes within 84000 *dharmarajikas*.²³ As Strong explains, in the *Asokavadana* the word 'stupa' is not often used. The 84000 structures Asoka constructed are referred as *dharmarajikas*, or "monuments pertaining to the King of Dharma," which is one of the Buddha's epithets. However, Asoka is also known as a King of *Dhamma*. Therefore, by referring to these structures as *dharmarajikas*, Asoka makes a strong political and religious link between himself and the Buddha, since these structures are built by a King of Dhamma for another King of Dhamma. Furthermore, the number of relic *stupa* Asoka built is an exaggeration. Indeed, the number 84 000 is more symbolic than realistic. Fussman says that, traditionally, the world was seen as having 84 000 great cities. To summarize then, by claiming to have built 84 000 *stupa*, Asoka extends his power and political reach all over the world.²⁴ Therefore, early religious texts indicated the *stupa* to be a monument for the laity, yet it soon became a royal monument due mainly to Asoka's patronage.

²¹ John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka. A Study and Translation of the Asokavadana*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 110-12; Bénisti, "Étude sur le stupa dans l'Inde ancienne," 46,48-49. Bénisti, taking from Pryluski, hypothesizes that the idea of the division of the relics is a late addition to the Buddhist texts and could be an example of a legend influenced by history. Indeed, the Buddhist texts indicate that the divisions of the relics had to be done with military protection. The same thing happened with Alexander of Macedonia (323 BCE) when his body was transferred to Egypt, where it almost started a war. Bénisti also mentions the Buddhist king Ménandre or Milinda (Pali) of Sagala (modern day Sialkot, Pakistan), whose ashes were probably divided after his death and monuments built on top of them.

²² The only relics he did not claim were the ones kept by the *naga* king. Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka. A Study and Translation of the Asokavadana*, 11-112.

²³ Ibid, 117-220. None of Asoka's original *stupa* are visible today as they have been enlarged and changed in subsequent centuries.

²⁴ Fussman, "Symbolisms of the Buddhist Stupa," 37-53. Strong explains that according to tradition, the body of the Buddha had 84000 atoms. Therefore, by dividing his relics into 84000 parts, Asoka was rebuilding the body of the Buddha onto the world. Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka. A Study and Translation of the Asokavadana*.

Thailand and Lan Na monastic architecture

The Wat

Though a *wat* is primarily an enclosed monastery, the term can be applied to most Buddhist places of worship, whether it be a large monastery or a small village hall, with only a few monks in residence.²⁵ Yet, a major monastic *wat* will have multiple architectural structures; at least two halls – the *ubosot* and the *vihan* – a *chedi* (*stupa*), a *sala kanparian* (ศาลาการเปรียญ) or pavilion for sermon, monks' residence or *kuti* (กุฏิ), a bell-tower or *ho rakhang* (หอระฆัง) and scripture pavilion or *ho trai* (หอไตร). Large monasteries will also be surrounded by a cloister or *rabiang khot* (ระเบียง). When it comes to a small village *wat*, there often is only one hall, a *kuti* and a *sala*. Most of these buildings, in both the large monastery and the village temple, are accessible to the public, although in northern Thailand the *ubosot* is generally not accessible to women, as are some *chedi* and particularly important relics. Two examples would be the main *chedi* (*Chedi Luang*) at Wat Mahathat Haripunchai in Lamphun [Fig. 8 and 9] and the footprint of the Buddha located in the high *mondop*²⁶ at Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang, in Lampang [Fig. 10 and 11].²⁷

Since the Bangkok period a *wat* is generally divided into two different sections, the *Buddhawat* and the *Sanghawat*, in other words, a section for the Buddha statue and a section for the monks. In central Thailand, the buildings used for ceremonies and devotion, such as the *vihan*, *ubosot* and *chedi*, are parts of the *Buddhawat*, while the *Sanghawat* usually has the *kuti*, the scripture pavilion and the

²⁵ O'Connor, "Interpreting Thai Religious Change: Temples, Sangha Reform and Social Change," 331.

²⁶ Nithi Sthapitanonda and Brian Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand. A guide to traditional and contemporary forms* (Bangkok: Asia Books Co., Ltd, 2005), 102. The Thai *mondop* is based on the Indian and Khmer *mandapa*, which is a square or rectangular entrance chamber to a larger construction, often a temple. While the *mandapa* is a structural element to a larger monument, the Thai *mondop* is a freestanding structure protecting or encasing an object, such as a statue, a *bai sema*, a relic etc.

²⁷ This northern practice – banning women from the *ubosot* – is generally practiced, yet not absolute. During my different visits in northern Thailand I visited a few *ubosot*, yet most are closed to female visitors, especially outside the touristic circles. The same is true for *chedi*, where the terraces are sometimes forbidden to women.

different *sala* or pavilions for sermons.²⁸ Yet in northern Thailand, the *ubosot* is part of the *Sanghawat*, not the *Buddhawat*.

Interestingly, the focal point of Thai monasteries, including Lan Na monasteries, has changed over time. In historical India and Sri Lanka,²⁹ the focal point of the royal *wat*, a *wat* which was under royal patronage, was the *stupa*.³⁰ In Sukhothai, Lan Na and to a certain extent, at Ayutthaya, there was no single point of importance, but a relation between buildings, mainly the *chedi* and the *vihan*. Interestingly, in the Bangkok era, the focal point of the *wat* becomes the *ubosot*. Before looking at this change in the symbolic organization of the Lan Na and Thai *wat*, we need to look at these three buildings individually. This section will therefore focus on the distinction between the two types of halls, the *ubosot* and the *vihan*, in historical Lan Na and Siam/Thailand and then will look at the importance and meaning of the *chedi*. Since this dissertation focuses on two northern temples with different approaches to monastic orientation, one focusing on the *bot* the other on the *vihan*, it is important to study these historical differences.

Vihan and ubosot

In Thailand, including historical Siam and historical Lan Na, two main monastic buildings fall into the category of *chaitya*; the *vihan* and the *ubosot* or *bot*. The word *vihan* derives from the Sanskrit term *vihāra*, which, as we have seen earlier, was associated with the *Sangha*. However, as will be explained, the historical Lan Na and Siamese's *vihan* is more strongly associated with the Buddha and the laity. On the other hand, the second type of religious hall, the *bot*, is the hall specifically associated with the Thai *Sangha*.

²⁸ Pierre Pichard, "Le hall d'ordination dans le monastère Thaï," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 87, no. 1 (2000), 134; Donald K. Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 34.

²⁹ In Sri Lanka, this is true for monasteries built before the 4th century CE. After this, it seems that the cult of the Buddha image grew in importance as well as the structure protecting it, the image hall. Senake Bandaranayake, *Sinhalese monastic architecture: the viharas of Anuradhapura* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974); Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*, 256, n.5.

³⁰ See page 96-100 of this dissertation.

The term *ubosot* derives from the Pali term *uposatha* (Vinaya Pitaka, Mahavagga, II, 1-7), which is the term for the day when monks should gather to recite the *Sangha's* 227 rules and confess their infractions.³¹ On the other hand, the *vihan* is the hall of images, where other ceremonies can occur and where the lay community is welcome to participate and pay respect to the image of the Buddha. Therefore, though a *wat* can have more than one *vihan*, it can only have one *ubosot*, if any. Indeed small local temples might have only a *vihan* and *kuti*. Furthermore, in historical Lan Na and contemporary northern Thailand, while the *vihan* is accessible by the laity for religious ceremonies, the *bot* or *ubosot* is open only on certain days of the month and is traditionally inaccessible to women on any occasion.³²

According to Nithi Sthapitanonda, an architect and national artist from Chiang Mai who excels in bringing ancient Lan Na architectural flavors to his contemporary works, “[t]emple halls in the north are smaller and less elaborate than in central Thailand. Wood ornament predominates, sometimes gilded or decorated with glass tiles. In general, the look inside as well as out is freer, gentler and less regimented.”³³ Teak wood was the main material used for traditional Lan Na halls, as the teak tree used to be abundant in the region. Sometimes, the drums of the pillars were in brick or cement, yet all other elements were made of wood, even the roof tiles. This is why today historical Lan Na *vihan* and *bot* are few, as wood is a perishable material. If some wooden structures have withstood time, they are now, for the most part, hybrids of what they used to be, having experienced heavy restorations. Nonetheless, we know enough about the different characteristics of the *vihan* and *ubosot* from ancient Lan Na to draw models.

Visually, both structures, the *vihan* and the *ubosot*, are halls often with two interior rows of columns, creating a main hall in the centre and two aisles on either

³¹ In Thailand the ceremony occurs on the last day of the waxing and waning moon. Pichard, “Le hall d’ordination dans le monastère Thaï,” 125.

³² In today’s vernacular however, both terms, *vihan* and *bot*, are often interchangeable, especially within non-royal temples outside monastic boundaries, such as small village temples. In those cases, the term *bot* is preferred to *vihan*, though as we will see, they might not technically be *ubosot*.

³³ Sthapitanonda and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand. A guide to traditional and contemporary forms*, 106.

side. The statue of the Buddha is opposite the entrance in historical Lan Na as well as in modern central Thailand.³⁴ Most Lan Na temple halls, whether *ubosot* or *vihan*, are often wider yet lower than central Thai halls, which are typically high and relatively narrow with a steeper multi-tiered gable roof, which is often supported by an external row of columns [fig. 21].³⁵ Therefore, for historical Lan Na halls, the roof is the main external visual architectural element, as it often dwarfs the walls or pillars. Indeed, some Lan Na *vihan* [Fig. 12] and a few *ubosot* [Fig. 13] are open and free of walls, an interesting Lan Na characteristic.

From the exterior the halls' roofs are multi-tiered, generally with two to three layers, with the lower tiers at a wider angle than the superior one, descending further out of the wall or piers level [Fig. 14]. In the north, the multi-tiered roof is usually divided into four main sections, stepping down from the centre to each side. The eastern side generally has two sections, one being the portico, the other the first part of the main hall [Fig. 15]. The main element of a hall's frontal side is its triangle gable or *na neb* (หน้าทับ), which, in historical Lan Na, is most often coffered with carved panels. The decorations are not restricted to the gable, but are found on the entire façade, "over all the upright boards of this façade from the ridge pole down between both porch slopes to the limit of the low overhanging eaves."³⁶ A great example of such a Lan Na decorated façade is found at Wat Phra Singh in Chiang Mai, where the renovated coffered façade does not emphasize the triangular shape of the gable, but adds a structural quality to its design, paralleling the articulated interior ceiling [Fig. 15].³⁷

³⁴ This section will look at the historical Lan Na hall in comparison to the modern or Rattanakosin era hall, which, as will be explained, has become a paradigm of modern central Thailand.

³⁵ Also, it is interesting to note that monastic Lan Na *vihan* are, for the most part, larger than the *bot*. In central Thailand, traditional monastic architecture usually dictates that the *bot* of a monastery will be larger than the *vihan*.

³⁶ Anuvit Charernsuokul, *The Elements of Thai Architecture* (Bangkok: Karn Pim Satri Sarn Co. Ltd, 1978), 121-22.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 19.

The bargeboard's decorations are known as *lamyong* (ลำยอง) [Fig. 16].³⁸ In northern Thailand, the *lamyong* is sometimes less elaborate than in central Thailand, yet shows a greater variety and less rigidity than its stylized central Thai modern counterpart. *Lamyong* have four distinctive decorated sections, the *cho fa*, the *hang hong*, the *nag sadung* and the *bai raka*.³⁹ The side finials of the *lamyong* are known as *hang hong* (หางหงส์), which means the 'swan tail'. Nithi explains that though modern temples usually sport *naga* as the side finials of the bargeboard, this finial's name indicates that it is probably a modern phenomenon and traditionally a mythical bird akin to the swan known as *hongsa* was probably represented.⁴⁰ Furthermore, though today the *hang hong* is often decorated as a naga's head, in the north it is often more abstract and end in a rearing loop or leaf [Fig. 17]. Indeed the Lan Na historical monuments still standing often have this leaf-shaped *hang hong* [Fig. 14].⁴¹ The roof ridge finials or *cho fa* (ช่อฟ้า) are often reminiscent of swans or *hongsa*, both in historical Lan Na and central modern Thailand, yet in historical Lan Na they are often abstract, resembling the rearing trunk of an elephant [Fig. 18].⁴² These decorative elements are organic yet lack the elaborate stylization of the elongated decorations of modern constructions. The *bai raka* and the *nag sadung* are, respectively, the above and central decoration of the bargeboard itself. If they

³⁸ Somewhat confusingly, Swearer calls *panlom* (pān lom) the small metal multitier umbrella sometimes situated at the center of the main roof ridge found on Isaan and Lan Na halls. See Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*, 263 n.39. However, Swearer does not give the Thai spelling and does not reference this information. As I know it, a ป้านลม or *panlom* is a gable's bargeboard to help break the wind. Sthapitanonda and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand. A guide to traditional and contemporary forms*, 251.

³⁹ *Nag sadung* is the 'under' section of the bargeboard, while the *bai raka* is the upper section of the bargeboard.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 145. The *hongsa* is a mythical bird already present in Thailand during the Mon era of Haripunchai in northern Thailand and Dvaravati in central Thailand (3rd-10th centuries CE). The *hongsa* is a guardian like the *naga* and the *garuda*.

⁴¹ Yet these elements of architectural decoration are particularly vulnerable to the climate and many have been weathered by time and are more likely to have been restored. For example, in the spring of 2010, Wat Lai Hin in Lampang was being restored. The pediment was kept intact, while the *layhin* had been discarded because the wood was rotten. Also, the *ubosot* at Wat Phra That Lampang Luang was restored in the first quarter of the 20th century, yet its bargeboards are already in poor condition.

⁴² Bunyasourat, *วิหารล้านนา/Vihan Lanna*, 203.

are decorated or carved, they will most often be carved as a scaled and spiked body of the *naga*, both in central Thailand and historical Lan Na.⁴³ Yet when the *hang hong* is a leaf, the bargeboard seems to lack zoomorphic elements [Fig. 17].

The eave brackets or *khan tuay* (คันทวย)⁴⁴ are also important decorative elements in historical Lan Na. In Lan Na, the brackets are often carved with with a particular shape that recalls the ears of elephant or *hoo chang* (หูช้าง)[Fig. 17]. This particular shape allows greater freedom of representation and it is why the eave brackets of northern Thai temples are often more decorated than the ones in central Thailand. Though subjects may vary, the most common modern decoration for the *khan tuay* – both in central and northern Thailand – is the fighting *naga* (นาคะตัน). Historically however it seems that a variety of subjects were present, at least in Lan Na, such as the *hongsa*, *Hanuman*, different animals or even non-figurative motifs such as clouds.⁴⁵ This variety can be explained by the Lan Na *hoo chang* shape, which is a panel instead of a thin wooden board, giving the craftsman a greater area to work with.

The wide and imposing roof of the historical Lan Na hall creates a dark interior, where decoration is found on all the wooden columns and coffered articulations [Fig. 19]. Most of the decorations are reminiscent of lacquer art found in Lan Na and Myanmar, which differs from the lacquer of central Thailand, as the latter is gold on black. In Lan Na and Myanmar lacquer is gold on red. This subtle interior decoration emphasizes the wideness of the interior space, as well as the strength and importance of the columns within the hall [Fig. 20]. Indeed, in Lan Na, the columns are not only supporting elements, but are an integral part of the decoration and overall aspect of the interior space. This also accounts for the fact that many halls were without exterior walls.

⁴³ This is true if the *hang hong* is a *naga*. When it is a leaf the bargeboard seems plain.

⁴⁴ Sthapitanonda and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand. A guide to traditional and contemporary forms*, 150-53.

⁴⁵ William Warren, Ping Amranand and Thongchua Paothong, *Lanna Style. Art and Design of Northern Thailand* (Bangkok: Asia Books, 2000), 100.

In general, it seems that the historical Lan Na hall gives an organic yet more somber impression with coffered and carved decorative elements. Though modern decorations are often more regimented – for example having fewer subjects being carved, focusing mostly on the *naga* – historical halls appear to have had a greater freedom of representation. The decorations also seem to have less ‘arabesque’ and be more abstract, though still organic. For example, the *cho fa* could be less fluid and resemble the rearing trunk of an elephant, yet still be organic rather than stylized or even plastic as is often the case with Bangkok style halls.

As Pichard explains, the Bangkok style hall – high,⁴⁶ narrow, with stylized decoration and a predominance of the *naga* – has become the norm in modern Thailand, even though the form is relatively new. The reason behind this normalization of central architecture will be discussed in a subsequent section. Suffice here to say that the centralization of the Sangha was also reflected in Thai religious architecture. Furthermore, though in historical Lan Na the main hall (both in size and emplacement) of the monastic compound will be the *vihan*, in the Bangkok era it is the *ubosot* which is more important and indeed, majestic.⁴⁷ On the other hand the Lan Na *ubosot* is small and does not have a central location within the monastery. At Wat Maha That Haripunchai, the *ubosot* is even outside the wall surrounding the many *vihan* and the *chedi*, effectively separating the *ubosot* from the rest of the monastery and rendering it visually less important.⁴⁸

Visually, both monuments, the *vihan* and *ubosot*, are great halls, yet *bai sema* or boundary markers surround the *ubosot*, distinguishing it from the *vihan*. Normally, there are eight *bai sema* (ใบเสมา) surrounding the *ubosot*, one at cardinal directions and corners. The question of delimitation of sacred space for

⁴⁶ Pichard calls this new focus on the elevation of the temple a “verticalité arrogante” or an arrogant verticality. Pichard, “Le hall d’ordination dans le monastère Thai,” 141.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 143; Darlington, “The ordination of a tree: The Buddhist ecology movement in Thailand,” 127. Yet, the distinction between the two halls, the *vihan* and the *ubosot*, does not exist in Cambodia and Laos, where there is usually only one hall within the monastic compound. Furthermore, in Laos and Cambodia, the term used for the ordination hall is *vihan*, not *ubosot*.

⁴⁸ The historical Lan Na *ubosot* is generally not accessible as it is not only separated from the other building, but effectively locked from visitors. The *ubosot* is therefore physically and visually less important than the *vihan*.

ritual and ceremonial purposes is important in Buddhism. Following the *Vinayapitaka*, these delimitations could be for the entire monastic compound, to indicate who was part of the religious community.⁴⁹ According to the *Mahavagga* (II, 6) these limits could be ‘natural’ markers, such as trees, rocks and rivers. Yet a monastery could also have great marker or *mahasema* surrounding the temple compound. Though we find these boundaries in Thailand, they are mostly found in Bangkok.⁵⁰ The laws also specify that the ordination space should be delineated, either by moats, alignment of bamboo clumps or rock slabs, which suggests that markers did not need to be of permanent material. Indeed the appearance of the *bai sema* differs greatly depending on the region and time period.⁵¹ What seems to be important is the delimitation itself, not the medium used. In modern Thailand, to further emphasize the importance of the *ubosot*, the *bai sema* are now more important as well, now often finely chiseled and protected within small *mondop* [Fig. 23]. In comparison, some Lan Na *ubosot* do not have these permanent markers and when they do, the markers or *bai sema*, are relatively small, plain and simple [Fig. 22].⁵² In contemporary Thailand, each marker is placed on top of a stone sphere or *luk nimit* (ลูกนิมิต), placed underground.⁵³ One more sphere is under the *bot*’s floor, at its centre or under the main statue of the Buddha inside the *bot*.

The interior space of great assembly halls could also be adorned with mural paintings, though it does not seem to have been the norm in historical Lan Na. As

⁴⁹ Pichard, “Le hall d’ordination dans le monastère Thaï,” 128.

⁵⁰ An example would be the Bangkok temple Wat Ratchapradit (1863-64).

⁵¹ Ibid, 129. We have small boulders in Sri Lanka already in the 5th century CE, yet they are not limited to the ordination hall, but are found around other monastic monuments, such as the *kuti*. Yet in Thailand, they are only found around the *ubosot*, as early as the 6th century in *Isaan* and the Mon kingdom of Dvaravati. In central Thailand, on rare occasions, the *ubosot* might not even have *bai sema*, if the *mahasema* were well defined.

⁵² Indeed the Royal *ubosot* at Maha That Lampang Luang, Lampang does not have visible *bai sema*. On the other hand, the *ubosot* at wat Phra Sing has more than eight *bai sema* and they are not at the four axial and corners of the hall, it has six on each side and non at its two entrances.

⁵³ The roots under the *bai sema* are probably recent, from the Bangkok period, though it is difficult to know for sure. They do not seem to have existed in the Sukhothai era, nor in Sri Lanka or Myanmar. Unfortunately, though the ancient cities of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya have been restored, the archaeological research during the restoration was somewhat superficial. In other words, though no *luk nimit* were found, it does not mean that they did not exist, though it is unlikely.

explained earlier, many historical wooden Lan Na *vihan* were opened on the side, with only a narrow strip of wall where the roof reaches the external pillars [Fig. 24]. This section could be painted, though not many examples survive and it seems that only the temples with rich patrons had them.⁵⁴ Indeed mural painting was not a strong tradition in historical Lan Na, though it has become more important in recent history, mostly during the last 50 years and in the urban area of Chiang Mai.⁵⁵

In contrast, in central Thailand, most of the modern hall of the Bangkok era, the *vihan* more so than the *ubosot*, have complex mural paintings.⁵⁶ As Professor Nithi explains, before the 20th century most Thais were illiterate and the mural paintings served as didactic tools for the teaching of Buddhist principles. Therefore, the format and visual details needed to be simple, direct and literal. On the western wall, behind the main statue of the Buddha, you would find the Thai Buddhist cosmology or *Traiphum*.⁵⁷ The *Traiphum* is an important part of the central Thai mural tradition dating from the Ayutthaya period; yet it is not an important northern tradition. The scene is traditionally represented behind the main Buddha statue of the temple halls, opposite the main entrance.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ John P. Ferguson and Christina B. Johannsen, "Modern Buddhist Murals in Northern Thailand: A Study of Religious Symbols and Meaning," *American Ethnologist* 3, no. 4 (1976): 645-69.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ This section will concentrate on the modern temple of the Bangkok era and will not look at Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and other regions and time periods.

⁵⁷ Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang. A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*. A good example of such a representation would be the *Traiphum* at Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi (c.1824-1851)

⁵⁸ Ferguson and Johannsen, "Modern Buddhist Murals in Northern Thailand: A Study of Religious Symbols and Meaning," 645-69. Even with temples of the last 50 years Ferguson shows that the representation of the *Traiphum* itself is not necessarily a common image in northern Thailand. As explained in the previous chapter, the *Traiphum* (ไตรภูมิ) pertains to the three worlds of the Buddhist Universe, the World of Desire or Kamaphum (กามภูมิ), the World of Form or Rupaphum (รูปภูมิ) and the World of Non-Form or Arupaphum (อรูปภูมิ) [Fig. 28]. Each of these worlds are then subdivided into realms: eleven, sixteen and four respectively, for a total of 31 possible 'levels' of rebirth. All levels are accessible for a future birth, depending on the *kamma* the individual may accumulate during his or her previous lives. Jackson, "Re-Interpreting the Traiphum Phra Ruang: Political Functions of Buddhist Symbolism in Contemporary Thailand," 64-100; Coedes and Archaimbault, *Les trois mondes (Traibhumi Brah Ruan)*; Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang. A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*.

Wat Suwannaram in Thonburi (วัดสุวรรณาราม) offers an example of a traditional image of the *Traiphum*. The representation of the first world, ours, the world of desire, takes most of the space, often three quarters of the wall. At the lowest section, above the floor, there is a picture of hell as well as of *yak* or demons, followed by the earth, with representations of Thai daily life, the representations of some 'grounded' heavenly abodes (these abodes rest on the ground, often shown on the seven mountain ranges around Mount Meru) and rows of gods and other heavenly creatures. Floating deities above the peak of Mount Meru represent the second world, the World of Form. The third world, the World of Non-Form, if represented at all, has empty celestial abodes.⁵⁹ *Nibbāna*, being outside the circle of rebirth, is never illustrated in the *Traiphum*.

The eastern wall is traditionally decorated with the defeat of Mara. The Buddha is the highest decorative element, with Mother Earth or Mae Phra Thorani (แม่พระธรณี) underneath him, flooding Mara's army, with water coming out of her hair [Fig. 30]. On each side of Mae Phra Thorani, is Mara's army, with demons, humans, weapons and animals. This army may continue on each side of the door, reaching the ground, though sometimes, the side sections are decorated with genre scenes of Thai daily life. Wat Dusidaram in Thonburi offers a good example of a traditional central Thai representation of the defeat of Mara. The image is well balanced, with the Buddha, Mae Phra Thorani and the main entrance door forming a strong vertical axis.⁶⁰ The Buddha is the highest being in the mural, proclaiming his spiritual superiority. Traditionally, the mural will simultaneously depict demons and soldiers attacking the Buddha, while others are being washed away by the goddess's water.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Rita Ringis, *Thai temples and Temple Murals* (Singapore, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 122-26; Santi Leksukhum, *Temples of Golds. Seven Centuries of Thai Buddhist Paintings* (New York: George Braziller Publisher, 2000), 128-31.

⁶⁰ A good example would be the representation of the Defeat of Mara, Wat Dusidaram, Thonburi, late 18th century.

⁶¹ Sthapitanonda and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand. A guide to traditional and contemporary forms*, 166.

Lan Na Chedi and Thaats

Although the word *stupa* is known in Thai as สตุป (stupa), this term is almost never used to refer to a Thai monument.⁶² Furthermore, though the Thai term *chedi* (เจดีย์) usually refers to the more general term *stupa*, there are some distinctions between the two. The Thai *chedi* is primarily defined as a structural form; it is conical and has a square base. The emphasis on the form of the monument betrays the Pali origin of the word; *cetiya* or a grave marker.⁶³ If the physical form of a historical *chedi* diverges from this simple description – conical with a square base – the structure will have a specific adjective added to its name, to emphasize as well as explain its unusual form.⁶⁴

Therefore, one might conclude that not all *stupa* are *chedi*, as not all *stupa* are conical in form. Furthermore, although the *stupa* is, today, generally accepted as a reliquary, the *chedi* is not defined as such. In Thai, a bodily relic of the Buddha is referred to as *thaat* (ธาต) and the term often refers to the reliquary itself.⁶⁵ Any ‘container’, either small or large and of any form can be a reliquary, and thus be named *thaat*. If a *chedi* contains relics of the Buddha or other important relics, then

⁶² The word ‘stupa’ is in Sanskrit, while the word ‘thupa’ is the *Pali* equivalent. The fact that the Thai use the word *stupa* instead of *thupa* when referring to monuments outside Thailand betrays its foreign origin. If the Pali term had been used in the past, it probably would have survived into the modern Thai language, like so many other Pali terms. The fact that the term *stupa* is known and used to refer to monuments outside Thailand indicates that the Sanskrit term is a late addition to the Thai vocabulary.

⁶³ The spelling of the term also betrays its *Pali* origin. The word เจดีย์, although pronounced ‘chedi’ is spelled with the letter ‘y’ at the end, so if pronounced correctly, it would be ‘chetiya’. However, the term is old and the ‘y’ has become obsolete with the addition of the sign ‘็’ on top of the consonant, making it silent.

⁶⁴ Woodward, “The Thai ‘Chedi’ and the Problem of Stupa Interpretation,” 72. The *chedi* at Wat Phra Yun in Lamphun, Lan Na, is an example. It is commonly referred to as a *mondop Chedi*. This *Chedi* has a relatively small conical or drop-shape cupola, atop a large *mondop* protecting four statues of the Buddha. The structure sits on a high square terrace, accessible via staircases.

⁶⁵ The word ธาต is an old word and although, if pronounced ‘literally’, it would sound as ‘thatu’, the vowel ‘ou’ or ‘ุ’ is, in this case, phonetically obsolete. Therefore the word is pronounced ‘thāt’. Yet, how it is spelled betrays its Pali origin. There is also a difference between a bodily relic (bones, teeth, hair), relic for use (begging bowl) and commemorative relics (bodhi tree, images of the Buddha). See Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, 89, n82. Trainor also explains that the image of the Buddha was accepted as a type of relic relatively late in Buddhist history. In Thai, sacred objects that are not bodily relics such as Buddha statues are known as สิ่งศักดิ์สิทธิ์ or singsaksit.

it becomes a *thaat chedi*, not a simple *chedi*. Here, the term *thaat* will have precedence over the term *chedi*. In other words the content becomes more important than the form. A *thaat chedi* is therefore a reliquary in the form of a *chedi*. Sometimes, for such a monument, the term *chedi* is not even used and it is simply referred as *thaat* such as the monument at Wat Phra That Haripunchai in Lamphun, where the main *chedi* is locally called Phra Maha That.⁶⁶ The chronicles from Chiang Mai, the *Jinakalamali*, dating between 1516-1527, refer to this monument as *Mahadhātu cetiya*, using both *dhatu* (relics) and *cetiya* (*chedi*) to refer to this monument, emphasizing the difference between form and content.⁶⁷

Because the primary medium for *chedi* (brick covered in plaster) is more permanent than the one for the *vihan* and *bot*, more *chedi* have survived history. However, not many of them have survived it intact. Indeed, most *chedi* have been modified, enlarged and embellished over the centuries, making it difficult to chronologically define the transformations of the Lan Na *chedi*. Usually, it is with sculptures, not architecture, that we can establish a relatively strong chronological artistic development of Lan Na art.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it should be noted that the Lan Na *chedi* has had multiple sources of influence, such as the Sukhothai and Haripunchai kingdoms, but also Sri Lanka, Myanmar with Pagan, Pegu and other Mon states, Yunnan, Khmer and later, Siamese.

The oldest still standing *chedi* in Lan Na, and indeed one of the oldest in Thailand, is *chedi* Ku Kut.⁶⁹ The *chedi* is believed to date from the Golden Age of the

⁶⁶ Woodward, "The Thai "Chedi" and the Problem of Stupa Interpretation," 76; Chihara, *Hindu-Buddhist Architecture in Southeast Asia*, 245. Interestingly, in Laos and in contemporary Lan Na language, the term *thaat* is generally used for the monument referred as *chedi* in Thai. Therefore, though the term *thaat* comes from the *Pali* term for relic, in Laos and Lan Na language, a *thaat* can roughly be defined as a *chedi*, with or without important relics.

⁶⁷ Hans Pentz, "Inscriptions and Images on the Phra Maha That in Lamphun," *Artibus Asiae* 49, no. 3/4 (1988), 351.

⁶⁸ Carol Stratton, *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), 129. Scholars have divided the classic Lan Na periods (14th to 16th centuries) into four periods: the Formative (late 13th to early 14th century), Early Classic (14th to mid 15th century), High Classic (mid 15th to first quarter of 16th century) and Late Classic (2nd ¼ to mid 16th century). Stylistically, these periods can be expressed as 'Lan Na-Haripunchai', 'Lan Na-Sukhothai' and 'Lan-Na Chiang Mai'. This last category includes High Classic and Late Classic.

⁶⁹ The earliest *chedi* in Thailand are believed to be from the Dvaravati Mon kingdom of central Thailand. The only one of consequence found is believed to be *chedi* Chula Pathon. Steve Van

Mon kingdom of Haripunchai (1157-1292).⁷⁰ Hariphunchai art offers an alternative to Khmer art and architecture of the same period, as the kingdom remained independent, culturally, politically and religiously, from Khmer domination.⁷¹ *Chedi Ku Kut*, at the temple of the same name, is a pyramidal structure, with niches on its five upper stories [Fig. 25]. A Buddha statue used to stand inside each niche, yet the sculptures show late alterations, most likely from the reign of King Sabbasiddhi in the 13th century, who, according to historical chronicles, restored the *chedi* after an earthquake.⁷² It is believed that the source of inspiration for its pyramidal shape is the Mahābodhi at Bodh Gaya, commemorating the place where the Buddha achieved enlightenment.⁷³ The pyramidal style is also found in Sri Lanka, with the Satmahal at Polannaruva. This pyramidal style was probably the norm in Lan Na before the Tai expansion, as it is also found in Nan, at Wat Chedi Si Liem and Phaya Chedi. The Buddha statues are stylistically northern (Myanmarian) in influence rather than Khmer, with light and fluid body and garments.⁷⁴ Yet some decorative elements, foliage in particular, are reminiscent of Khmer art.⁷⁵ With this *chedi*, we therefore see northern (Myanmar) influences as well as southern (Khmer) elements, demonstrating that the Lan Na regions were not isolated from other Southeast Asian political and religious powers.

Scholars have tried to categorize and chronologically separate the different Tai *chedi* of historical Lan Na, yet it has proven to be a difficult task due to the

Beek and Luca Invernizzi Tettoni, *The Arts of Thailand* (Hong Kong: Periplus Editions, 1999), 64; Hiram W. Jr. Woodward, *The Art and Architecture of Thailand. From Prehistoric Times through the Thirteenth Century*, vol. 14, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section Three, South-East Asia (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 76-80; Swearer and Premchit, *The Legend of Queen Cama. Bodhiramsi's Camadevivamsa, a Translation and Commentary*, 96-98; Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 32-38; Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism. An Introduction to its history and meaning* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2008), 26-27.

⁷⁰ See pages 59 and 61 of this dissertation.

⁷¹ Woodward, *The Art and Architecture of Thailand. From Prehistoric Times through the Thirteenth Century*, 171-79.

⁷² *Ibid*, 176.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 174-75.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 171-79; Stratton, *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand*, Indeed Khmer art was stiffer and more rigid when representing the body.

⁷⁵ For example, it bears some decorative elements such as foliated trefoil arches for the niches of the Buddha also found in Khmer LopBuri. The leaves of the foliage have human shapes motifs, also found at Thommanon temple at Angkor.

different sources of inspiration and the different forms found in Lan Na. Yet two frequent forms should be noted here, the first is the *mondop*-type *chedi*, believed to derive from Haripunchai and Myanmar models⁷⁶ and the one generally acknowledged by scholars as being the classical⁷⁷ Lan Na *chedi*, influenced by Sukhothai. Both of these types share a similarity with most of the other *chedi* of historical Lan Na: a very large base, often higher than the rest of the *chedi*'s parts put together. This is a singular Lan Na characteristic, as most *stupa* in India, Sri Lanka and central Thailand will have a relatively short or unimposing base.

Mondop style *chedi* was already frequent during Mengrai's era (r. 1261-1311).⁷⁸ It consists of a large and high square base, the middle section reminisce a rectangular *mondop* often with niches housing Buddha statues [Fig. 26]. Three or four receding tiers, circular, octagonal or decagonal then top the *mondop*-like structure. The structure is then often followed by a small *anda*,⁷⁹ then by a relatively short yet sturdy spire. There are many examples of this type of structure, both historical and modern, such as *chedi* at Wat Phra That Si Choom, in Chiang Sean (เจดีย์วัดศรีชุม) and the *chedi* at Wat Pasak (c.1295) also in Chiang Sean (เจดีย์วัดป่าสัก).⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Sommai Premchit, พระเจดีย์ในลานนาไทย :

งานวิเคราะห์และอนุรักษ์ศิลปและสถาปัตยกรรมลานนาไทย / Lan Na Chedi: Conservation of Lan Na Thai Art and Architecture (Chiang Mai: Research institute of Chiang Mai Universty for the study of Lan Na art and architecture, 2524), 159-69.

⁷⁷ See note 67 above.

⁷⁸ See page 59 of this dissertation.

⁷⁹ *Anda* is the term used for the middle section of a *stupa*. In ancient India the *anda* is often the large bulbous section of the *stupa*. An example would be the Great Stupa at Sanchi.

⁸⁰ Sommai do not put these two *chedi* in the same category however, due to their decorative elements. He puts *chedi* Pasak as being influenced by the Srivijaya kingdom (7th-13th centuries) of southern Thailand, while *chedi* Si Chom is in the category of Burmese *chedi*. Yet other scholars see *chedi* Wat Pasak as having been influenced by Haripunchai art, not Srivijaya. Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 73; Michael Freeman, *Lanna Thailand's Northern Kingdom* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 211; Sumet Jumsai, *Seen: Architectural forms of Northern Siam and Old Siamese Fortifications* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Commission. The Association of Siamese Architects Under the Patrona of His Majesty the King), image5; Sthapitanonda and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand. A guide to traditional and contemporary forms*, 94-95.

The classical Lan Na Chedi⁸¹ is divided in sections and though these divisions are relatively the same as in central Thailand – base, middle section and finial – the physical details somewhat differ. Simply described, the classical Lan Na *chedi* is characterized by a large base with exaggerated octagonal tiers (three, five or more), a very small bell-shaped middle section and a finial topped by parasols.

The base is usually divided in three sections, yet also often has a plinth. The first section of the base is normally multilayered, either twice or thrice, and is square or octagonal. If square, it has trice-indented corners at each angle. It often has decorated diamond shape *chang go* or sheets of gilded copper, added as embellishments [Fig. 27]. These *chang go*, though not all embossed or *repoussé*, often cover the entire *chedi*, a singular northern characteristic, as the base of the central Thai *chedi* will generally not be gold in color. The base also has triangular projections at each layer of the indented corners. The second section of the base is much simpler, formed by three, often plain, receding steps, leading to the third section of the base. This third section is generally trice tiered, though some Lan Na *chedi* have five tiers. This section is usually octagonal in shape, well defined and exaggerated in comparison to Siamese (Sukhothai and Ayutthaya) and central Thai *chedi* (Bangkok era).⁸²

The receding tiers lead to the middle section of the *chedi*, the *anda*, which is usually bell-shaped. This *anda* is often visually insignificant in comparison to the imposing base. Between the finial and the *anda* is the *harmika*, normally an indented square, paralleling, yet at a much smaller scale, the first section of the base.⁸³ *Chedi* are usually topped by a high finial, made of diminishing disks,

⁸¹ See note 68 above.

⁸² This circular transformation is probably an influence from Sukhothai, an important Tai kingdom, somewhat to the south of Lan Na. Sukhothai is generally accepted by the Thai population as being the first ‘real’ Thai kingdom in Thailand, and is the foundation for its cultural and national history. The typical Sukhothai *chedi* (13th to 15th century CE) sports a much larger bell-shaped middle section than the Lan Na Chedi of roughly the same period (14th to 16th century CE). It also ends in a lotus bud finial and is much slender than the ones found in northern Thailand at the same period. The *chedi* at Wat Sra Sri is a good example of a typical Suhothai *chedi*.

⁸³ In Lan Na, the *harmika* is often not well defined and some *chedi* seem to be missing it entirely.

supporting umbrellas (thi or ๓).⁸⁴ Examples of classical Lan Na *chedi* would be the *chedi* at Wat Doi Suthep, just outside of Chiang Mai [Fig. 28] or the *chedi* at Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Sean [Fig. 29]. This section analyzed the stylistic specificities of Lan Na *chedi*. This dissertation's two case studies also have *chedi* or halls of relics. It was therefore important to discuss the architectural specificities of the historical Lan Na *chedi*, so their architectural forms can be situated within Lan Na architectural history.

The chedi, vihan and ubosot in their context

Woodward indicates that though the early *stupa* in India might have been seen as an 'encompassing order,' even a cosmogram, the "Thai *chedi* is better understood as a mere constituent element in a greater whole."⁸⁵ This greater whole is the *wat* where there is a particular relation between the *vihan* and the *chedi*. Woodward calls this relation an 'energized line.'⁸⁶ In historical Lan Na, this line of power between the *vihan* and the *chedi* was particularly strong.⁸⁷ Indeed in most *wat* the main *vihan* is directly east of the *chedi*, in close proximity to it [Fig. 27]. For example, at Wat Maha

⁸⁴ Joe Cummings and Luca Tettoni, *Lanna Renaissance* (Chiang Mai: Dhara Dhevi Hotel Co. Ltd, 2006), 65. The lotus bud finial is not common in Lan Na, though it is the usual finial of central Thailand.

⁸⁵ Woodward, "The Thai "Chedi" and the Problem of Stupa Interpretation," 90. It is clear that Woodward has a more regional approach to the study of the *stupa/chedi*, as opposed to a universal one. See note 13 of this chapter for an analysis of two different approaches to the stupa in modern scholarly research.

⁸⁶ Hiram W. Jr. Woodward, "Monastery, palace, and city plans: Ayutthaya and Bangkok," *Crossroads* 2, no. 2 (1985): 23-60. This energized line could also be a line between *chedi* and *bot*, relics and Buddha statue, *wat* and king's ashes and even between two or more *wat*. In other words, this energized line could be understood as a line reaching through time and space, but also linking Buddhism and royalty, even royal patrons to other royal patrons. What Woodward's analysis demonstrates is that the *wat* and indeed its different architectural monuments should be studied as a physical and spiritual force within a matrix.

⁸⁷ In historical Sukhothai (13th to 15th century CE), the center of the *wat* is the *chedi*, yet the *vihan* is now, contrary to India and Sri Lanka, axially related to it, though most often from a distance. There are exceptions however. Both *vihan* at Wat Sra Si and Wat Mahathat are close to the main *chedi*. In Ayutthaya (14th to 18th century), though there is an increasing importance of the *ubosot*, the *vihan* is still the more prominent hall of the *wat* compound. It stands to the east of the *chedi*, often closer to it than its Sukhothai predecessor. Pichard, "Le hall d'ordination dans le monastère Thai," 130.

That Lampang Luang in Lampang, the main *vihan*'s plinth is roughly a meter away from the *chedi*'s railing.

The population does circumambulate clockwise around the *chedi* three times with candle, lotus bud and incense. Then they put these in front of the Buddha statue in the main *vihan*.⁸⁸ Yet the closest space around the *chedi* is often not accessible to women and the *chedi* itself is rarely 'touchable', that is the *chedi* itself is not bodily available to the congregation. Yet the space of the *vihan* is available and is indeed the center of the congregation's activity. The *chedi* is therefore imbued with symbolism, yet somewhat detached from the population. In Lan Na, it is the *vihan* that is more strongly imbued with the presence of the Buddha.

In northern Thai *wats* the main image hall is both the central space for devotional and ritual activities and the residence or dwelling place of the Buddha in much the same way that the *gandhakutī* (perfumed chamber) was the Buddha's residence in early Indian monasteries.⁸⁹

In historical Lan Na as well as modern Thailand, the most sanctified object of the *wat* is the image of the Buddha. Indeed Pichard and O'Connor see the change of monastic focus, from the *stupa* in India to the hall in historical Lan Na and Siam/Thailand, as a change of sanctity, from emphasizing the relics to focusing more on the image of the Buddha.⁹⁰ In other words, the relics had more importance in early Buddhist India, while in Thailand and historical Lan Na, it is the image of the Buddha that is more strongly imbued with the Buddha's power.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*, 33.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 41, 258 n35. Swearer follows Bandaranayake's analysis of Sinhalese archaeological terminology associating the image hall with the Buddha's original perfumed chamber in *Jetavana* Monastery.

⁹⁰ In his study of 38 Bangkok *wat*, O'Connor asked: "what is the most sacred object/element of this temple?" Thirty-five times out of thirty-eight, monks in residence answered that the statue of the Buddha was the most sacred. Two monks answered that the *chedi* was the most sacred, while at one *wat* it was the remains of the previous abbot. Taken from Pichard, "Le hall d'ordination dans le monastère Thaï," 136.

⁹¹ The importance of the relics has been the focus of important scholarly publications. On the other hand, the acknowledgement of the change of emphasis from relics to statue is somewhat recent in scholarly publications. Swearer's research on the consecration of the Buddha statue in northern Thailand is a great example of such new approach to the importance of the Buddha statue. Further research is needed however to fully understand this shift of monastic focus.

Indeed Swearer shows that for historical Lan Na the focus of the *wat* is the concept of the presence of the Buddha in the *vihan* through the Buddha statue. Swearer says that the Buddha image in the central *vihan* of historical Lan Na *wat* is not only a reminder of the Buddha, but “it is the central locus of [the] sacred space where devotees recall (*buddhānussati*) the Buddha and by that recalling enter into his very presence.”⁹² Indeed through elaborate rituals, Swearer explains that a statue will be imbued with the power and knowledge (of the *Dhamma*) of Gotama Buddha.⁹³ Hence, when the congregation goes to the *wat*, they can experience the presence of the Buddha inside the *vihan*.

The concept of the Buddha’s presence is interesting, yet problematic. Indeed the Buddha has ‘nibbānized’ or ‘parinibbānized’⁹⁴ and is therefore technically not ‘accessible’ anymore. Yet, as most visitors to Southeast Asia would concur, even though the Buddha has ‘nibbānized’, he is still ‘present’ in the visual culture. Strong gives a compelling description of the paradox of the ‘presence’ of the ‘nibbānized’ Buddha:

The paradox, of course, is that this has never stopped Buddhists from making offerings to the Buddha, from having faith in the Buddha, from bowing down to the Buddha, and engaging in all sorts of activities and sentiments vis-à-vis the Buddha that almost anywhere would qualify as worship. If the Buddha in nirvana has truly gone beyond, he nonetheless often seems to be remarkably “present”.⁹⁵

Yet, as Swearer explains, the statue of the Buddha acquires power of its own through the rituals performed for its consecration. The rituals focus on *Jataka* tales,

Yeneo Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*, trans. Peter Hawkes (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1986).

⁹² Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*, 41.

⁹³ Interestingly, other studies show that in other countries and other eras, the *stupa* is associated with the *Dhamma*, yet in Lan Na it is the statue of the Buddha that appears to be more strongly associated with the teaching of the Buddha. Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*; Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*.

⁹⁴ The term ‘nirvanized’ is Collins’. As *Nirvana/Nibbāna* is not a place *per se*, it is technically incorrect to say that a person has ‘reached’ or ‘attained’ *Nibbāna*. See Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities. Utopias of the Pali imaginaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193.

⁹⁵ Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka. A Study and Translation of the Asokavadana*, 102.

the life of prince Siddhartha, the life of Gotama Buddha and his enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, therefore moments in the life of Gotama Buddha and not his final Nibbāna.⁹⁶ So the statue goes through the life of Gotama Buddha and is imbued with his story and power. The statue has therefore independent power from the ‘nibbānized’ Buddha who has gone through *Parinibbāna*. Therefore, the presence felt is the presence of an enlightened being signifying a being of our historical temporal field.

The same thing happens with his relics. In Buddhism, a being is seen as an agglomeration of different aggregates, which, once *Parinibbāna* is attained, cease to exist or ‘agglomerate’. The only physical reminiscences of the Buddha are his bodily relics, such as his hair, bones and teeth.⁹⁷ “These continue to exist as relics, quite literally parts of the Buddha’s physical being in the same way that they were during his life, but now disconnected from the other physical and mental events which then occurred.”⁹⁸ In other words, these relics are related to Gotama Buddha while he was still alive, but relations ceased when he ‘nibbānized’. Therefore, the relics are independently powerful, with merit and power of their own because of their ‘former’ relation with the Buddha, but do not physically or temporally link this space with the ‘parinibbānized’ Buddha.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Donald K. Swearer, “Hypostasizing The Buddha: Buddha Image Consecration in Northern Thailand,” *History of Religions* vol.43, no.3, Image and Ritual in Buddhism (1995): 263-80; Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*, 108-15.

⁹⁷ Indeed, it is important to realize that not all relics are the same. Here Collins only talks of the physical remains of the Buddha, and not secondary relics, such as texts, pieces of cloths, modern images etc.

⁹⁸ Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities. Utopias of the Pali imaginaire*, 280.

⁹⁹ Though the relics may clearly be seen as signs of the Buddha, Collins also explains that they are definitely ‘effects’ of the Buddha as well. They therefore have a power of their own. Collins explains that most of the texts relating to relics are about the end of Buddhism and its revival with a future Buddha, or as some call it, millennialism. At the end of this Buddhist cycle or the era of the present Buddha, the relics will also stop performing miracles and even cease to exist. Some texts even talk about the final Nibbāna of the relics themselves, which would finally put an end to this Buddhist era and allow another to begin. The idea here is that only when the relics of the Buddha will disappear, which is inevitable as they are part of Samsara and therefore impermanent, will the era of Gotama Buddha end and the era of Buddha Metteya (skt Maitreya) start (though it is not clear if the era will start right away or some time will elapse between the two). However, this does not necessarily mean that there is a physical link with the Buddha, since Nibbāna has no physicality, but rather that the physical remains of his body are able to perform miracles. *Ibid*, 248; Stanley J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult*

As mentioned earlier, in Thailand and historical Lan Na it is the Buddha image that is the most sacred element of the *wat* and it is through the statue that the congregation can feel the presence of the Buddha. Indeed, in historical Lan Na, it is the *vihan* that is the focus of the congregation and the most important hall of the *wat*. Yet since the Bangkok era, the focus of the *wat* has changed, from the traditional northern line of power between the *chedi* and *vihan*, to the *ubosot*. In central Thailand, after the change of capital from Ayutthaya to Bangkok, the *ubosot* becomes the main building of the Thai *wat*, often separated from the other buildings, even having its own *rabiang* (gallery/cloister).¹⁰⁰

Pichard hypothesizes, quite convincingly, that the new importance of the *ubosot* since the Bangkok era is due to the intense centralization and institutionalization of the *Sangha* during the 19th and early 20th century.¹⁰¹ By making the *ubosot* the most important monument of the *wat*, it gave a higher status, indeed a separate status, to the *Sangha* itself, reflecting the politics behind the *Sangha's* centralization. Furthermore, the *ubosot* now has a royal connotation, which is also linked to the new centralization of the administration. Indeed since the early 20th century only the king has the right to authorize the new construction of an *ubosot*.¹⁰² This helped the central government to control new monasteries under a central *Sangha*. The new *ubosot* is therefore a symbol of the modern, centralized government of the late 19th and 20th century, both political and religious. I agree with Pichard that the new importance of the *ubosot* can be seen as the product of intense centralization and institutionalization of the *Sangha*. Yet the lack of an *ubosot* in a regional *wat* is not necessarily an expression of regional resistance. Many factors come into play when building a temple, the financial situation of the

of Amulets (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 375, note 11. For an analysis of the dichotomy of relics and images, see Richard Gombrich, "Merit Transference" in Sinhalese Buddhism: A Case Study of the Interaction between Doctrine and Practice," *History of Religions* 11, no. 2 (1971): 203-19.

¹⁰⁰ Pichard, "Le hall d'ordination dans le monastère Thaï," 134.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 138-39; Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*, 43. Even today, to build an *ubosot*, the community needs the approbation of the Government, department of religious affairs.

community being one.¹⁰³ The two *wat* studied in this dissertation have very different layouts. The visual focus of the first is the *ubosot*, while the other is the *vihan* and the *chedi*, while its *ubosot* is smaller and to the side, like earlier Lan Na temples. I believe the differentiation of the layouts can be linked to the modern architectural changes Pichard explains.

I agree with Pichard that the new importance of the *ubosot* can be seen as the product of intense centralization and institutionalization of the Sangha. Yet the lack of an *ubosot* in a regional *wat* is not necessarily an expression of regional resistance. Many factors come into play when building a temple, the financial situation of the community being one.¹⁰⁴ Yet the two *wat* studied in this dissertation have very different layouts. The visual focus of the first is the *ubosot*, while the other is the *vihan* and the *chedi*, while its *ubosot* is smaller and to the side, like earlier Lan Na temples. I believe the differentiation of the layouts can be linked to the modern architectural changes Pichard explains.

Furthermore, though the new modern *ubosot* is now related to royalty, historically in both Thailand and Lan Na, the *chedi* is the monument with the strongest royal symbolism. Indeed if historically the *ubosot* is associated with the *Sangha* and the *vihan* with the population, then the *chedi* could have been and could still be associated with the royalty. For example the *chedi* at Wat Mahathat Haripunchai in Lamphun was constructed in 1150 [Fig. 8]. However, between 1150 and 1448, the Chedi was ‘ameliorated’ five times, either by adding molding, gilding or enlarging the entire structure. This practice was common in historical Lan Na and is still practiced today, in contemporary Thailand. These ameliorations and additions were partly performed to link the most recent patrons with previous historical patrons or historical moments.¹⁰⁵ Most of the royal *chedi* we see today are the outer layers of complex historical programs designed to preserve the past while enhancing or preserving the latest patron’s social status.

¹⁰³ I do thank Dr. Sandra Cate for her comments on this issue.

¹⁰⁴ I do thank Dr. Sandra Cate for her comments on this issue.

¹⁰⁵ Denis Byrne, “Buddhist Stupa and Thai Social Practice,” *World Archaeology* 27, no. 2 (1995): 266-81.

Moreover, after the second half of the 19th century, the Thai monarchs were “intent upon reinforcing the perceived lines of connection between Buddhism, the kingship and the modern nation state.”¹⁰⁶ The ‘regions’ were assimilated by Bangkok central power and Thai culture was ‘officialized’. As shown earlier, part of this ‘officialization’ of the Thai culture was based on its historical legitimacy, something confirmed by its bond to historical Tai cultures, such as Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. Thai culture is defined as ‘*Thainess*,’ something which, according to the 19th century Thai monarchs, already existed in the early Tai states. Thainess or *khwampenthai* (ความเป็นไทย) “was thought of as ... springing primevally from the soil of Siam.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, it was important for the Thai political figures, as well as the new Thai nation as a whole, to have a link to an historical past, if the culture was to be ‘official’ and strong enough to survive Western colonialism. Monarchs founded monasteries and restored ancient monuments across Thailand, to create a link with all the historical regions of the new country that was now Siam, later to be called Thailand.¹⁰⁸

The renovation of ancient monuments not only serves as a tool for historical legitimacy, but to achieve religious legitimacy as well. Indeed building or restoring religious monuments is an act of merit. In fact, building temples and other religious structures is ranked the highest in the hierarchy of ‘merituous’ acts.¹⁰⁹ As explained in the previous chapter, throughout Thai history the political élite supported

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 277.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Pichard, “Le hall d’ordination dans le monastère Thaï,” 136. Indeed, like it was the case in Lan Na, the legitimacy of the modern and the ‘new’ was often acquired through the re-localization of statues from ancient kingdoms, such as from Sukhothai to Bangkok, or Lan Na’s regions to its political center, Chiang Mai. As Pichard explains, for Bangkok, it was part of the centralization and legitimization of the modern through a direct physical link with the past.

¹⁰⁹ Byrne, “Buddhist Stupa and Thai Social Practice,” 272; Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 146-47. Tambiah’s research of 1970, when he interviewed 72 Thai households, shows that financing the entire building of a *wat* was the most important act of merit someone could do. In his 1953 studies, Kaufman interviewed 22 people and came with a slightly different ranking of meriteous acts, with ‘becoming a monk’ ranking first and financing entire monasteries ranking second. See Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*, 17-18.

Buddhism and in turn used Buddhism to legitimize their positions.¹¹⁰ Indeed as previously explained, the elite's understanding of merit-making supports the social hierarchy. That is not to say however that Thai people in general are not interested in merit-making or that they do not give money for the building or the restoration of temples. Yet only the rich and powerful are able to be a primary patron. Indeed, building and renovating temples is not affordable to everyone, only the rich and powerful can afford to do so, ensuring that this social group will accumulate the most merit. This also implies however, that the elite need to continue being patron of religious complexes to keep their hierarchical positions. In other words, to keep the balance of power, royalty needs to act like royalty; building religious monuments, such as halls and *chedi*, is a way to ensure that the hierarchical balance is kept.

Moreover, though the construction of great halls (*vihan* or *ubosot*) or of a *chedi* is an act of merit and will therefore ensure a great amount of good *kamma*, tradition also implies that for a construction to be successful, the patron needs to *already* have a great amount of accumulated merit. Byrne gives the example of King Mongkrut and the restoration of Phra Pathom at Nakhon Pathom. "Mongkrut believed his store of merit was equal to the task, and the project confirmed the truth of this in the eyes of the world and redounded to the prestige of his dynasty."¹¹¹ Therefore, by successfully constructing large Buddhist monuments, a patron not only acquires merit for his or her future birth, but also proves his or her *current* store of merit, confirming the current hierarchical order.

If a prince or a king does not have enough merit to build or restore a religious monument, he certainly does not have enough merit to rule. The peace of the

¹¹⁰ A. Brand, "Merit, Hierarchy and royal gift-giving in traditional Thai society," *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land- en Volkenkunde* 131, no. 1 (1975), 115-17. Brand relates how royal chronicles of the modern era emphasize the number of temples that were built and renovated by each king. Furthermore, during the reign of Rama III (r.1824-1851) temples built by individuals were often presented as gifts to the king, as temples were often seen as the patron's private property. Though Brand explains that we should translate 'private property' not as a possession of a physical building, but "as an established means of acquiring merit by maintaining the temple and providing the monks with food and other necessities." Therefore, it is the temple itself, the physicality of the monuments that was given to the king, but a means to acquire merit.

¹¹¹ Byrne, "Buddhist Stupa and Thai Social Practice," 272.

kingdom depends of the merit of its rulers. Restoring religious monuments ensure the population that the rulers have enough merit to do so. Yet, as explained earlier, in historical Lan Na it also meant that the temple became imbued with royal power, which was too powerful for the laity to withstand, making these temples and *chedi* taboos for the commoner.¹¹²

Summary

The main monuments of Lan Na and Thai *wat*, the *vihan*, *ubosot* and *chedi*, find their origins in earlier Indian and Sri Lankan models. Yet these monuments progressed over time and between cultures, so that local meanings, forms, symbolisms and nomenclature have changed considerably.

The style of Lan Na religious monuments is more organic than its stylized Bangkok counterparts. The *vihan* are much lower and larger than the Bangkok high and narrow halls. The *chedi* are also different with a very short middle body while the base takes sometimes more than half of the full *chedi*'s height.

The Lan Na *wat* decorations are also usually more organic while Bangkok ones are more stylized, though the represented subjects, such as the *naga* and the *hongsa* are found on the same finials, yet there is a greater flexibility of subject in Lan Na. In historical Lan Na and Thailand, the *vihan* stood for the lay community, as it was in the *vihan* that the lay community could find the most important element of the *wat*, the main Buddha statue. The *ubosot* is for the *Sangha*. In historical Lan Na, the *ubosot* is part of the *Sanghawwat*, while in Thailand, it is part of the *Buddhawat*. This change of focus from the *vihan* to the *ubosot* in central Thailand also reflects the centralization of Thailand and the importance of a central *Sangha*. The *ubosot* is visually less important in Lan Na while it has therefore become the center of the *wat* during the Bangkok era. This change of focus is due to the centralization of Thailand and the *Sangha* during the Bangkok era. Yet even in the Bangkok era, the most

¹¹² Some royal monasteries with important relics were pilgrimage sites during the 12 months Lan Na religious calendar. Sommai Premchit and Pierre Doré, *The Lan Na Twelve-month Traditions: An Ethno-historic and Comparative Approach* (Chiang Mai: Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, 1991), 76, 125-29.

important element of the *wat* is the main Buddha image, as it is imbued with the power and knowledge of Gotama Buddha.

Chapter 5 Wat Rong Khun and Chalermchai

We now turn to the description and analysis of the first of the two case studies mentioned in chapter 2. This chapter is an analysis of the White Temple by artist Chalermchai Kositpipat in relation to Chalermchai's oeuvre, its place within the neo-traditionalist artistic movement in Thailand and to Thailand's political and religious context before and after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. In this chapter, I will argue that the White Temple mostly follows, and therefore supports the ideologies of central Thai Buddhism, which is seen as part of a national propaganda supporting social hierarchy and nationalistic ideas. I will argue that this temple follows the established neo-traditionalist artistic movement upholding the conventional nationalist discourses since the late 19th century.

This chapter will begin by briefly looking at other works by Chalermchai, so the White Temple can be situated within the artist's career and his artistic goals. I will then focus on the White Temple and its artistic details. I will show that one of Chalermchai's main goals is to build a temple that will become a paradigm of nationalism.

This chapter will show how Chalermchai uses central Thai Buddhism as well as some elements of traditional Lan Na art and culture to achieve his goals.

Chalermchai's short biography

Chalermchai is well known in Thailand to both the artistic community as well as the general population.¹ His career is interesting and still rising; his art is flamboyant and nationalistic. He is notorious for his high-spirited personality and strong confidence in his own art for both its cultural and monetary value.² At the same

¹ This artistic community is to be understood as an artistically aware or involved, loosely constitutes community. This artistic community is composed of other Thai artists, Thai (trained in Thailand or in the West) art historians, critics, curators and people involved in the art market. Chalermchai occupies an interesting and enviable position in this artistic community, both locally (Chiang Rai) and nationally.

² As Cate explains "through his dramatic, sometimes melodramatic, self-representations, combative interviews, and role in producing exhibition openings as spectacles, Chalermchai commands such attention as a "public personality." Following Cate's analysis, in Thailand, ambitious individuals "relentlessly cultivate distinctive and often controversial public personae as

time, his art is so sought after that it has commanded prices that only a few members of the Thai population can afford.³ Though this is a general rule of the art market, in Thailand many of Chalermchai's patrons buy his art for nationalist reasons rather than economic ones.⁴ Furthermore, as Apinan explains, in Thailand many young artists measure success by sales alone, which makes Chalermchai very successful in the minds of many.⁵

Chalermchai was born in the village of Rhong Khun in Chiang Rai, on February 15, 1955, as the third child in a family of four sons. According to his biography, his father and mother were not compatible, so he and his siblings had a difficult childhood.⁶ Chalermchai recalls how his parents often disagreed and fought. The family had a small store, where his mother worked frequently alone, as his father spent time gambling. Chalermchai says that he was a difficult child, prone to violence and disorder. He even tried to stab his own brother while he was still in primary school. He was not a good student, failing exams and even degrees. As he himself explains, he was only interested in drawing and playing. Drawing was how he escaped what he calls a 'broken household.'⁷

a means of garnering money, status, followers, customers, and even historical stature." Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 126.

³ Ibid, 150-52; Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 74-75.

⁴ Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 126.

⁵ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 174. Interestingly, a few young artists in Chiang Rai, are less attracted by 'commercial' success. One artist in particular is devoted to building Chiang Rai's artistic community rather than his own personal financial gain. Yet that is not to say that financial difficulties do not occur and are not a burden for young Chiang Rai artists. However, the strong commercial politic adopted by Chalermchai Kositpipat is not shared by everyone. The Land Foundation Project in Chiang Mai would be a good example of a non-commercial artistic enterprise that influenced some northern Thai artists.

⁶ Chalermchai Kositpipat and Phetchayoupha Bourisirijarougnrat, ไม่ธรรมดา เฉลิมชัย โฆษิตพิพัฒน์/*Unusual, Chalermchai Kositpipat* (Bangkok: Phim kreagn reak, 2549), 181-82; Thopong Sewatham and Soupara Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/The drawing of my life* (Chiang Rai: Wat Rong Khun, 2549), 20-23; Chalermchai Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, trans. Malithat Promathatavedi (Bangkok: Amarin, 2005), 33-34.

⁷ Kositpipat and Bourisirijarougnrat, ไม่ธรรมดา เฉลิมชัย โฆษิตพิพัฒน์/*Unusual, Chalermchai Kositpipat*, 181-82; Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life* (Bangkok: Amarin publication, 2548), 20-23; Chalermchai Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, trans. Malithat Promathatavedi (Bangkok: Amarin, 2005), 33-34. Chalermchai's biography is available at Wat Rong Khun's shop in different formats.

Chalermchai followed a standard artistic education in Thailand, first going to Poh Chang School in Bangkok, then Silpakorn University.⁸ He graduated from Silpakorn in 1978 with a degree in Thai Art. This major had been recently opened and he was of the first class to graduate, along with other neo-traditional artists, like Panya Vijinthanasarn.⁹ In 1977, while he was still a senior student, Chalermchai won the first prize at Bua Luang Art contest, then 2nd prize, again at Bua Luang exhibit in 1979 and the same year the bronze medal at the 25th National Exhibition of Art: the National Exhibition is generally viewed as the most important art exhibit in Thailand.¹⁰

After graduation Chalermchai started painting as a freelance artist and, most likely due to his victory at Bua Luang Art exhibit in 1977, had a successful early career. However, as explained in his biography, his early life as an artist was confused and misguided; he was prideful, visited the whorehouses regularly and was focused only on dreams of ‘becoming someone’ and conquering the world at any cost. In the early 1980’s, he saw a way to acquire such recognition: painting the *ubosot* at Wat Buddhapadipa in Wimbledon, England.

Murals at Wat Buddhapadipa

The *ubosot* was built to promote Buddhism in a non-Buddhist territory, England. Having numerous sponsors, both private and governmental, it was the first Thai temple outside Thailand to be built as a representation of *Thainess*, following a traditional Bangkok style of architecture.¹¹ The *ubosot* was dedicated in 1982, at a

⁸ See pages 36-37 of this dissertation. Mukdamanee, “Development of Contemporary Art in Thailand,” 136; Michaelsen, “State Building and Thai Painting and Sculpture in the 1930s and 1940s,” 62; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 34-37; Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life*, 67-73; Kositpipat and Bourisirijarougnrat, *ไม่ธรรมดา เฉลิมชัย โฆษิตพิพัฒน์/Unusual, Chalermchai Kositpipat*, 193-213. If a student has no official artistic training, as it was the case with Chalermchai, he or she will go to Poh Chang School first, before going to Silpakorn University.

⁹ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 176.

¹⁰ Winning at the National Exhibition is more prestigious than winning at Bua Luang, something Chalermchai downplays, by boasting, even today, about his 1977 first prize, never mentioning his 1979 third position. See pages 41-42 of this dissertation.

¹¹ Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 17-35; Silpakorn University Faculty of Architecture, “พระอุโบสถวัดพุทธที่ป/Ubosot of Wat Buddha Patheep,” in

cost of 7.6 million *baht*. After the *ubosot's* dedication Khun Sawet, a pious Buddhist and chairman of the executive board of the London Buddhist Temple Foundation, looked for artists who could finish the project by painting murals. This took him two years. As Cate relates it, one day, unannounced, Chalermchai Kositpipat and his friend Panya Vijnthanasarn knocked on his door and proposed themselves as muralists for the Wimbledon project. After asking for their portfolios and samples of their work, Khun Sawet hired them for the job.¹² Chalermchai and Panya were not asking for salaries; only that their lodging, food and working material be provided by Khun Sawet.

When they met Khun Sawet in Thailand, they believed that they would be able to finish the murals in only one year, with only two assistants, at a cost of one million baths.¹³ In the end the project finally took 8 years and 28 assistants, all of them working 'for free' as an act of merit. Because of the rising cost of the murals, Khun Sawet, as well as Chalermchai and Panya, conducted fund raising both in England and Thailand. Cate mentions that Chalermchai was highly successful at promoting the temple as well as his and the other artists' benevolent works in an attempt to raise awareness of the project and help fund raising.¹⁴ As Apinan says, many Thai artists follow Andy Warhol's comments on art and business, i.e. that good business is the best art.¹⁵ Early in his career, Chalermchai understood this concept and promoting his work at Wimbledon was one of his first steps in what has become a life-long marketing strategy. As Cate explains, he used his particularly vibrant personality – she talks of his dramatic, even melodramatic public persona – to promote the temple as well as the concept of merit-making to appeal to the Thai population.¹⁶ This continues with the promotion of Wat Rong Khun.

Since Cate has already studied the murals at Wimbledon in detail, I will only mention two images relevant to the study of the White Temple in Chiang Rai:

พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวกับสถาปัตยกรรมไทย / *King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Thai architecture* (Bangkok: Silpakorn University, 2548).

¹² Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 37.

¹³ *Ibid*, 3, 37-38.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 38.

¹⁵ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 174.

¹⁶ Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 37.

Chalermchai's *Traiphum* and Panya's *Defeat of Mara*.¹⁷ These two murals are important both as comparative material and because they provide an early look at what Chalermchai wanted to achieve with neo-traditionalist painting in a Buddhist temple context.

When comparing Chalermchai's image at Wimbledon with earlier Thai temple murals models, we find that though he keeps important traditional details, he also diverges significantly from tradition.¹⁸ The artist explains that at Wat Buddhapadipa, the representation of the "Buddhist cosmology is more complete than anywhere else."¹⁹ Indeed, he explains that his *Traiphum* represents four Realms instead of the usual three; he describes his *Traiphum* as a representation of hell, human world, heavens and *Nibbāna* [Fig. 31]. Indeed, Chalermchai's artistic goal was to improve on tradition by producing a modern work of art. In other words, he wanted to paint something new.²⁰

At Wat Buddhapadipa, hell is represented on the lower section of the wall, at the level of the Buddha statue's podium. This section is very dark and visually separated from the realm of the earth by a clearly painted boundary of earth or soil; the text of the *Traiphum Phra Ruang* explains that hell is below the realm of humans. Above this, half of the wall is taken up by the Earthly realm. At the centre of the mural, he has represented different deities, *arahants* and enlightened beings. While there is a central palace, like in traditional murals, there is no representation of Mount Meru. It is the Buddha however, not the usual Indra, who is inside this

¹⁷ Ibid; Chalermchai Kositpipat, Panya Vijinthanasarn and Sompop Budrat, *The Mural Paintings of Wat BuddhaPadipa*, trans. Mira Kim Prachabarn and Pongsak Kanjanakpandh (Bangkok: Khana Chittrakon Asasamak, 1987). Though he and Panya were the two artistic supervisors, neither of them was responsible for the completion of all the murals. For Wat Buddhapadipa, Chalermchai is responsible for the designs of two walls out of four within the main hall, Panya being responsible for the two others. Of the murals designed by Chalermchai, the most important are the *Traiphum* behind the main statue of the Buddha, the *Parinibbāna*, the Buddha Preaching to His Mother and the Descent from Davadeugn (ดาวดึงส์, *Tavatimsa in Pali*) Heaven. The most important murals by Panya are the Defeat of Mara, the Birth of the Buddha and the First Sermon.

¹⁸ Ibid, 20-23.

¹⁹ Ibid, 79.

²⁰ Ibid. Indeed he has written that his artistic goal at Wimbledon was to make something *new* and by doing so, not necessarily rejects Thai mural tradition, but improve upon it.

central palace.²¹ Though there are columns rising from the water, their number is not in accordance with the *Traiphum* text. Indeed, the *Traiphum* is specific in its description of the universe, with seven seas and seven worlds, represented as mountain range, circling around Mount Meru. In a traditional mural such as Wat Suwannaram, the circling mountain range and oceans are cut in half at the middle; therefore, we see seven columns of rocks – representing the mountains – on each side on Mount Meru. But at Wat Buddhapadipa there are four columns of rocks rising from a great ocean, while several more mountain ranges are painted on the horizon. Thus, this mural does not follow the layout of traditional representations.

On the upper register of the mural are several deities inside floating palaces, as is traditionally the case. There are also empty abodes with small lights or lotus buds at their centers. On a traditional mural, these empty abodes would represent the World of Non-Form. Yet here they are at the same level as abodes with deities normally representing the World of Form. The division between the Worlds of Form and Non-Form is therefore somewhat lost. Furthermore, at the very top of the mural, Chalermchai painted *Nibbāna*. Here, *Nibbāna* is represented by the five Buddha of our eon,²² with a central image of the current Buddha when he attained *Parinibbāna*. Chalermchai has represented *Nibbāna* with its own mountains, oceans and starry sky. Therefore, visually, *Nibbāna* is separated from the other realms and worlds, though its presence is still problematic from a Buddhological perspective.²³ The problem of representing *Nibbāna* will be studied in more detail in the section on Wat Rong Khun. Suffice here to say that the *Traiphum Phra Ruang* is clear, *Nibbāna* is not considered part of the three worlds, but ‘is outside’ of it. According to this logic, it should not be represented.

²¹ Coedes and Archaimbault, *Les trois mondes (Traibhumi Brah Ruan)*, 154. According to the *Traiphum*, it is the god of gods, Indra, who lives on top of Mount Meru and who is therefore represented in the central palace of the *Traiphum* image.

²² Kositpipat, Vijnthanasarn and Budrat, *The Mural Paintings of Wat BuddhaPadipa*, 87. The five Buddhas of our eon are Kakusandha, Konagamana, Kassapa, Gotama and Metteya. *Dialogues of the Buddha. Translated from the Pali of the Digha Nikaya*, trans. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, vol. III (London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1959), part II, chapter 14.

²³ The theological problems brought by a representation of *Nibbāna* will be dealt with in greater detail in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Yet Chalermchai's representation of the *Traiphum* shares similarities with earlier models of the Ayutthaya and Bangkok eras, for example, the largest part of the murals is used for the Realm of Desire (though Chalermchai does not call it so).²⁴ Deities are also represented conventionally as they are calmly standing without expressions, which is characteristic of high beings, since they should not be affected by desires, needs or wants. He also represents scenes of Thai daily life, something also found in the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*. However, the main departures from traditional murals are Chalermchai's description of the *Traiphum* with the representation of *Nibbāna* and the amalgamations of the different heavens into one group rather than separating the World of Form and the World of Non-Form. Furthermore, in *The mural paintings of Wat Buddhapadipa*, a book published after the completion of the murals, Chalermchai describes his painting of the *Traiphum*, the mural behind the statue of the Buddha, as a representation of the three worlds of hell, earth and heavens, with the addition of *Nibbāna*.²⁵ Yet this description of the *Traiphum* is not totally accurate, as the *Traiphum* is a complex cosmological representation of the Worlds of Desire, Form and Non-Form. His description of the *Traiphum* as being 'hell, earth and heaven' collapses with the complexity of the cosmological text that is the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*.²⁶

²⁴ See note 26 below.

²⁵ Ibid, 79.

²⁶ However, Chalermchai's description however more accurately describes another Thai 'three worlds,' the one of the 'Opening of the three worlds' or *perd saam lok* (เปิดสามโลก) represented on the sidewall of the hall. The descent of the Buddha from the heaven where he had been teaching his mother is an important Buddhist account, which is part of the Pali Canon. While descending on earth after visiting and teaching his mother in the Davadeugn heaven (ดาวดึงส์) (second heaven of the World of Desire), a link was made between three different realms of rebirth: hell, earth (humans) and heavens of the World of Desire. These three worlds are not the same as the three worlds of the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*, but show three different levels of rebirth within the world of desire. This text is about differentiating three very different realms of rebirth – hell, human and heavens – to make a visual comparison and moral point easily understandable to visitors. Though both of the terms, *Traiphum* and *Saam Lok*, literally mean 'three worlds' they do not refer to the same cosmological concepts and, to my knowledge, are generally not used interchangeably.

Another important mural at Wat Buddhapadipa in Wimbledon England is the *The Attack and Defeat of Mara and the Enlightenment*, by Panya Vijnthanasarn [Fig. 30]. This image is on the entrance wall, opposite the *Traiphum*. The defeat of Mara is an important traditional representation, where three important moments are usually presented simultaneously: the attack by Mara's army, the enlightenment where the Buddha takes Mae Phra Thorani (แม่พระธรณี) as a witness to his great deeds, and the subsequent flooding of Mara's army by Mae Phra Thorani. Though Mara is sometimes interpreted as a fallen god, an evil being no different than the Christian's Devil,²⁷ Mara is in fact the ruler of the world of desire. As the Buddha was meditating under the *Bodhi* tree, Mara tried to stop him from reaching enlightenment. He first sent his daughters to tempt the future Buddha, then, after they failed, he sent his army to attack him. Yet, the Buddha remained calm in the face of turmoil. The defeat of Mara coincides with the very moment of the Buddha's enlightenment, since the god of desire failed to prevent it. When the Buddha reached enlightenment, he called the Mother Earth as a witness, by touching the ground with his right hand. When the Buddha takes her as a witness, she also helps vanquish Mara's army by drowning them with water flowing from her hair.

Though this image of the *Defeat of Mara* is by Panya Vijnthanasarn, it is important to describe, as it will become an important source of inspiration for Chalermchai's own *Defeat of Mara* at Wat Rong Khun. Panya's representation shows similarities with traditional Thai murals but his work, even more strongly than Chalermchai's, departs from tradition. Apinan even uses the term post-modernism to describe the Defeat of Mara by Panya.²⁸ Yet, Panya's work, following the traditional

²⁷ Prebish and Keown, *Buddhism the eBook, an online introduction*, 65.

²⁸ Though Apinan also uses the term post-modern to describe Chalermchai's work at Wat Buddhapadipa, the praising vocabulary he uses to describe Panya's work is telling. "He cleverly reinterprets modern myths, politics, and art through the conventions of commentary and exegesis." Apinan Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford and New York: Oxford university Press, 1992),199. The goal of this dissertation is not to identify or categorize the modern or post-modern aspects of either Chalermchai's Wat Rong Khun or Somluk's Wat Pa'O. However it is important to acknowledge that the debate of modernism versus post-modernism has received interesting scholarly debates, including discussions over the actual legitimacy of post-modernism. Indeed at the CIHA conference in January 2008, during the period for questions after the session 'The Idea of World Art History,' a debate was launch on the

Thai artistic convention, still shows a vertical axis dividing the mural in two sections. There is also a difference in colors between the higher section with the Buddha and *deva* and the lower section with Mara and his army. The radiant Buddha is sitting on a lotus-like pedestal with the 'taking the Earth as a witness' *mudra*. The *Bodhi* tree is highly stylized, its branches fanning like soft purple feathers. Two groups of six *deva* are arching on the lower sides of the sitting Buddha, while four more are floating, either towards or away from the Buddha. Mara's army takes more than two thirds of the wall. This section is eclectic as well as intricate. The soldiers on the left of the Buddha are actively attacking him, throwing multiple arrows and spears, one even has a bazooka, while the ones on the right of the Buddha are holding flowers and are paying homage to him. Some soldiers are on the back of elephants. While the riding demons are stylized, the elephants they are riding are relatively natural, but one of them, on the left of the Buddha, has what appears to be shadow demons on its front legs, a city on its underbelly and other devilish creatures on its hind legs. This 'shadowy' effect is used again on the eyebrows, upper and lower lips, as well as of Mara's fangs. These shadows appear to be illusions, other armies on different visual planes than the main one. These visual effects are interesting and reflect Mara as god of illusion and deception. Coming out of Mara's mouth are more demons and beasts, moving up the wall, attacking the Buddha to his left, or to his right, fleeing down the flood coming-out of the goddess' hair. All of this gives the mural a dynamic movement from right to left. The two thirds of the wall representing Mara's army is chaotic, contrasting with the calm and peaceful upper section inhabited by the Buddha. Furthermore, though most of Mara's army is made of stylized representations of *yak* (giants/demons), there are also some foreigners, such as an 18th century British soldier and a Japanese Samurai. There are also creatures that are neither human nor traditional Thai demons. For example, on the left hand side, under the elephant

validity of the term post-modern, especially regarding non-western art. Also see for example Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 5-52; Rey Chow, "Postmodern Automatons," in *Writing Diaspora. Tactics of intervention in contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

holding a flag, there is a demon with a traditional body, with the golden head of an insect. Further to the left, under the hind leg of the elephant, there is a soldier with a mask resembling an early 20th century pilot headset, with a Nazi swastika on the its side. On the right-hand side, under the hind legs of the elephant, there is a soldier with the purple head of a human with the body of a robot. The army is therefore eclectic and appeals to a wide audience, with Thai, foreigners and 'hybrids', as well as traditional and contemporary references.

As the artists explain, they wanted to paint a Thai temple, but with modern or contemporary elements, bringing Thai mural painting to a higher level.²⁹ Both artists wanted to produce modern works of art departing from previous historical Thai murals. Yet both artists achieved their goal differently. Indeed, with his *Defeat of Mara*, Panya adds to our understanding of Buddhism, for example by illustrating the illusory nature of reality with the imagery of the second army found on the legs of the elephants and fangs of Mara. Chalermchai on the other hand departs from the traditional representation by adding new dimensions to the subject represented. In other words, Panya's work is different because he explores the theme with new artistic vocabulary; Chalermchai's work is different because he alters the subject. Panya therefore focuses on the artistic representation while Chalermchai goes further and alters the Buddhist subject. These two images are important in relation to what Chalermchai will later do at Wat Rong Khun. At Wat Rong Khun Chalermchai goes further and brings the two concepts (new artistic vocabulary and alteration of the subject) together. It is my opinion that Chalermchai's work at Wat Rong Khun shows greater artistic maturity than his work at Wat Buddhapadipa, yet some of the elements present at Wat Rong Khun can be traced backed to the earlier temple.³⁰

Though some of the murals such as those in the side room at Wat Buddhapadipa were not completed until 1992, Chalermchai returned to Thailand in

²⁹ Kositpipat, Vjinhthanasarn and Budrat, *The Mural Paintings of Wat BuddhaPadipa*, 20 -25.

³⁰ Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 199-200.

1988.³¹ When he came back from London, he started to rebuild his fortune, as he had spent most of his assets on the Wimbledon project.³²

Wat Rong Khun

As explained in chapter 2, Wat Rong Khun is a small temple outside the city of Chiang Rai, in the village of Rong Khun. The original temple was built in 1957 under the direction of abbot Phra Khru Chakhriyanuyut (พระครูชาคะริบานุต). In 1990, the dining hall and the great entrance gate were built. Five years later, with the financial help of the village temple goers, the abbot built a herbal sauna for the treatment of drug addicts. The same year, 1995, the villagers also decided to rebuild the main hall, which at 38 years old, had become a nesting ground for bats, making it unsuitable for religious ceremonies. The old hall was thus destroyed and the villagers began building a new one on February 3, 1996. Unfortunately, due to the financial crash of 1997, the villagers were not able to continue the project and the construction came to a stand still, with only the foundation and the frame standing.³³

Because Rong Khun is his home village, Chalermchai decided to offer his services to the temple and finish the work as an “offering to the Lord Buddha as the “art of the land” out of his own pocket.”³⁴ As Ajarn Don Chairat³⁵ mentions in his compilation of the history of Wat Rong Khun, Chalermchai has altered the design of the previous project to such an extent that it bears no resemblance to the 1996 design. From the start, Chalermchai wished to build a temple that would make an impression on both Thai and foreigners alike.³⁶

³¹ Kositpipat and Bourisirijarougrat, ไมธรรมดา เฉลิมชัย โฆษิตพิพัฒน์/*Unusual, Chalermchai Kositpipat*, 227.

³² Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 118-19.

³³ Don Chairat, “The History of Wat Rong Khun,” in *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land* (Bangkok: Amarin, 2005), 73-77.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁵ Ajarn is a title for a teacher. It is used for teachers and professors, as well as someone dispensing knowledge, such as a master who would be called *adjarn* by his or her apprentices.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The original 1957 temple complex was located on four *rai*, the equivalent of 6400m² land.³⁷ Chalermchai added one *rai* and 200 square *wa* to the south of the great hall then Khun Wanchai Wirchayachakhon (คุณวันชัย วิชญชาคร) gave an additional 5 *rai* and 300 square *wa* to the west of the hall. The complex is now very large for a simple *ban* temple, with 10 *rai* and 100 square *wa* or 16400 m².³⁸ Before they were transformed, the plots of land that were either given or bought were rice fields worked by local farmers. All of the previous buildings, including the ones built only a few years earlier, like the sauna and the main gate, were destroyed to make place for nine new buildings.

Inspiration for the Project

Chalermchai has written that this temple is a gift to the Nation, Buddhism and the current King of Thailand, Rama IX.³⁹ This parallels the three pillars of Thai nationalism, issued by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). Indeed King Rama VI saw the essence of the Thai nation as being the royalty, Buddhism and the nation as people.⁴⁰ These three pillars of nationalism are still a strong ideology in contemporary Thailand. Indeed King Rama VI was a strong promoter of Thai nationalism, to the expense of other religions found in Thailand, such as Islam, and different ethnic identities, such as the Chinese.⁴¹

General vision of the complex

When Chalermchai started the project, only the main hall and its immediate surroundings were to be redesigned, as was the villagers' previous goal. Yet while the main hall was well underway, he realized that the rest of the complex looked at odds with the white hall he had designed. In other words the discrepancy in style

³⁷ One *rai* is the equivalent of 1600 square meter (400X400m). There are 400 *wa* in one *rai*, therefore one *wa* is 4 square meter or 2X2m.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 19-23; Chalermchai Kositpipat, "Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple,").

⁴⁰ Wyatt, *Thailand, a Short History*, 216; Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, xvi, 139-40.

⁴¹ Wyatt, *Thailand, a Short History*, 216; Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*.

and aesthetic between the old buildings and the new hall was too great.⁴² It was then that he envisioned the great Buddhist complex currently under construction.⁴³

Chalermchai's current vision includes nine main buildings; the *bot*, the relic pavilion, the image pavilion, a preaching hall, a contemplation hall, the monks' cells, an art gallery with a gift shop, the bathroom and the crematorium. The buildings are separated into three groups, the *Buddhawat* or the section for the Buddha, the *Sanghawatt* or the section for the monks, and the *Kharawat* or the sections for the lay people [Fig. 32].⁴⁴ In Lan Na as well as the rest of Thailand since the Sukhothai era, monastic architecture is clearly divided in two, the *Buddhawatt* (Buddhavāsa in Pali) and the *Sanghawatt* (Sanghavāsa in Pali).⁴⁵ The boundary between the two is one that people can cross however. For example lay people have access to certain sections of the *Sanghawatt* and the monks obviously have access to the *Buddhawatt*. Yet in northern Thailand the *Buddhawatt* is where the lay population goes to be in the presence of the Buddha, while they go to the *Sanghawatt* to talk to the monks. At Wat Rong Khun, Chalermchai has added one more section, the *Kharawat* for the lay population. Yet we should not think of this space as the only space accessible to the laity, on the contrary, the lay population is welcome to the *Buddhawatt* and to certain parts of the *Sanghawatt*. Yet, I argue that the *Kharawat* should be seen as the space that is least associated with Buddhist devotion, the space that is the least sanctified and the worldliest.⁴⁶

⁴² Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life*, 213. The first project included the main hall as we see it today, with the high plinth and the elaborate finials. The front bridge was also there, yet without the Mouth of Mara. The front pool was also rectangular rather than ovoid and much smaller than the present pool.

⁴³ Ibid, 213-14. The expansion of the complex did not happen at once however; he bought new land adjacent to the temple's lot to accommodate the increasing size of the project. He then asked a Bangkok landowner to give even more land at the back of the temple to further increase the temple's dimension and build a parking lot.

⁴⁴ Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*, 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid; Michel Marlière, *Étude d'un groupe de trois monastères bouddhiques sis à Thonburi, Thaïlande : essai de sociographie bouddhique* (Genève and Paris: Droz, 1977), 36. As explained in the previous chapter, the spatial separation between the *Sanghawatt* and the *Buddhawatt* exists in both historical Lan Na and central Thailand, yet in Lan Na, the *ubosot* is within the *Sanghawatt*, not the *Buddhawatt* as in central Thailand.

⁴⁶ It cannot be said however that this space is not sanctified, since it is part of the temple compound.

The three different sections occupy different parts of the complex. The Buddha's abode being the largest, occupies the entire northern part of the complex. The section for the laity stands to the southeast corner of the temple complex, while the *Sanghawat* is at the southwest corner. The Buddha's section is also separated from the other buildings by a white fence along the entire edge of its border. Furthermore, colors also differentiate the different sections of the temple: the Buddha and the monks' buildings are white, while there are golden ones within the section of the *Kharawat*. The temple grounds are well kept, with employees working to maintain the temple's purity and order. Indeed no detail is left untouched. For example, the umbrellas and sarongs offered to visitors are systematically reorganized, folded and evenly dispersed by employees. The vegetation is also well groomed and tidy, with flower baskets, a mowed lawn and aligned trees. The overall aspect of the temple is one of tidiness and organization. If a monument needs cleaning (indeed stucco will gather mold and dirt) or reparation (the shards often fall and some rust may appear when the stucco is not applied correctly on the finials' metal frames), the temple's employees will work to maintain the temple's appearance and fix the problems to the best of their abilities. Yet in my different visits, from 2003 to 2010, the temple is progressively becoming greyer and some watermarks are visible on different monuments. Indeed I believe that maintaining the whiteness of the temple will prove itself a challenge in the years to come. [Fig. 33 and 34]

The Kharawat (เขตฆราวาส)

I will describe the temple complex as a visitor would encounter it, unfolding sequentially as we walk through it. The Kharawat, or area for the laity, comprises four main buildings or structures, including secondary buildings or constructions; currently two of them are painted in gold. To the left of the entrance is a two-storey building with a gift shop, administrative rooms and a theatre [Fig. 35].⁴⁷ Further west, next to the first building, is the bathroom [Fig. 36]. The third structure will be

⁴⁷ Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life*, 214-15; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 8-11.

the preaching hall, which is a two-storey building [Fig. 37]. One floor will be used for meditation while the other will be used to receive sermons.⁴⁸ There will also be a crematorium next to the preaching hall [Fig. 38]. These two last buildings are still under construction. Furthermore, this section of the temple also has a decorated main gate [Fig. 39] between the gift shop and the entrance to the Buddhawat, as well as a golden fountain [Fig. 40].

This section's first building, on the left of the gate, which will be dealt with later, is the gift shop. During my first visit in 2003, the theatre was open and there was a movie playing in which Chalermchai explained his vision for the temple. In subsequent visits, in 2007, 2008 and 2010, the theatre was closed to the public. At the same gift shop, are printed reproductions of Chalermchai's works, as well as shirts with printed designs of his works, pictures of the White Temple or of Chalermchai himself. There are also postcards, pins and magnets, all of them with reproductions of either the White Temple or reproductions of Chalermchai's paintings. There are also series of books and stationary on sale. Most of the books are reproductions of Chalermchai's works – the same as the available prints – as well as his biography in short, long and extended versions. During my different visits (2003, 2007, 2008 and 2010), most of the prints stayed the same, images of heavenly abodes, heavenly vehicles, images of the Buddha and the King of Thailand. Leaflets are reprinted regularly, though most of the information stays the same, with a short introduction of Chalermchai's vision for the temple as a meritorious act. Next to the gift shop is the bathroom. This building is highly decorated, which is an anomaly for a Buddhist temple [Fig. 35]; there are glass shard inlays and stuccowork for both roof finials and wall decorations, as well as in the upper-middle gable. The building is gold in color except for the images of both men and women on each side of the structure. This and the other buildings' media are cement and stucco. Indeed the elaborate decorations are achieved by forming a rudimentary metal frame then covered in stucco. The stucco can then be covered in glass or mirror shards for added effect.

⁴⁸ Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาทชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life*, 214-15; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 8-11.

The bathroom exterior is in gold color, including the glass shards. The building has a three-tiered roof with three gables, on top of the others. The main roof finials, the equivalent of the *cho fa*, are *naga*, while the secondary ones, the equivalent of the *hang hong*, are abstract. Abstract finials, as seen in chapter 4, are often found in Lan Na, as opposed to representations of the naga as is generally the case with Bangkok temple architecture.⁴⁹ Yet the abstract finials in Lan Na architecture are often more subdued than what is represented at Wat Rong Khun. In fact their elongated forms are closer to Bangkok style finials in that regard. The finials at Wat Rong Khun are therefore an interesting combination of styles producing a unique, yet somewhat familiar characteristic. The lowest *naga* have their mouths open, while the two upper ones have their mouths closed. The stucco details on the barge roof are abstract, stylized and highly detailed, yet plastic in appearance; they sometimes give the impression of flames bursting-out of the building.

Chalermchai uses gold colors and lavish decorations as a way to inspire Buddhist precepts.⁵⁰ Indeed, though it is gold in color (no real gold was used) and highly decorated, it is Chalermchai's hope that people will realize that it is 'only' a bathroom; people use this facility for some of their most basic and natural needs. He hopes that contradictory elements – beauty and body excretions – will make an impression on people and they will realize the 'idiocy' of attaching oneself to worldly events, experiences and possessions. Everything fades, decays and some things are even 'excreted'; it is the reality of Samsāra. It is a very interesting moral lesson. Though the building is just as lavishly decorated as the other buildings, which might render the moral somewhat difficult to realize, the gold contrasts with the rest of the temple, which emphasizes the uniqueness of this bathroom and helps convey the moral lesson.

⁴⁹ As seen in chapter 4, *hang hong* and *cho fa* are terms used for temple finials. Since the bathroom is not a religious monument, *cho fa* and *hang hong* are used with caution in an attempt at comparing the decorative details found on other buildings at Wat Rong Khun.

⁵⁰ "Wat Rong Khun Chalermchai Kositpipat," <http://www.watrongkhun.com/download.php> (accessed June 12th, 2010).

The third structure of the lay section is the contemplation hall [Fig. 37] for preaching and *Dhamma* teaching. This building will have two levels and will accommodate 300 individuals.⁵¹ As of March 2010, only the structure of this building was visible. The last building in this section will be the crematorium, which was also still under construction in March 2010 [Fig. 38].⁵²

To the south and yet still part of the earthly section of the compound, are the great gate, previously mentioned, and a golden fountain at the entrance of the *Buddhawat*. This part of the complex is often crowded with people seeking shelter from the sun or the rain, and with people either going to the gift shop or going to the *Buddhawat*. As soon as the visitor leaves the shaded area of the gateway, he or she enters the *Buddhawat*, with its openness, green grass, pools and open sky [Fig. 41]. One has the impression of entering a different world; from a shady crowded place, to an open and peaceful one. The golden fountain next to the gate is interesting and unique. As far as I am aware, there are no other Thai temples with such a 'device' near the *bot* or *vihan*. Though water is always available in a Thai monastery, it is generally not meant for religious ablution. Chalermschai rarely acknowledges his sources of inspiration and this fountain is an anomaly for a Thai temple. However, religious ablution before prayer is a Muslim ritual and Islam is one of the official religions of Thailand. Whatever his source of inspiration, if any, ablution is not a Thai Buddhist tradition. Nevertheless, this fountain adds to the differentiation between the *Buddhawat* and the *Kharawat*, indeed the *Buddhawat* is a purer space than the rest of the temple; the visitor therefore needs to wash before entering.

The *Sanghawat* (เขตสังฆาวาส)

Following the path between the *Buddhawat* and the *Kharawat*, the next section on the left is the *Sanghawat* or section for the monks. It includes the monks' cells and the contemplation hall, which will be used by the monks for *Dhamma* teaching and

⁵¹ Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life*, 214-15; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 8-11.

⁵² *Ibid*, 11.

meditation.⁵³ This hall has yet to be built. The monks' cells or *kuti* are standing, though they are not yet decorated. The *kuti* [Fig. 42] complex was one of the first structures built by Chalermchai's team, as the monks needed somewhere to stay. However, the decoration and maintenance of the structure is secondary to the completion of the *Buddhawat*. Indeed, the *kuti* were somewhat dirty in 2007 and increasingly grey with mold between December 2008 and March 2010.

I argue that though the buildings of the *Sanghawat* are all white like the *Buddhawat's*, hence purer than the *Kharawat*, they are on the same side as the lay section, indicating that they are still on earth. Indeed though the color white indicates that the monks have chosen a different path than the laity, a purer, not as worldly path, they have not yet reached *Nibbāna*.

The Buddhawat (เขตพุทธาวาส)

When Chalermchai Kositpipat (เฉลิมชัย โฆษิตพิพัฒน์) talks about this section of the temple, he explains that it is the section for the Buddha himself.⁵⁴ *The Buddhawat*, or the area for the Buddha, was built as an abode for the Great Teacher. If he ever came back to earth, this section would be so beautiful that it would be suitable for him.

The *Buddhawat* comprises the hall [Fig. 43], the bridge of rebirth (at the front of the hall), the pavilion for the relics (หอพระธาตุ) [Fig. 44] and, after the celestial bridge [Fig. 45] another pavilion is for the images of the Buddha [Fig. 46].⁵⁵ All three major buildings (the hall, the pavilion of relics and the pavilion of images)

⁵³ The contemplation hall is not yet constructed. Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life*, 215.

⁵⁴ Chalermchai Kositpipat, interview with the author, June 3, 2007, Wat Rong Khun. Chalermchai Kositpipat, "Chalermchai Kositpipat and Wat Rong Khun,"); Leo Schuur, *White Temple: Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai, Thailand by Chalermchai Kositpipat*, trans. Kawporn Sussangkarn (Chiang Rai: Tamboon Pa-or Donchai, 2010), 37; Kositpipat, "Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple,"; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 25-31.

⁵⁵ Most publications available at Wat Rong Khun will describe the mouth of Mara, the hall and the two pavilions. Some will also explain the different decorations and their symbolic meanings. Ibid; Kositpipat, "Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple,"; Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life*, 216.

stand on high plinths, so they are higher than other buildings of the compound, giving the impression that they are more important than the others or that they are part of a different realm, not completely touching the ground [Fig. 47].

This section of the temple is highly decorated, with pools of water (with fishes), fountains, freestanding statues, bridges, trees and other decorative elements. These elements leading to the white hall are intricate and complex with many references to the *Traiphum*.

Starting at the side entrance, there is a walkway leading to the first bridge. In front of this bridge, there is the gaping mouth of Mara (Rahu in Thai)[Fig. 48], with hands, and a few feet, standing out from the mouth. Mara's open mouth has fangs as well as rows of teeth surrounding the hands and feet. At night, the mouth of Mara also has red lights hidden amongst the hands, which gives an ominous mood to the space before the bridge of rebirth. The first bridge of the *Buddhawat*, the Bridge of Rebirth, is set behind the mouth of Mara. Indeed Chalermchai explains that to attain liberation, one has to experience craving, passion and desire, embodied by Mara's mouth, and yet has to reject them, leave them behind.⁵⁶ Only then will one be able to enter heaven, guarded by two demons, Rahu (Mara) on the right and Death on the left. "Rahu is the controller of man's fate and Death is the controller of man's life."⁵⁷

Passing the two demons, you walk up the Bridge of Rebirth via a narrow walkway [Fig. 49]. Chalermchai explains that this passage is narrow, so that people will walk in a single line.⁵⁸ This is an interesting element since achieving *Nibbāna* is a personal achievement, which every being needs to reach for itself. At the highest point of the bridge, on top of each railing, there is a triangular stuccowork with elaborate decorative details. According to Chalermchai, this section represents

⁵⁶ Kositpipat, "Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple,"; Kai Thip, *Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai*, trans. Milathat Promathataved (Chiang Rai: Wat Rong Khun, 2009); Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 25.

⁵⁷ Thip, *Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai*, Having *yak* protecting temple grounds, especially around the most sacred section of the temple, is a relatively common element of modern central Thai architecture.

⁵⁸ "Wat Rong Khun Chalermchai Kositpipat."

Mount Meru with a celestial being at the middle [Fig. 49].⁵⁹ Following the tradition, this being should be Indra.⁶⁰ Under the bridge, there is a pool of water, with fountains on each side. Around the edge of the pool, there are ‘creatures’ associated with water, such as winged turtles and crabs, fishes and water-dragons [Fig. 50]. Coming out of the pool of water under the bridge of rebirth, at the level of Mount Meru, there are six decorated white columns, three on each side [Fig. 51]. In Chalermchai’s design these six columns do not represent the seven mountaintops around Mount Meru usually seen in Thai Buddhist murals, but rather the World of Desire’s six heavens.⁶¹

Continuing over the bridge, we arrive in front of the *ubosot*. The plinth of the hall is not only high, but large as well, allowing for a walkway around its walls [Fig. 52]. There is a railing around the walkway with 16 decorated lotus buds placed evenly around the hall [Fig. 53]. The 16 lotuses on the railing represent the 16 heavens of the World of Form.⁶² There also are four larger and more elaborate lotus buds, two on each side of the hall. Inside each of these four lotuses is a seated human figure, each representing the four disciples of the Buddha who have attained the first, second, third and fourth levels of holiness on the path to *Nibbāna* [Fig. 53].⁶³ Accessing the frontal porch, there are four more lotus buds on the porch

⁵⁹ Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 27; Kositpipat, “Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple,”; Thip, *Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai*.

⁶⁰ According to the *Traiphum*, it is the god of gods, Indra, who lives at the top of Mount Meru. Coedes and Archambault, *Les trois mondes (Traibhumi Brah Ruan)*, 154.

⁶¹ Thip, *Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai*. ; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 27; Kositpipat, “Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple.” As explained earlier the World of Desire comprises eleven realms, six of them being heavens. Then the World of Form is comprised of sixteenth heavens and the World of Non-Form is comprised of four heavens.

⁶² Thip, *Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai*. ; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 27; Kositpipat, “Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple,”

⁶³ Ibid; Thip, *Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai*; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 27. There are four categories of holy persons, which are distinct from non-Buddhist and ‘ordinary Buddhists’. These holy persons are advanced practitioners and therefore have a better understanding of *Dhamma* and have better insight. Prebish and Keown refer to them as the ‘stream winner’, the ‘once-returner’, the non-returner’ and the *arahant*. Prebish and Keown, *Buddhism the eBook, an online introduction*, 94-95.

railing. These four lotuses represent the four heavens of the World of Non-Form.⁶⁴ There is therefore a clearly laid-out spatial progression through the three different worlds of the *Traiphum*, from the world of Desire with the representation of Hell and the first six heavens, then the 16 heavens of the World of Form, then the four heavens of the World of Non-Form. The final destination of this ‘*Traiphum* path’ is the main hall, where the Buddha resides.

The hall’s entrance wall has four openings: three doors and a central upper window. Chalermchai explains that the triangular window represents emptiness or ความว่าง (khwam wang).⁶⁵ The hall’s roof is elaborately decorated, with numerous stylized finials. Because of the elaborate arabesque additions, it is sometimes difficult to decipher which animal is represented.⁶⁶ Chalermchai explains that there are four animals represented on the temple’s roof, including a composite of all four: the lion [Fig. 54], the naga [Fig. 55], the elephant [Fig. 56] and the swan [Fig. 57].⁶⁷ These animals are all represented on the different *cho fa* and *pan lom*, while the main *cho fa* at the front is a composite of all four animals [Fig. 58]. The artist explains that he wanted to use an animal for each of the four elements: the fire (lion), the earth (elephant), the air (swan) and the water (*naga*). So this way, the entire world would be represented among all finials.⁶⁸ The swan and the *naga* are most often represented, as they, according to Chalermchai, also stand in contradiction, the *naga*’s fangs representing evil in men, while the swan represents

⁶⁴ Thip, *Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai*; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 27; Kositpipat, “Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple.”

⁶⁵ Thip, *Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai*; Kositpipat, “Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple.”

⁶⁶ Highly decorated temples are numerous in Thailand. Indeed elaborately decorated halls are the norm. Yet most of these decorations give a polychrome effect. Aasen links these highly decorated Buddhist temples with the decorated paraphernalia of Indian kings of old. The sumptuous allure of Indian king’s thrones, garments and palaces were a testimony of his divinity as well as a way to control “the beneficial powers of the universe.” Clarence Aasen, *Architecture of Siam. A Cultural History Interpretation* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford, Singapore, New York: Oxford university Press, 1998), 69.

⁶⁷ Kositpipat, “Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple,”; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 29-30.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Buddhist virtues.⁶⁹ Indeed, the swan is a very elegant and calm animal, displaying no emotion when floating on water, as if it is detached from the world around it. Yet, the *naga*, though a fearsome creature, is not usually seen as evil, on the contrary, it is a protector.⁷⁰ Furthermore, though the *naga* and the swan are often represented on temples' roofs, the lion and the elephants are rare depictions. On the other hand, as mentioned in chapter four, historical Lan Na halls displayed a greater variety of forms than their modern Bangkok counterparts.

The interior of the temple is not finished yet. The space is open and light. The hall is relatively narrow, with high walls, thin and tall columns, and a smooth wooden ceiling without articulations. This interior is not traditional Lan Na in appearance, but takes from Rattanatoksin's models of narrow and tall temple halls mentioned earlier in chapter 4. As of March 2010 the two main walls, the one behind the Buddha statue and the wall of the entrance, were painted. However the sidewalls were still blank, except for a few celestial vehicles on the south wall. The mural opposite the entrance is not a traditional representation of the *Traiphum*. The main visual element is a large half-length portrait image of a golden Buddha, which takes three quarters of the mural. Its head is surrounded by a triple halo and fiery symbols. His eyes are slightly open, seeming to look at the freestanding statue of the Buddha in front of him. Two deities, Indra and Brahma, are floating at the level of the Buddha's chest, looking up toward the head of the Buddha. On each side of the Buddha, celestial palaces stand on rocky peaks. Some have humans, maybe *arahants*, inside them, though most have radiating objects, many resembling lotus buds. The celestial abodes are highly decorated with very elaborate roof finials resembling the *bot* of the temple itself. On the right of the Buddha image, there are people in procession, leading to one of the celestial abodes. Between the two sets of

⁶⁹ Kositpipat, "Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple." All these symbols and interpretations were confirmed in the June 3rd, 2007 interview with the artist. Chalermchai Kositpipat, interview with the author, June 3, 2007, Wat Rong Khun.

⁷⁰ For example, when king Asoka gathered the relics of the Buddha, he could not get to a particular portion, as it was protected by the *naga* in its underwater realm. When Asoka went to the underwater realm to retrieve the relics, the *naga* showed him the stupa he had built and how well the relics were honored. King Asoka then decided to leave this portion of the relics with the *naga*. Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka. A Study and Translation of the Asokavadana*, 111-14.

mountaintops – on each side of the Buddha – there is an agitated ocean, with lotus buds and marine creatures. This ocean recedes towards the central Buddha who stands beyond the horizon. This image is not the usual representation of the *Traiphum*, though it includes many of its traditional features, such as representations of daily lives, celestial abodes with anthropomorphic beings, as well as empty ones. However, the hierarchical division between the *Traiphum*'s different realms is not followed. Indeed, the Realm of Desire with humans, the Realm of Forms with celestial abodes (with anthropomorphic beings) and the Realm of Non-Form with empty celestial abodes (empty of beings, though with fiery objects resembling lights or lotus buds), are all at the same level. Furthermore, like at Wat Buddhapadipa, the Buddha is represented on the mural, even though, according to the *Traiphum*, he should not be represented, as he is not part of the three worlds anymore. However, Chalermchai does not present this mural as the *Traiphum*, but as the “happiness of the mind” (เบิกบานในจิต).⁷¹ Though it resembles traditional representations of the *Traiphum*, so visitors would recognize familiar element, they could not use this image didactically. Yet as we have seen previously, the *Traiphum* is represented outside the hall. Indeed while following the path from the mouth of Mara to the open doorway of the hall, the visitor was symbolically re-enacting the ultimate path of rebirth, from hell, through the middle world and then the different heavens. Therefore, the representation of the *Traiphum* was displaced, from the inside to the outside space. The mural behind the Buddha does not ‘need’ to represent the *Traiphum*, but it still includes familiar iconographic elements so the wall will be familiar to the Buddhist audience. At Wat Rong Khun, as opposed to Wat Buddhapadipa, the complex iconographic, spiritual and doctrinal importance of the *Traiphum* is kept.

Chalermchai has signed many such representations of celestial abodes as seen on the mural inside the *ubosot*. Indeed, these celestial representations are found in an overwhelming number at the temple's gift shop. Though all of these images are very similar, with only few details differentiating them, Chalermchai has

⁷¹ Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/the drawings of my life*, 204. My translation.

given them different titles and different meanings. All have spiritual themes however, such as the 'heavenly transport' and 'Land of Devas – Land of Dharma'.⁷²

On the lower section of the mural, there are lotus buds emerging from troubled water, yet this section is not easily seen from the hall. As with all Thai Buddhist temples, there is a pedestal for the main statue of the Buddha. At Wat Rong Khun, there is a golden arch around the main statue formed by two protecting *naga*. In most temples, this pedestal is elaborate and heavily decorated, with secondary images of the Buddha and other decorations. At Wat Rong Khun, this pedestal is gone, leaving only a low platform. The main Buddha statue is white and rests on a high stand, hidden by the secondary Buddha statue in front of it. This arrangement gives the impression that the white Buddha is floating. The secondary Buddha statue was the primary statue of the old temple at Rong Khun. In 1950, village devotees brought it to Rong Khun from Nong Sai village, Mae Sai province, as an act of merit.⁷³ When Chalermchai became involved with the project however, he wished to do away with the Buddha, because he felt it was not beautiful enough to be in his temple. Yet abbot Phra Khru Chakhariyanuyut (d.2003) refused its displacement.⁷⁴ This is the only concession Chalermchai has made for the construction of the temple. Yet the ancient statue was downgraded to become the secondary image and Chalermchai insisted on beautifying the image by gilding it and changing the flame on its head, so that it would blend more easily with the rest of the décor. Until 2003, these three Buddhas – the mural, the white Buddha and the golden Buddha – were in front of each other. Since Phra Khru Chakhariyanuyut's death however, Chalermchai has added a naturalistic statue of the deceased abbot under the secondary statue of the Buddha. Now, there are four images, three of the Buddha and one of the deceased abbot.

In 1994, due to his efforts to develop humanitarian work at the temple, the abbot Phra Sawai, received the title of honored teacher (khru meaning teacher) Phra

⁷² Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 65. The last title was taken from a translated booklet from Wat Rong Khun.

⁷³ Chairat, "The History of Wat Rong Khun," 75.

⁷⁴ In the summer of 2003, this information was given on a poster inside the hall, with a drawing of the three Buddha images, the one on the wall and the two statues.

Khru Chakhariyanuyut (พระครูชาคริยานุยุต).⁷⁵ Though images of important abbots and monastic founders are often part of monastic complexes, to put the statue of a monk in such a prominent position inside a hall is rare in Thailand. It is possible that Chalermchai wishes to raise the importance of the temple by associating the deceased abbot with the tradition of ‘saints’ or *Ton Bun* in northern Thailand. Yet, though the cult of saintly monks is well known, their representations are rarely in a central position in a hall.⁷⁶ Furthermore, as explained in chapter 3, all *Ton Bun* share similar characteristics, such as promoting the building of monuments for the sake of the population, having a charismatic persona and a regional, even local, vision of Buddhism and community, acting against the centralized *Sangha* administration of Bangkok etc.⁷⁷ Phra Khru Chakhariyanuyut, though responsible for the building of the temple’s hall and sauna to help drug addicts, is not recognized as a *Ton Bun* or holy man. It is not my intention to diminish Phra Khru Chakhariyanuyut’s position and importance for the people of Ban Rong Khun. However, his statue is placed in a prominent position within the temple hall, a position rarely awarded to any monk, even if they are indeed recognized as *Ton Bun*. For example, there are two important statues of Khruba Siwichai at temple Doi Sutep in Chiang Mai.⁷⁸ Khruba Siwichai is associated with Doi Sutep as he was behind the building of a road leading to the temple at the top of the mountain. At Doi Sutep, there are two important shrines with his statues, one at the foot of the mountain, the other at Wat PhraThat Doi Sutep on top of the mountain. Devotees visit these shrines, especially the one at the foot of the mountain, on a daily basis to

⁷⁵ Ibid.; Cohen, “Buddhism Unshackled: The Yuan ‘Holy Man’ Tradition and the Nation-State in the Tai World,” 228; Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 295. Phra (พระ) is a title for monks, while khru (ครู) means teacher. Phra Khru is an honorary title awarded by the Sangha to senior monks. However, Phra Khru Chakhariyanuyut is never called a Phra Khruba (ครูบาร). Khruba is a special reverential title given to monks, especially in northern Thailand, who have charisma and are recognized for their holiness. The best example would be the saint Khruba Siwichai, of Chiang Mai. Yet even Khruba is not the equivalent of *Ton Bun*, a title given to monks by the population.

⁷⁶ See page 80-81 of this dissertation.

⁷⁷ Cohen, “Buddhism Unshackled: The Yuan ‘Holy Man’ Tradition and the Nation-State in the Tai World,” 227-47.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Khruba Siwichai is probably the most well known and revered of all the *Ton Bun* in northern Thailand. See pages 80-81 of this dissertation.

pay respect to Khruba Siwichai. Yet these shrines are specially dedicated to Khruba Siwichai, they are not accompanied by Buddha images. On the other hand, inside Wat Phra That Doi Suthep's ground, there is also an image of Khruba Siwichai inside each of the two *vihan* of the main complex. Yet these images are not prominently placed within these halls. For example, within the large *vihan*, there is a very small statue placed to the side of the sidewall [fig. 59]. There is a larger statue in the small *vihan*, yet this statue is still smaller than the Buddha statues, it is also to the side and therefore not aligned with the main Buddha statue [fig. 60]. The visual effect in both halls is markedly different from the one at Wat Rong Khun. Furthermore, Khruba Siwichai is probably the best-known *Ton Bun* in northern Thailand, a highly revered religious and historical figure, yet his position within the halls is very different than Phra Khru Chakhraniyanuyut's position in Wat Rong Khun. Yet, and though Phra Khru Chakhraniyanuyut is not recognized as a *Ton Bun*, his prominent position within the hall at Wat Rong Khun would be familiar to northern Thai population, who would easily associate him with charismatic northern monks of the past and present.⁷⁹ It appears that Chalermchai is trying to elevate the importance of Wat Rong Khun by playing with the visual culture associated with the Lan Na *Ton Bun*.

In March 2010, only a small portion of the south wall had basic schematic drawings of celestial vehicles floating towards the main Buddha image on the west wall. These celestial vehicles are reminiscent of the many images Chalermchai has painted and of which reproductions are on sale in the *Kharawat's* gift shop.

The back wall of the main hall is the most traditional mural, as it is a representation of the *Defeat of Mara* (or Rahu in Thai), with a representation of the Buddha on the wall itself [fig. 101]. The details of the mural are not traditional however; yet it closely resembles Panya's mural at Wat Buddhapadipa, an obvious model and source of inspiration for Chalermchai. At the very top of the mural there is a Buddha taking the Earth as a witness' *mudra*, like Panya's earlier *Defeat of Mara* at Wat Buddhapadipa. Below, on each side of the Buddha, are monks venerating him, with a central human woman directly below the Buddha, yet at a much lower

⁷⁹ Ibid.

level than the monks. In fact, she is situated where the Earth Goddess would conventionally be on a traditional Thai mural. Yet Mae Phra Thorani (แม่พระธรณี) is absent from Chalermchai's mural; she is not present to drown Mara's army. At Wat Buddhapadipa, Mara and his minions are situated on the lower third of the wall. However, contrary to Wat Buddhapadipa, this mural represents a battle between good and evil. On the wall, there is not only Mara's army attacking the Buddha, but also heroes fighting on the 'good side'.

Mara's army is not as numerous and chaotic in Chalermchai's mural as in Panya's mural at Wimbledon. Furthermore, Mara's face is much larger and imposing in the former. In fact, in Chalermchai's mural, Mara's face is roughly the equivalent of two thirds of the mural, with two eyes and large upper and lower fangs coming out of a gaping mouth. Chalermchai is also copying Panya's idea of an illusionistic army; the entire face, including each fang is decorated with shadows of demons, weapons, hellish creatures and people in hell. Around the eyes of Mara are shadows of guns converging toward the center of the mural. Inside each eye is a representation of George Bush on the left and on the right, Osama Bin Laden. More obvious is the mouth, which takes almost all the lower section of the mural, from the floor to the upper frame of the door.

Contrary to the entrance wall at Wat Buddhapadipa, the wall at Wat Rong Khun has three doors, so the secondary doors cut the design on each side of the main central one. On the right side of the door are representations of the twin towers on 9/11, with an airplane crashing into one of the towers. On a New York city streets, there is a convoy of cars and trucks; most notable is one of the Pepsi company. There is the tubing from a gas pump ending around Mara's lower fang, while demons and people are painted as shadows on Mara's lips, like the shadow creatures of Panya's mural. On the other side of the secondary door, there is the alien creature from the 1987 movie 'Predator' (or any subsequent Predator movies). On top of Mara's upper fang is a representation of superman in his usual hero pose, flying down, with one arm stretched forward and the other folded at the elbow so

the arm stays close to the torso. In front of him is the Japanese character 'Ultraman' flying in his small spacecraft.

On the left side of the central door, the fangs and lips of Mara are equally decorated with shadows of devilish creatures and people in hell. On this side, between the main door and the lower fang of Mara, is a large volcano throwing lava and debris. At the foot of the volcano, the earth is cracking, revealing the hot lava underneath. Further down the volcano, there is a representation of a small battle ship from the Star Wars movies. Between the lower fang and the upper fang, roughly at the same level of the Star Wars spaceship, there is the Starship USS Enterprise from the Star Trek series. On a large alien-type snake, going down from the upper to the lower fang, is Neo from the movies 'the Matrix'. During my 2003, 2007 and 2008 visits, Neo was the highest of the heroes represented on the entire mural, as all other elements are below him. When asked why Neo was in such a prominent position, Chalermchai did not have a particular answer, yet reiterated his interest in action movies with heroes, saying that the ones represented are the ones he likes.⁸⁰ Interestingly, there are no references to any Thai heroes from the movie industry, such as characters played by Tony Jaa. Although his international success happened after Ong-Bak (2003), he is known in Thailand since the 1990's.

On the left side of the secondary door is the 'Alien' from the 1979 movie 'Alien' or any of its sequels. Right under the upper fang is a football and a cell phone, probably as representations of human passions (people not being able to 'live' without their phones and the great passions that soccer generates). Between the two fangs, there is a representation of the planet earth exploding.

⁸⁰ Chalermchai Kositpipat, interview with the author, June 3, 2007, Wat Rong Khun. The movie *The Matrix* has received a lot of attention for its relation to Buddhism. For example, in the movie the Matrix, the 'reality' is not 'reality' but a construction; the hero, Neo, has to realize this construction and see reality behind it. In Buddhism, the world we inhabit is a construction and we need to understand this to attain reality: Nibbāna. Though the two directors and screenwriters, the Wachowski brothers, were greatly influenced by Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, they were also influenced by Eastern philosophies. Many scholars have actually pointed to the Buddhist influences in the Movie. James L. Ford, "Buddhism, Christianity, and the Matrix: The Dialectic of Myth-Making in Contemporary Cinema," *Journal of Religion and Film* 4, no. 2 (2000); Frances Flannery-Dailey and Hendrix College, "Wake up! Gnosticism and Buddhism in the Matrix," *Journal of Religion and Film* 5, no. 2 (2001); Julien R. Fielding, "Reassessing the Matrix/Reloaded," *Journal of Religion and Film* 7, no. 2 (2003).

In March 2010, after Chalermchai started to print images of the eastern wall, he added heroes to the murals. In March 2010 Chalermchai had added Batman, now at a higher level than Neo on the left side of the mural. Roughly at the same level of Neo, to his left, there is also now an image of Optimus Prime of the Transformer movies. On the right side of the mural, Chalermchai has added two new characters as well, Spiderman, to the left of Superman, and the Terminator, on the lower section of the wall, on the other side of the secondary right door.

As mentioned, the resemblance between Panya and Chalermchai's two murals, is unmistakable. Yet, on Chalermchai's mural, there are 'good guys', heroes from the contemporary Western and Japanese entertainment culture, which would be relatively easy to recognize by most people visiting the temple, Thai or foreigners, young and old. There have been so many movies and sequels, posters, video games and action figures of most of these creatures. Furthermore, George Bush and Osama Bin Laden, inside Mara's eyes, would easily be recognized by most visitors. Chalermchai likes the idea of 'good versus evil' in our contemporary lives, yet realizes that no hero exists in real life.⁸¹ He wanted to include an army that would fight on the 'good' side, against Mara's army and yet would never be able to help in the reality of our world, which is, according to Chalermchai, suffering from the decisions of a few, such as Bin Laden and George Bush who are represented inside Mara's eyes. He wanted to show that fighting and killing bring real suffering, while no movie hero could actually help.⁸² Furthermore, these 'good guys' are still on the lower half of the wall. This lower section, including the heroes, is of darker shades than the upper Buddha section, though still in golden brown colors. Also, and though this image is not as chaotic as Panya's, it is still very energetic in comparison to the wall's upper register. Representations of wars, human suffering and the cultural 'heroes' are on the lower section of the wall and are clearly separated from the Buddha's representation. In other words, even if Chalermchai likes the idea of 'heroes,' he wanted a visual separation between these heroes who are still active and fighting, even if they are fighting on the 'good' side. On the other

⁸¹ Schuur, *White Temple: Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai, Thailand by Chalermchai Kositpipat*, 26.

⁸² *Ibid.*

hand, the Buddha refused to fight Mara's army, making him a superior being for refusing confrontation or distraction from his goal. Therefore, he is the uppermost element of the mural, above even the most recognizable of heroes, such as Superman or even the most 'Buddhist' of heroes, such as Neo.⁸³ The Buddha is the only one who has made the right choice, he chose not to fight, and so he is the highest component of the mural. Indeed, though the other 'good heroes' are fighting against Mara's army and that most people would indeed consider them 'good', they are still on our plane of existence (the lower section of the mural), while the Buddha is dissociated from all the commotion and sits calmly at the top of the mural. Thawan Duchanee explored a similar theme in 1989, where he painted different 'heros' of foreign cinema such as Rambo, the Terminator, Clint Eastwood, Mel Gibson, Super Man, Jet Li etc. These 'good guys' are ready for battle, with their weapons raised and body tensed; yet the Buddha, of whom only the head is visible, is turned away from action, refusing to fight.

Outside the hall, at its four corners, are four elaborately carved white free-standing high monuments resembling high *bai sema*⁸⁴ on pedestals [Fig. 61]. However, there are only four of them, not eight as is the required number for ordination halls. These are not *bai sema*, but stylized northern flags or banner. Called a *Tung tukka-ta* or *tong sod*, these flags are hung outside and inside northern temples. These days, the flags are most often made of plastic, so they can withstand time and the elements. Yet historical *tung* could be made of flowers and leaves as well as wood [Fig. 62]. They are not only used at temples but are also seen in many northern processions and festivities, such as school sport events. Doi Tung (ดอยตุง),⁸⁵ where the late princess mother used to reside, is called the mountain of the hanging flag, for such northern banners. The origin of the banner (ตุง) is not well known, but it was explained to me as being a flag resembling a ladder, so the

⁸³ See note 80 above.

⁸⁴ See pages 107-108.

⁸⁵ ตุง is a northern Thai word meaning a hanging flag. In central Thai, the word ตุง means a 'bulge'.

soul of a dying person could grab onto it and climb to heaven. It is considered an act of merit to make and hang them at temples as a sign of respect to the Buddha.⁸⁶

Behind the *bot*, on the same high plinth, is the pavilion for the relics or *Ho Phra Taat* (หอพระธาตุ) [Fig. 63]. As of March 2010, this pavilion was still closed and not accessible to the visitors. White in color, high and narrow, resembling a tower, this building was not yet decorated, having yet no finials. It is a three-part building, with an entrance level, a middle section of three superimposed gables and the shaft of the tower with three receding caps as well as a finial. The highest cap of this upper section has glass sides and will hold the relics. [Fig. 64] In March 2010, Chalermchai said he had no idea when he would receive the relics or what the nature of the relics would be.⁸⁷ This building is not yet complete, as each of the superimposed gables will have additional finials and arabesque decorations with glass shards.

The pavilion does not look like a Thai *chedi*, but more like an East Asian Pagoda, though none of the publications about Wat Rong Khun refers to this building as either. Contrary to a Thai *chedi*, the central room will be accessible to visitors, though the major relics will not, being in a small box in the highest section of the building. This pavilion, like the *bot* and the pavilion of images, is white with successive gables and finials on top of each other. As of March 2010, there were not yet any decorative elements on the tower. However, when it is finished, there will be continuity between the architectural forms of this building and the two others in the *Buddhawat* and the other temple buildings. A traditional *chedi* would have introduced a round or at least conical structure within the compound and have disturbed the architectural unity of the complex. Furthermore, as it is currently designed, the building allows for decorative arabesques, something a traditional *chedi* would not allow, except maybe for the finial. Yet, in interview, Chalermchai explained that, though the main building is not a *chedi*, there will be a *chedi* or a *chedi*-like structure inside the building. Though when asked which style the *chedi*

⁸⁶ Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 31.

⁸⁷ Chalermchai Kositpipat, interview with the author, March 21, 2007, Wat Rong Khun.

will be, Chalermchai said that it would be *his* style and would not be modeled on earlier *chedi* of different eras.⁸⁸ Interestingly however, the *chedi* will not hold the relics, as they will be inside the glass box at the top of the *Ho Phra Taat*, a design that is, to my knowledge, without precedent in Thai Buddhist architecture.

The last building of the Buddhawat is the pavilion of images, accessible via a 'celestial' bridge linking the two previous monuments.⁸⁹ Structurally, this pavilion is a smaller version of the pavilion of relics [Fig. 65]. The building is also divided into three superimposed sections; yet these sections are different than the pavilion of relics. This last building has a main chamber, a double-tiered roof and a finial. However, instead of having three gables and roof caps like the pavilion of relics, this last building has only two gables and two roof caps. Like with the pavilion of relics, decorative elements will be added, yet were not visible in March 2010. This pavilion will hold statues of the Buddha.

Therefore, the Buddhawat, though organized differently, has the three main elements found in Bangkok era *wat*: the ubosot, the reliquary monument and the image hall. Yet at Wat Rong Khun, the last two buildings, the *chedi* and the *vihan*, are not represented conventionally, indeed they are not even recognized as such by Chalermchai. Though the pavilion of relics and the pavilion of images share functions with the *chedi* and the *vihan*, they do not form the conventional link between the historical *vihan* and *chedi*. The presence of the Buddha is not felt because of the relation between relics and images, but is felt because the *ubosot*, which is generally not seen as the hall for the Buddha, but the hall for the *Sangha*, is now an abode for the Buddha. Therefore, though the form and spatial organization has changed, the presence is still felt. The spiritual experience is still strong.

The Buddhawat is separated from the rest of the temple by a decorated white fence. As Chalermchai explained, this Buddhawat is supposed to be the most beautiful section of the temple, as it is supposed to be 'fit' for the Buddha.⁹⁰ Though

⁸⁸ Chalermchai Kositpipat, interview with the author, March 21, 2010, Wat Rong Khun.

⁸⁹ Sewatham and Souksawat, *ผมวาดชีวิตผม/The drawing of my life*, 215.

⁹⁰ Kositpipat, "Inspiration and Meaning of the main building of Rong Khun Temple,"; Kositpipat, *Creating Buddhist Art for the Land*, 8.

many symbolic elements are at play, such as Mount Meru on the bridge, the Buddhawat is not supposed to be a symbolic place, but a real, pure, paradise on earth, so if the Buddha decides to return to earth, he would choose to come back here.

The physicality of Nibbāna and the Buddha

This last statement is problematic. Indeed as the Buddha has ‘nibbānized’, it seems impossible for him to return to earth and enjoy the *Buddhawat*. However, it would be simplistic to merely affirm that Chalermchai is mistaken in his artistic intention and to forgo any analysis. As explained in chapter 4, visitors to Thai temples experience the presence of the Buddha due to the independent power of the Buddha statue, a power it receives through rituals and the energized line between the statue and the *chedi*. I argue that Chalermchai departs from this view of the metaphysical power of the statue. Indeed when speaking of the *Buddhawat* as an abode for the Buddha, Chalermchai seems to refer to the Nibbānized Gotama Buddha and not a statue that has received the Buddha’s power.

Yet Collins explains that all four of the following alternatives are wrong when it comes to describing an enlightened being after final Nibbāna: Does not exist, does exist, both exists and does not exist, neither exists nor does not exist.⁹¹ Therefore, it is safe to say that, according to Theravada Buddhism, Gotama Buddha would not come back, either as he was, prince Siddhartha, or in a rebirth; he can therefore not ‘enjoy’ the *Buddhawat*. Again, when talking about a ‘nibbānized’ being, the Buddha explains that the ‘state’ of *Nibbāna* is not spoken in terms of birth and rebirth, but as a person “who has made an end of suffering.”⁹² Though what happens to a being after ‘nibbānization’ is unclear, what seems clear is that no matter, sensation, perception, mental activities, consciousness is involved.⁹³ Therefore, one would presume that if no mental activities or consciousness arise, there could be no ‘will’ to come back or to ‘go’ anywhere. Yet the possibility of the Buddha’s returning to

⁹¹ Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities. Utopias of the Pali imaginaire*, 244.

⁹² Ibid, 217.

⁹³ These are the five aggregates.

this plane of existence is not the only difficulty regarding the Buddhawat as the Buddha's abode.

If the Buddhawat is constructed for the Buddha, can it be seen as being *Nibbāna*? Hence the question, 'What is *Nibbāna*?'⁹⁴ *Nibbāna* is the cessation of *dukkha* as explained by the First Noble Truth. *Dukkha*, often translated as suffering,⁹⁵ is more aptly described as everything impermanent. Therefore, *Nibbāna* is the end or cessation of *dukkha*, since there is no permanence in *Samsāra*. In the *Udāna* the Buddha describes *Nibbāna* thus:

That sphere exists, monk, where there is no earth, no water, no heat and no wind, where the sphere of infinite space does not exist, nor that of infinite consciousness, nor that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception there is neither this world nor the other world, neither moon nor sun; there, I say, there is no coming and going, no duration (of life, to be followed by) death and rebirth; it is not stationed, it is without occurrence(s), and has no object. This, indeed, is the end of suffering.⁹⁶

This text works in the negative. It does not give a direct answer as to 'what is *Nibbāna*', but it explains what it is not. For the purpose of this dissertation and its relation to the White Temple, it is important to acknowledge that *Nibbāna* has no physicality and is therefore devoid of 'object'. Indeed, the *Buddhawat* cannot be seen as *Nibbāna*, since, very simply, *Nibbāna* has no form, materiality and content. Therefore, *Nibbāna* cannot be accessible as a part of a material world.

The Buddhawat shows an evolution of creative thinking from Chalermchai's *Traiphum* at Wat Buddhapadipa. The mural at Wat Buddhapadipa depicted an evolution from the Worlds of Desire, Form and Non-Form to end with *Nibbāna*. As explained in the previous chapter, in the historical Lan Na *vihan*, the presence of the

⁹⁴ For an in-depth analysis of a Theravadin analysis of *Nibbāna*, see *Ibid*. For a Mahayana interpretation and analysis of Nirvana, see Theodore Stcherbatsky, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana*, 2 ed. (Delhi, Varanasi and Patna: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977).

⁹⁵ Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities. Utopias of the Pali imaginaire*, 140, 155.

⁹⁶ *Udāna* VIII.1 (Khuddaka Nikaya, Sutta Pitaka). The *Udāna* is a series of 80 utterances by the Buddha. *Ibid*, 165. (translated by Collins), see also *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon. Part II Udāna: Verses of uplift and Ituvuttaka: As it was said.*, trans. F.L. Woodward (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1996), 97; *The Udāna*, trans. Peter Masefield (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994), 165.

Buddha is felt because of the independent power of the statue, power it has received through rituals that teach the statue about Gotama Buddha's life and the *Dhamma* as well as through a line of power established between the *chedi* and the *vihan*, therefore between the relics and the statue. Wat Rong Khun is unique since Chalermchai claims to build the temple for the Buddha himself, and not simply to 'host' the power of his images and relics.⁹⁷ Though there is a straight line at Wat Rong Khun between the image pavilion, the relic pavilion and the *ubosot* [Fig. 66], the importance of the relics and images do not seem to be the reason behind the presence of the Buddha in the *Buddhawat*. I argue that his presence is felt because of an evolution of the *Traiphum*, from hell to the different heavens, yet does not reach *Nibbāna per se*, as *Nibbāna* cannot be physically experienced. Furthermore, as explained earlier, the Buddha cannot come back either. Yet, by resembling a 'high-level' heaven, the *Buddhawat* appears to be closer to the ultimate goal, *Nibbāna*. It shows the different rewards someone could receive when performing merit.

Though in Theravada Buddhism the Buddha is not associated directly with any specific level of heaven or divine alternate world (in contrast to Pure Land in Mahayana Buddhism)⁹⁸ the concept of heavenly abodes and Buddhist imaginaires or, as Collins calls them Buddhist felicities, is important in Theravada Buddhism. These images of heavenly abodes and transportations are a familiar concept in Theravada Buddhism, especially if we accept that most people do not actively seek to reach *Nibbāna* in their current life.⁹⁹ Indeed, Keyes explains that *Nibbāna* should not be seen as the primary goal of most Theravada lay Buddhists.¹⁰⁰ Some but not all monks devote their lives to the attainment of *Nibbāna*. However, Keyes explains

⁹⁷ For a study of the northern Buddha image, with an emphasis on the rituals and ceremonies associated with the 'making' of the Buddha statue, see Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha. The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*.

⁹⁸ Pure Land Buddhism is associated with Buddha Amithāba, who has made Pure Land, a western paradise, where humans could be reborn and benefit from Amithāba's help and dhamma teaching. Prebish Charles and Damien Keown, *Buddhism the eBook, an online introduction*, 2nd edition ed. (Journal of Buddhist Ethics Online Books, 2005), 155-56.

⁹⁹ A. Thomas Kirsch, "Complexity in the Thai Religious System: Interpretation," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 2 (1977): 241-66; Charles F. Keyes, "Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 2 (1977): 283-302.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

that people might wish for a better future life, such as being reborn beautiful, rich, or better yet, being reborn rich and beautiful in a heaven. In fact, as Keyes explains, it would be more accurate to see Theravada Buddhism's central concept as *kamma*, rather than *Nibbāna*, since *kamma* is the means to an end, whatever end it is, either a temporary one with a better rebirth or a final one, with *Nibbāna*.

Paticcasamuppada or Dependent Origination

The intricate cosmological basis of the whole complex and more particularly of the Buddhawata is, I believe, based on the concept *kamma*, which in turn is related to the concept *paticcasampuppāda* or dependent origination. Traditional Theravadin understandings of dependent origination explain that all phenomena are conditioned. In other words, nothing arises from its own volition, but rather arises in a series of 12 links (*nidāna*) or chain of causation:¹⁰¹ ignorance, compositional actions, consciousness, name and form, six sense organs, contact, sensation, craving, clinging, becoming, rebirth, old age and death.¹⁰² For example, craving is dependent upon sensation, which itself is dependent upon our contact with the "physical forms of the world."¹⁰³ Clinging arises from our craving, which is the source of our rebirth/entrapment in *samsāra*. Cravings lead to actions or *kamma*, which have either good consequences if the action was morally positive or negative consequences if the action was morally negative.¹⁰⁴ *Kamma* therefore explains the circumstances of our entrapment. In other words, in which of the possible 31 levels of rebirth will we find ourselves in the next life. So the concept of dependent origination explains *how* we are trapped in *samsāra*, in other words the

¹⁰¹ C. Keyes, "Merit-transference in the Kammic theory of popular Theravada Buddhism," *Karma: An anthropological inquiry* (1983), 262; Prebish and Keown, *Buddhism the eBook*, and online introduction, 85-86.

¹⁰² According to one popular understanding, the 12 links extend over three lives. This understanding comes from Buddhaghosa, a 5th century CE Theravadin commentator. Prebish and Keown, *Buddhism the eBook*, and online introduction, 86. The first two links relate to the previous life, the third to the seventh links relate to the conditioning of the present life, the eight to tenth links are the fruits of the present life, while the last two links relate to the next life. On the other hand, the 12 links can also be understood in 'groups,' either as defilements, actions (*kamma*) or sufferings.

¹⁰³ C. Keyes, "Merit-transference in the Kammic theory of popular Theravada Buddhism," 262.

¹⁰⁴ C. Keyes, "Merit-transference in the Kammic theory of popular Theravada Buddhism," 261.

process from which we are reborn, while *kamma*, itself a part of dependent origination, explains the circumstances¹⁰⁵ of our entrapment. Chalermchai's vision of the Buddhawat therefore draws from this traditional and cosmological understanding of dependent origination and *kamma*. The Buddhawat is an artistic representation of a heavenly reward as described in the Traiphum.

Pali texts such as the *Vimanavatthu* (Khuddaka Nikaya, Sutta Pitaka) and Thai texts such as the *Traiphum*, do not give many specifics about heavens in the Realm of No-Form, as there is nothing to visually describe except colored lights.¹⁰⁶ Indeed in these heavens, all experiences are within the mind. Yet there exist spectacular descriptions of the *deva*-heavens in the Realm of Form.¹⁰⁷ The texts also explain that these heavens are 'accessible' by people who accumulate enough merit. In the *deva*-heavens, joys and luxuries are tangible, as there is a relation between sense, pleasure and 'external physical elements.' The *deva*-heavens are sensual, though not sexually charged, places. Collins gives a few examples of the heavenly imagery, such as divine light, visual splendor, jewels, finely decorated abodes and palaces, gardens, golden mountains, pleasure parks and flying vehicles. Most of these characteristics are found in Chalermchai acrylic works of the 1990's.¹⁰⁸

The *Vimanavatthu* recounts, in verse, men and women's acts of merit and their heavenly rewards. The descriptions of the heavenly rewards are visually interesting, as they focus mainly on architecture and landscapes, often with fountains and water. The visual descriptions found in the *Vimanavatthu* are very similar to many of Chalermchai's images and indeed the *Buddhawat* at Wat Rong Khun. Indeed, it seems that the architecture of Chalermchai's White Temple is the three-dimensional equivalent of many of his 1990's paintings representing heavenly abodes and celestial transportations. There is an important difference however

¹⁰⁵ My circumstances I mean *luck, beauty, wealth* etc.

¹⁰⁶ Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities. Utopias of the Pali imaginaire*, 309-11. The text speaks of shooting lights of six different colors, produced by the Buddha when he uses magic, knowledge and joy together. Coedes and Archaimbault, *Les trois mondes (Traibhumi Brah Ruan)*, 184-89; Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang. A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*, 263-69.

¹⁰⁷ Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities. Utopias of the Pali imaginaire*, 304-09.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 312.

between the *Buddhawat* and Chalermchai's images of heavens: the colors. Beautiful purples, gold, pink and other soft colors are visible in Chalermchai's art, while the *Vimanavatthu* talks about architecture decorated with precious stones and shining metals, such as rubies, gold, crystal, emerald etc. Chalermchai's color palette for many of his 1990's paintings representing celestial abodes and vehicles therefore match what is described in the *Tipitaka*. Fully white architecture is relatively rare in Chalermchai's paintings of heavenly abodes, as well as in the *Vimanavatthu*. Yet his earlier representations of *Nibbāna* are white, to express purity, an important theme at Wat Rong Khun.

The *Buddhawat* has therefore more to do with a representation of a heavenly abode, than with *Nibbāna*, yet with the purity of a heavenly abode fit for the Buddha, therefore white in color. Though theoretically problematic – the Buddha has 'nibbānized' and is not in one of the many heavens of the Thai cosmology – this heavenly representation would make sense to Thai visitors, since, as Keyes explains, the goal of many Thai Buddhist visitors, would be to be reborn in a heaven such as the one Chalermchai represents. The hierarchical and progressive experience of Wat Rong Khun conveys the familiar concept of heavenly rewards, in a new and innovative way. I believe Wat Rong Khun offers an artistic combination of different notions and familiar ideas, to help the viewer experience the recompense of good *kamma*, even if it means tempering with the non-physicality of *Nibbāna*.

I believe this is the idea behind the construction of the White Temple. Chalermchai exhorts other Thai people to give to the temple, as an act of merit.¹⁰⁹ As Keyes explains, though Thai society is hierarchical and divided, it also allows for a certain amount of flexibility, where someone can rise and fall within the social parameters. In other words, someone born in a poor family could rise to richness and fame, or vice versa. Keyes explains that someone could justify these 'changes' in his or her social position with the concept of dependent origination and the laws of *kamma*. However, to be credible this person would need to "display attributes that are

¹⁰⁹ There are a few, yet large, donation boxes on the temple grounds.

outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace.”¹¹⁰ Keyes talks of someone who has spent years in the religious order or who gives “his wealth to the construction of religious artifices”¹¹¹ as example of someone who has accumulated enough merit to justify *kamma* as the force behind his/her social changes. Furthermore, Keyes explains that the person who gives extensively to the order does not only accumulate merit, but also shows that his or her wealth was gained due to previous accumulated merit. This is also what Chalermchai claims in his biographies and in the different pamphlets at Wat Rong Khun.¹¹² He therefore supports and encourages the concept of merit-making and the physical and mental gain you can achieve by doing merit. Yet we should not forget that Chalermchai has also constructed a space where visitors can have an important spiritual experience and have glimpse, without meditation, of heavenly rewards.

Though Chalermchai breaks from artistic traditions and has undeniably produced a distinctive artistic monument, the Buddhist message expressed at Wat Rong Khun is relatively traditional, yet it brings physicality to the spiritual and moral Buddhist teachings.

Summary

The renovation of Wat Rong Khun started before 1997, yet it became Chalermchai’s project as a direct result of the 1997 Asian financial crash. This temple is Chalermchai’s life work and is a development of his previous neo-traditional works such as Wat Buddhapadipa and paintings of heavenly abodes and celestial transportations.

The temple is still under construction and it has already gathered national and international attention, at least when it comes to tourism. Chalermchai’s intention is to make a temple glorious enough for the Lord Buddha as well as for the Thai nation. His views on both, Buddhism and nationalism, are similar to the central

¹¹⁰ Keyes, “Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society,” 287.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² He often juxtaposes his worldly success with his practice of Buddhism, one being the direct response to the latter. Chalermchai Kositpipat, “The Creation of the Buddhist Artwork for the Motherland at Wat Rong Khun,”).

Thai discourses that started in the 19th century. Both emphasize merit-making, yet maintain traditional cosmography and social hierarchy, the centrality and greatness of the monarchy and a desire to gain recognition within the World order.

In his pamphlets, Chalermchai makes it clear that he is building the temple for the greatness of the nation. He also uses the image of the king to gain national recognition. Even his shorter biographies don't fail to mention that he had been selected to paint images in the king's book *Ruang Phra Mahajanoka*, based on the *Jataka* tale.¹¹³ It therefore follows the three pillars of Thai nationalism: the King, Buddhism and the Nation.

In this dissertation I argue that since Wimbledon, Chalermchai's success is based on two important propagandist platforms, one is international success, the other is national pride. His discourse on nationalism is very strong, as he focuses on the king and on Buddhism. By so doing he emphasizes the greatness of the Thai artists who do not need to compare themselves to foreigners.¹¹⁴ His propaganda is similar to the modernist royal and modernist discourses of the 19th and 20th centuries in Thailand. Though national discourses since the late 19th century focus on the greatness of the Thai nation, it also thrived on international recognition.

Chalermchai also uses the attention of the tourist industry as a way to demonstrate his international recognition. This is similar to how the Thai elite of the 19th century wanted to show their modernity so they could gain a prominent position within the New World's order. Yet 'modernity' as expressed by the 19th century elite is not Chalermchai's goal. One of his goals is to gain international recognition to advance his national status. In other words, I believe his interest in national recognition is greater than an interest in a potential recognition from the international community. Yet the fact that he receives foreigners' attention helps his national status.

¹¹³ Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles. A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 391.

¹¹⁴ As Sandra Cate explains, though his anti-western discourse is strong, it is also selective, "for he has driven both a Harley-Davidson and a Mercedes Benz." *Ibid*, 126.

Chalermchai even uses, knowingly or not, part of the same paraphernalia that the Thai elite used when trying to integrate the regions. Chalermchai never goes around the temple without certain objects, including a walking stick, a large knife and a hat. This hat – replicas are on sale in the gift shop – is similar to ones of the British colonial army, the pith helmet, and similar to the ones worn by the central officials of the Thai elite whilst in the north.¹¹⁵ Part of his paraphernalia seems to support the politic of official centralization of the Thailand and the absorption of Lan Na culture for the good of a unified national identity.

His use and representation of Buddhism is conforming to central Thai Buddhism. In his pamphlets, Chalermchai emphasizes the construction of the White Temple as an act of merit. By dividing his temple in three different sections and putting an accent on merit-making, Chalermchai supports central Thai Buddhism, with a traditional Thai cosmography and social hierarchy. Social hierarchy is reinforced since the concept of merit explains the social divisions, exemplified by the three divisions at Wat Rong Khun: the *Kharawat*, the *Sanghawatt* and the *Buddhawatt*. With this temple the association between Thai nationalism and neo-traditional art is reinforced. However, there are no doubts that this temple is artistically singular and distinct from previous architectural monuments in Thailand. Nevertheless, though this temple is visually different from other temples in the land, I argue that the temple conforms to central nationalism and is therefore relatively orthodox in its Buddhist, social and national expression.

For example, the main monument of the temple is the *ubosot*, not the *vihan*. In fact, the temple does not have a *vihan* but a pavilion of images resembling a small tower rather than a hall. This centralization of the *ubosot* follows modern Thai interests for the *ubosot* and what it represents, that is the centralization of the *Sangha* and the royalty/governmental administration. The style of the hall also follows the Bangkok model, which is tall and narrow with elaborate stylized finials. Though the finials are primarily decorated with *naga* and swans, there are also other animals, such as the elephant and the lion. Stylistically, the work is a three-

¹¹⁵ The pith helmet is also the helmet of the Thai royal guard.

dimensional elaboration of Chalermchai's paintings of the 1990's. It emphasizes the *Traiphum*, merit-making and social hierarchy; in other words, it follows modern Thai nationalism. Though it presents some northern Thai details, such as the elaborate *tung* and the variety of subjects found on the *bot*'s finials, the overall concept behind the temple follows a conventional Thai neo-traditionalism that supports a centralized national identity, yet Chalermchai does so by producing a temple which is visually distinct from previous temples in Thailand.

Chapter 6 Wat Pa'O

This chapter is an analysis of Wat Pa'O Ram Yen [วัดป่าอ้อร่มเย็น, temple of the cool shaded forest] in the village of Pa'O Ram Yen on the outskirts of Chiang Rai. Contrary to Wat Rong Khun, this temple is little known either locally, nationally or internationally. Yet some members of the artistic community in Chiang Rai are invested in the project. It is through some of these artists that I became aware of Wat Pa'O. Like Wat Rong Khun, it is still under construction; yet two of the three main buildings, the *ubosot* and the *chedi*, are accessible to the laity, though neither is finished. Though the *vihan* is still missing, the blueprints are available. Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter two and as will be explained in more detail here, it is Somluk Pantiboon's hope that the temple will never be complete, that its construction and reparation will continue for generations to come. Indeed the artist who supervises the construction wants the temple to be an 'ongoing' project. As will be explained, at Wat Pa'O, the construction processes are seen as just as important as the final architectural monuments. Furthermore, by having access to the construction phase, we can assess more easily and analyze the processes, changes and methods of construction rather than simply having access to a final product. Though working with a project still under construction is unusual, I feel confident that enough is known about the temple, its buildings and the underlying concepts behind its construction, that the *wat* can be analyzed and compared to the material presented in previous chapters.

The population of Pa'O initiated the project in 2006, yet its completion is under the supervision of artist Somluk Pantiboon (สมลักษณ์ ปันติบุญ), a ceramicist established at Pa'O.¹ In this chapter I argue that the inspiration behind the temple is localism in combination with an 'engaged' Buddhism experienced at the communal level through morally guided activities. The details of the temple will therefore be described and their Buddhist and national specificities will be analyzed.

¹ Both his house and workshop, Doy Din Deng, are at Pa'O, the workshop being only a few meters away from the temple itself.

In this chapter I will begin by briefly looking at other works by Somluk Pantiboon, the artist responsible for the project, so the temple of Pa’O can be situated in relation to his artistic vision and practices. I will then focus on the architectural and decorative details of the elements already in place at Wat Pa’O. I argue that Somluk departs from the forms representing a central Thai identity and architecture and takes from traditional Lan Na art, yet adapts it to suit contemporary needs: the concept of localism is important for Somluk and is represented in the construction and maintenance of the temple.

Village of Pa’O Ram Yen

The village of Pa’O Ram Yen is situated in the province of Chiang Rai, a few minutes drive north from the capital of the same name. The population of the village, 70 households with 400 inhabitants, is divided relatively equally between Buddhists and Christians. However, until Somluk decided to build a temple, there was only a Christian church in the village. To get to the nearest temple, the Buddhist residents of Pa’O had to walk a fair distance (2 km)² and cross a highway. Determined to have their own temple, the population of Pa’O asked for the help of Somluk Pantiboon a respected artist living and working at Pa’O.

When asked to help with the construction of the temple, Somluk readily accepted under the condition that he would not be solely responsible for it. In other words, he would help with the architectural plans, the fundraising as well as the overall organization, but he would not build it himself. Since this is the temple of a small community, he wants the community to get involved in its construction. As explained in chapter 4, Thai *chedi* are strongly associated with the royalty and though all royal temples have them, not all temples have *chedi*. Indeed many small village temples do not have them. Furthermore, though some village workers can be employed to work and build *chedi* in different temples, Somluk wants this temple to

² One monk from Wat Pa’O gave an interview for the temple’s blog and he mentions that the distance is approximately 2 km. Yet the monk also says that to get to the nearest temple the people of Pa’O had to cross the highway, which was very problematic, as most people of the village are old and to cross a highway represented a real danger for them. Angkrit Ajchariyosophon, “Wat Pa’O Ram Yen,” http://watromyen.blogspot.com/2009_12_01_archive.html (accessed December 20, 2009).

be different and actually have the entire Buddhist community involved in the project. By requesting that the laborers be from the village, he insures, among other things, that the villagers will have a personal connection to the temple but also that the *chedi* will become a local symbol rather than a symbol of the elite. The interest in localism and local pride is a very important concept for Somluk and is apparent in the organization and plan of the small temple. Before looking at the temple itself, its art and architecture, we need to look at Somluk's work and his artistic vision.

Somluk's Art

Somluk is a potter, or, as presented on his business card, a ceramicist. Born in 1957 in the small village Chiang Khong, province of Chiang Rai near the Laos/Thai border, he studied at the Northeastern Institute of Technology, Faculty of Industrial Design, in Chiang Mai [Fig. 5].³ He was always interested in art, though he never thought much about ceramics until he took an elective course in pottery. There he developed an interest in the craft. He had an unusual yet interesting early career. Between 1980 and 1986, he was a volunteer instructor for pottery and print making in camps for Khmer and Laos refugees in Thailand, a project sponsored by the UN.⁴ Though his work was fulfilling on a human level, he realized that he could not financially survive as a volunteer all his life, so he moved to Japan to apprentice with master potter Iwao Onuma from 1987 to 1988, then to master potter Tarouemon Nakazato from 1989 to 1991. He then returned to Chiang Rai province to open a ceramic factory, Doy Din Deng (ดอยดินแดง, the red earth hill), where he trains local workers in the art of ceramic making and firing. He chose to establish his shop in the vicinity of the city of Chiang Rai because its beautiful landscape reminded him of both Chiang Khong and Japan.⁵

At Doy Din Deng, Somluk established a business section, with wheels, kilns, and a shop where he sells everyday stoneware, such as mugs, cups, plates, vases,

³ Phinituwan, ศิลปิน-ศิลปะ : บทความสาระน่ารู้ทางศิลปะและศิลปิน/ *Artists and Art: essays on art and artists*, 33.

⁴ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen.

⁵ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen. *Lanna Contemporary Art* (Nonthaburi: PCC Art Gallery, 2005).

teapots, etc. [Fig. 67]. There is also an ‘artistic’ section, with Somluk’s own wheel and studio, and a gallery for his art works. One of the important sources of inspiration behind Somluk’s work, both the everyday ceramics and his artworks, is a deep respect for nature and a desire to live in harmony with it.

All the stoneware, whether everyday ceramic or artwork, is made of clay found in the area with a glaze made of different elements, both organic and mineral matters, such as the bark of trees, rice stalk, leaves etc... When fired, these elements change to different colors. All the forms are hand-made, thrown on a potter’s wheel. Although electric wheels are employed in the workshop, Somluk still prefers to work with a wheel turned by a foot-paddle.

He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions at home and abroad; he has also received numerous prizes, both in Thailand and abroad, including Japan (thrice at the Asian Exhibition of Arts and Crafts in Fukuoka) and New Zealand (Award of Merit at the 19th Fletcher Challenge Award Exhibition, Auckland).⁶ He was also resident artist at the Richmond Art Center of the Loomis Chaffer School, Connecticut in 2003. Somluk is well known within the Chiang Rai artistic community as well as the national and international ceramic community.⁷ Yet, and though he is well known in his field, he does not have the national recognition that Chalermchai Kositpipat has.⁸

The traditional aspects of Somluk’s Art

Somluk is well versed in the history and different techniques of Thai ceramic work. While he is interested in a wide range of possibilities, he employs simple basic principles or what he calls the ‘matrix’ of ceramic making: clay, slip, paint and glaze.⁹

⁶ Ibid; Somluk Pantiboon, *Contemporary Ceramics in the Thread of Tradition* (Oslo: Vigeland Museum, 2004). The most recent solo exhibit in Thailand was late 2008, at the Ardel Gallery in Bangkok, entitled ‘Still Voice of the Forest’. Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007 and March 23, 2010, Pa’O Ram Yen.

⁷ Somluk was guest artist and judge at the National Ceramics Exhibition in Bangkok in 2006. As mentioned, he also has had numerous international exhibitions, such as in Norway, Japan, New York, New Zealand.

⁸ Yet few artists have had the publicity and national recognition Chalermchai has received.

⁹ A slip is diluted clay applied before the work is fired; it is most often of a different color than the body of the object so to hide it. Decorated painting will also differ from the clay body or the

For Somluk all pottery works, from all times and regions, are compatible because they share the same basic principles, therefore, it does not matter if one studies pottery in Thailand, Japan or elsewhere.¹⁰ If one understands the basic principles, they can be adapted to the different regions. For example, the type of clay might be different, so a certain period of adaptation on the wheel might be required. The colors of the fired clay might also be darker than intended, depending on its mineral content, so the work might need a slip to create a lighter background to set off the painted decorations.¹¹ The painting and the glaze colors might also differ, as the vegetation changes from region to region. Yet, though the details change, the basic 'matrix' stays the same no matter where you are or where the primary material is from. This makes ceramic an art form with extraordinary freedom to explore new styles, techniques and colors, yet the artist can also keep in touch with traditional concepts. With ceramic making, the contemporary and the traditional may merge in unison, as there are no definite boundaries between them. In his art, Somluk always tries to find new material for the glaze with what is available in Chiang Rai, giving it different colors and textures. He also experiments with adapting ancient techniques for modern use, like different techniques of coiling and paddling. Yet he has a profound respect for historical objects and he still studies historical pieces as source of knowledge and inspiration for his own work.¹²

slip, if used. Glaze, if used, is the last pre-firing coat and will render the ware waterproof and often gives it a 'glassy' quality due to silica. Ware can have all these layers – slip, paint decorations and glaze – or can have one or two of them. Ware can also be punched and paddled to give texture and can sometimes receive post-firing layers of colors, before being re-fired. All these different techniques were used in historical Lan Na and Thailand.

¹⁰ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen.

¹¹ For example, the clay used in historical central Thailand was fine and very pale, while the clay around Chiang Mai was darker, requiring a white slip to hide the coarse and dark quality of the clay. Shaw, *Northern Thai ceramics*, 39-42, 66-67; *Thai Ceramics. The James and Elaine Connell Collection* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford, Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹² In interview, Somluk focused on historical Lan Na and Sukhothai ceramics, indicating that he appreciated the different colors of green found on historical ceramic works from these two regions. Yet Ban Chiang and other early sites (Bronze and Iron Age) from the Korat Plateau in northeastern Thailand are known for their large earthenware decorated with red geometric designs which are often incised or paddled. Brian Vincent, "Crossing the Style Barrier: New Evidence from Thailand," *Uncovering Southeast Asia's Past. Selected Papers from the 10th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists* (2006): 137-47.

Though a strong comparison between Montien Boonma and Somluk Pantiboon exceeds the limits of this dissertation, a few parallels between the two artists could be drawn. A celebrated conceptual Thai artist, Montien Boonma (1953-2000) was interested in the concept of locality, the environment, Buddhism, and what he called 'primitive medium', such as clay and vegetation. As a conceptual artist Montien was interested in transforming objects into artistic hybrids so viewers could realize that the modern world was fast changing, but also that they could gain awareness and respect of the natural media he used. As will be shown in this chapter, these concepts resonate with Somluk's project at Wat Pa'O. However, Montien's audience was primarily an international urban audience who did not have an everyday relation with these 'primitive media'. His art uncovered the disjunction between the viewer's everyday life and an imagined local experience. On the other hand Somluk's project at Wat Pa'O is intended for the villagers themselves.

Somluk is interested in ceramics, not only for its artistic possibilities, but also because of the familiarity and dynamism of pottery. Indeed, Thai historical pottery was not only beautiful, but always functional as well.¹³ At Doy Din Deng, Somluk separates the functional section from the artistic section, but he is aware that historically, this separation did not exist.

As I became more engaged in pottery and pursued my profession as a ceramist, I could see more clearly than ever before the dynamics of Thai pottery touching on all the corners of people's lives throughout our history and the significance of this tradition that our forefathers have left for us. [...] Some of my works may not be for everyday use, and in this respect my work differs from that of my forefathers.¹⁴

Nonetheless, Somluk acknowledges the 'savoir faire' of his ancestors and studied ancient techniques of ceramic making. When talking of historical pottery, Somluk talks principally of the kilns closer to Northern Thailand, including Sukhothai,

¹³ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen.

¹⁴ Pantiboon, *Contemporary Ceramics in the Thread of Tradition*.

Suwankhalok and Lan Na stoneware, though, when looking at his textured works, it is difficult to ignore Ban Chiang incised earthenware.¹⁵

Although Somluk has studied traditional art and techniques, he does not look at historical art for the sake of doing traditional art. While he sees historical art as an important learning tool, he believes it to be superfluous to simply copy historical art, since they were made for previous generations and we live in our own time.¹⁶ In other words, he is not interested in copying the past, but he is interested in acquiring the knowledge, so he can use it in a contemporary context. Therefore, his art could be categorized as neo-traditional even if visually it is exceptionally different from what is generally accepted as 'neo-traditional' art by art historians as explained in chapter 2. This neo-traditionalist artistic vision is also present at Wat Pa'O and the *wat's* architecture.

Thai Historical pottery

When the kingdom of Lan Na was established by Mangrai in the 13th century, pottery making changed from the production of earthenware to stoneware.¹⁷

Pottery varies from kiln to kiln in Lan Na and a uniform ceramic style in the region is difficult to determine. This section introduces Lan Na ceramics as a basis of comparison for Somluk's artworks.¹⁸

¹⁵ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen.

¹⁶ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen.

¹⁷ Charles Higham, *Early Cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: River Books, 2002), 187-92; *Thai Ceramics. The James and Elaine Connell Collection*, 24. Ban Chiang pottery is, of course, well known since its discovery in the 1960's. The red and buff unglazed earthenware of Ban Chiang and the region of the Korat plateau is from the iron age of Southeast Asia, 300-200CE. Yet in northern Thailand, earthenware were not as numerous and concentrated around the kingdom of Haripunchai, mostly for small objects such as Buddha statues and amulets. The more intense ceramic (stoneware) production across the northern valleys started after King Mengrai.

¹⁸ The study of Thai ceramic is interesting and often parallels the construction of the historical Grand Narrative mentioned in chapter 1. Indeed when studying Thai ceramic scholars usually follow the same sequential history starting at Sukhothai, to Ayutthaya then Bangkok. Lan Na ceramic is usually studied separately from *Thai* ceramic even if some earthenware made in Lan Na were artistically as interesting as wares from Sukhothai. J.C. Shaw, *Northern Thai ceramics* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford, New York, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981); Nicol Guérin and Dick van Oenen, *Thai Ceramic Art: The Three Religions* (Singapore: Suntime, 2005).

First, the basic color range of the glaze and slips of ceramics from the valleys around the rivers Ping, Wang, Yom and Nan are not very different from other regions of Southeast Asia. The basic glaze colors of the late 13th century CE onward remain the same, with different shades of green or celadon, different shades of brown, white and transparent.¹⁹ There exist three major historical Lan Na kiln sites Kalong (central Lan Na), Chiang Mai, and Paan (between Phayao and Chiang Rai). These wares, especially eastern wares from Phayao, are amongst the earliest within Thai territory and are believed by some scholars to be even earlier than Sukhothai wares.²⁰ The quality of the different ceramics from Lan Na varies greatly from kiln to kiln. For example, the Sankampeang wares from the Chiang Mai region were of poorer quality and the kilns used were unusually small. In comparison, the Kalong wares of central Lan Na were of fine quality with beautiful glaze decorations.

There are similarities between central Lan Na wares, mostly of central Lan Na, and wares from northern central Sukhothai kingdom; not from the city of Sukhothai itself however, but from Sawankhalok,²¹ the most important center for

¹⁹ The percentage of iron oxide in the glaze, when fired, determines the colors of the glaze. Celadon is acquired with a relatively small amount of iron oxide, found in ash of vegetation. The green of the glaze may vary greatly however, either from the type of firing (the more oxygen in the kiln, the deeper the shade), the application of a slip, or the vegetal source. For example, the intense bluish-green colors often found in Somluk's art and sometimes in ancient Sawankhalok ceramics, is acquired from the ashes of rice husk. Brown glaze is made with clay of very high content iron oxide, found in minerals. Although the chemical transformation is the same as with celadon, with brown glaze the iron oxidant dominates and simply over-rules any green shades the glaze might have. Brown shades range from a more yellow color, to a very dark, almost black color. It is the overall quality of the ware, the clay, the glaze, the decoration, incision, shape etc., which distinguish one historical group of kilns from another. Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12th 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen. See also Shaw, *Northern Thai ceramics*, for ceramic making techniques including slips, clay, glaze and the medium used for colors in historical Lan Na ceramic. See Louise Allison Cort, George Ashley Williams IV and David P. Rehfuss, "Ceramics of Mainland Southeast Asia. Collection of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery," <http://seasianceramics.asia.si.edu/index.asp> (accessed Feb 17th, 2010) for a general overview of the different techniques and media used in Southeast Asian ceramic.

²⁰ Shaw, *Northern Thai ceramics*, 85.

²¹ Roxanna Brown, "The Ming Gap and Shipwreck Ceramics in Southeast Asia" (University of California, 2003); Dick Richards, *South-East Asian Ceramics: Thai, Vietnamese, and Khmer. From the Collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford, Singapore and York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 35-36; Beek and Invernizzi Tettoni, *The Arts of Thailand*, 119; *Thai Minor Arts*, 178. Some scholars, both Thai and foreigners, will identify as 'Sukhothai' anything produced within the territory of the ancient kingdom of Sukhothai, yet the term is

ceramic in Thailand between the 14th and 16th centuries CE. Experts do not agree as to which, either Lan Na or Sawankhalok, produced the first stoneware. It is not clear either whether one influenced the other or both industries started independently, derived from the work of Chinese immigrants.²² Sawankhalok and central Lan Na wares show a variety of shapes, decorations, and glazes. Kalong wares are of good quality clay, fine grain and off white to 'buff' in color.²³ Contrary to Sukhothai city wares, where the unrefined coarse clay was used with a thick slip, the Kalong wares show fine clay of a buff white. The clay is of such quality that a slip was rarely used other than to accentuate an under glaze decoration.

Potters of both regions, Kalong and Sawankhalok, made monochrome glaze in high quality white and celadon, varying from deep olive green to blue-grey.²⁴ This nice bluish green color is one of Somluk's favorite. The most common decorations are floral motifs, swimming fishes and arabesques.²⁵ Yet, and although he acknowledges his study of historical ceramics, Somluk does not generally paint motifs on his stoneware. While celadon represents the bulk of Sawankhalok exports, and therefore of production, the Lan Na celadon is rarely found outside the region itself and the Lan Na wares, especially of Kalong, are known mostly for the

misleading, as the ceramic shapes, colors, qualities and quantities vary greatly from kiln site to kiln site. Other scholars prefer to identify a ware depending on the kiln it is from, either Sukhothai or Sawankhalok, which is roughly 40 km north of the ancient city of Sukhothai. Though ceramic was made and exported from the ancient city of Sukhothai, the quality of the ceramic was relatively low.

²² What is clear is that Sawankhalok and wares from the central and eastern regions of Lan Na (with the exception of the region of Chiang Mai) had similar firing techniques (cross-draught), glaze, shape, decoration and even techniques for stacking the wares inside the kilns. Only the size of the kilns and the color of the raw clay are markedly different; the kilns at Sawankhalok are larger and the Kalong clay is paler (white to buff) than Sawankhalok (pale buff-brown). These wares are the primary sources of artistic tradition for Somluk.

²³ *Buff* is a term used often – sometimes in excess – when dealing with clay. It does not indicate a particular color, but the 'off' quality of a color. It is definitely not sharp, neither is it specific on the color palette. When one sees a 'buff' pink or 'buff' brown, one sees an 'off', less than sharp color, with a tinge of grey-beige amalgamation. When used on its own, like in this case, it represents a color that is not definite, in other words, it is neither beige, nor white, nor egg-shell; it is *buff*.

²⁴ Shaw, *Northern Thai ceramics*, 43-45. Only in Lan Na, more specifically in the kilns of Payoom and Pa Dong, do we found 'true' celadon of the Sung tradition (960-1279CE); this celadon was thick, oily, and finely cracked to give it a 'breakable' and delicate appearance.

²⁵ *Thai Minor Arts*, 178.

quality of their white glaze.²⁶ Both also produce black and brown under glaze decoration as well as iron-brown glaze. There is also a nice black-underglaze ceramic with extremely thin overall glaze, giving a black and white ceramic.²⁷ The shapes vary greatly, from simple plates with fish patterns to elaborate fluted *kendi*.²⁸

In Sawankhalok and central Lan Na wares, the brown and celadon glazes were often applied differently. The green glaze, thinly or thickly applied, is rarely running and visible. In other words, it is uniform. On the other hand, the brown glaze is often applied with a coarse brush and the liquid glaze is allowed to drip. The brown glaze is therefore rarely uniform and the raw quality of the clay, as well as the glaze, is visible. This heavy glaze has also inspired many of Somluk's works. Indeed, he often offsets polished surfaces with heavy dripping and uneven glazes. He also uses dark paint offset by white slip; he also likes to experiment with different shades of celadon and blue.²⁹

Nature in Somluk's Art

Historical tradition is not however Somluk's main source of inspiration; nature is a stronger source of inspiration. According to Somluk, a potter is the type of artist who is closest to nature. Indeed, a potter needs the earth for the clay, the wood for firing the kiln, and different types of pigments found in the earth, the vegetation and minerals to make a single work of art; indeed Somluk only uses natural pigment, focusing mostly on the same colors as his historical predecessors, that is white,

²⁶ Roxanna Brown, *Legend and Reality. Early Ceramics from South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur, London, New York, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977); Shaw, *Northern Thai ceramics*. The white glaze can also take delicate shades of green or bleu. Between the 14th and 16th centuries CE the Sukhothai region was under Ayutthaya's power, the most important port for ceramic trading in Mainland Southeast Asia. Yet, Lan Na was still independent. It is therefore not surprising that Ayutthaya used Sukhothai wares, while it limited, if not banned, Lan Na wares in its port. Suzanne Brown also believes that Ayutthaya's bid for power and failed invasions of Lan Na was centered on the acquisition of ceramic trade in the region. See pages 61-63 of this dissertation.

²⁷ Ibid, 43.

²⁸ A *kendi* is a very common ware in Southeast Asia. It is used for liquid and has two openings. One opening is at the top of the pot where you pour the liquid in, and the second opening is on the side and at an angle, where the liquid is poured out. See Ibid.

²⁹ In an interview Somluk also mentioned that he was particularly fond of a soft pale bleu created from rice husk ashes. Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen.

browns and greens. Though he takes from nature for the clay, the fire and the colors he uses, he says it is important to keep nature in a state of balance. Therefore, since he uses nature for his art, he sees it as his personal responsibility to help give back to nature, so it can stay in a state of balance. That is why, for the better part of 2004 to 2007, he was planting trees around the province of Chiang Rai, starting from around his workshop and house and then expanding.³⁰

A ceramic work can often be fluid, its form delicate and its decoration organic. Yet, it is the final form, its shape and decorations, which appears organic and fluid. The medium itself is carefully hidden behind the decoration. In other words, a visually delicate work hides a hard as stone core. The raw material is transformed, hidden to produce a delicate fluid object. Somluk's works are different.

In his art, the echoes of nature are predominant, not only for the colors and forms of the artworks, but also for the brushwork and dripping quality of the final product. The roughness of the clay and the quality and texture of the glaze are also obvious. Instead of having a flawless surface, like most of the artifacts on sale at the shop at Doy Din Deng, the art works on display in the gallery reveal their media. The materiality of Somluk's art is undeniable; he does not blend the different elements to form a homogeneous and uniform final product.³¹ Yet his interest in nature goes beyond the media used in his works. Natural elements are visible in the final work as well, as if the final object is organic or alive, sometimes painfully alive. The word 'painful' is not used lightly here; some works have been literally punched and cut into.

When looking at his work, the media are not hidden but exposed; we have the impression of being in front of raw nature. His work is organic because the medium is not static; the clay, though now solid through firing, is not static. In some instances, the clay is exposed, lacking either slip or glaze. The glaze is also often

³⁰ When I visited him for the first time in 2007, he was planting trees outside the city of Chiang Rai. He had been planting trees for the better part of the last three years and he felt it was now time for him to focus again on his art. Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Doy Din Deng, Pa'O Ram Yen.

³¹ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12 and August 11, 2007, Pa'O Ram Yen.

exposed as a 'goeey' texture, oozing from the work. As shown earlier, uneven dripping glaze is also present in historical works, such as ones from Lan Na and Sukhothai. Yet, in Somluk's works, the organic element and liquid quality are pushed to their extreme. Here, the glaze is no longer an addition to the stoneware, but an integrant part of the art. When looking at his works, although in reality this is a solid medium, the viewer also has a strong impression of a crude, yet organic object. There is something raw and even violent about some of his works. These are not delicate porcelains but rough and untamed objects.

Furthermore, Somluk wants to represent or recall nature to "remind the viewers of the nature and environment surrounding them."³²

The green hills and blue skies are removed one by one. The abundant forests that originate water resource are cut. There economic crops such as corn, tapioca and rubber trees are planted instead. [...] The mountain and the hill are excavated. The lateritic soils are sold for road and dwelling construction, as well as other projects. There is no zoning control or responsible person for such action. It seems that the nature and environment are degraded gradually.³³

It is Somluk's hope that his work will inspire people to reconnect with nature. By doing so, people will realize the effects their lives have on nature and the environment. "A seed is comparable to a human being. If we carefully plant it with enough soil and water, it will grow and become the tree of hope that blossoms and yields results continually."³⁴

In his works, both his sources of inspiration, nature and historical traditions, are present. Yet he transforms them so they become independent contemporary works of art. Indeed to make his works, he takes from traditional ceramics of Sukhothai and Lan Na, but he transforms them for contemporary viewers. His personal artistic philosophy and interest, tradition and nature, are also found at Wat

³² Somluk Pantiboon, "A Seed of Hope," in *The Still Voice of the Forest by Somluk Pantiboon* (Bangkok: Ardel Gallery of Modern Art, 2008), 7.

³³ Ibid. The text was taken literally from the publication. Translation from Thai to English by Manita Srisitanont.

³⁴ Ibid.

Pa'O Ram Yen. As will be explained, though he is interested in traditional architecture, he also adapts it to suit contemporary needs. Nature is also of paramount importance to the project, and is found in the temple's media and its landscape.

Besides nature and tradition, another important concept for Somluk is an 'engaged' approach to society and social relations, which, I argue, parallel some aspects of Buddhadāsa's writings, such as a decrease in the importance of merit-making, and an interest in morally guided social relations.³⁵ Therefore, before looking at the temple, we need to look at some of Buddhadāsa's reinterpretation of Buddhism and how his visions of Buddhism differ from central state Buddhism.³⁶

Buddhadāsa

Buddhadāsa was born on May 27, 1906 in the province of Suratthani in Southern Thailand. He became a monk at the age of 21 and travelled to Bangkok to pursue his studies of the scriptures. As Jackson explains however he soon became dissatisfied with the Pali examinations, as they did not reflect his own readings and interpretations of the scriptures.³⁷ In 1932 he witnessed the coup that ended the absolute monarchy and saw this as an omen to pursue his desire of religious reform.³⁸ He then returned to Southern Thailand where he established Suan Mokh, his forest monastery, and wrote many books in which he reinterpreted Thai Buddhism. Though his writings received acknowledgement as well as criticism during the 1940's and 1950's, it is during the politically troubled era of the 1960's and 1970's that his work became relevant to a large and often young Thai audience.

³⁵ In interviews Somluk Pantiboon has never acknowledged a connection with Buddhadāsa or his writings; on the other hand, he has not refuted it. In my last interview in March 2010, when I explained the connections I was making between Wat Pa'O and localism including Buddhadāsa's interest in the community, Somluk did not acknowledge or dissociate himself from these connections but simply said that indeed Wat Pa'O needed to be studied in relation to the community.

³⁶ Buddhadāsa is by no means the only Buddhist promoting peaceful and 'engaged' social relation. In fact Sulak Sivaraksa is associated with the concept of 'engaged Buddhism' even more strongly than Buddhadāsa. However, Sulak's social activism owes much to Buddhadāsa's reinterpretation of the Buddhist doctrine.

³⁷ Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadasa. Theravada Buddhism and Modernist reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), 11-13.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

Indeed as will be explained in this section, his reinterpretation of the Buddhist doctrines went beyond religious texts and had implications for Thai social and political relations. As Sulak Sivaraksa vehemently stated: “.... His impact is nationwide. It is largely due to Buddhadāsa that the younger generation in Siam now turn to Buddhist values and take Buddhism seriously.”³⁹ Suchira Payulpitack also emphasizes the importance of Buddhadāsa’s movements and writings on socially active movements in Thailand, especially regarding ecology and social justice:

Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism has inspired individuals and groups in various social sectors to rediscover the meaning of Buddhism and to search for appropriate means to apply it in their daily lives and activities. [...] Many development organizations and foundations, according to Seri Phongphit, which have arisen since then owe much of their inspiration to Buddhadasa's teachings, for instance Khana-Kammakarn Sasana Pua Karn-Patana (the Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development), Mulaniti Patana Chonnabot (the Thai Rural Reconstruction Foundation), Mulaniti Dek (the Children Foundation). The search for the application of Buddhist teaching to modern life has been actively engaged in by both monks and laity in rural and urban areas. More and more monks devoted themselves to rural development work in the North, the Northeast, the South, and the Central regions.⁴⁰

Furthermore, respected contemporary social activists in Thailand acknowledge the importance of Buddhadāsa and many, such as Sulak Sivaraksa⁴¹ and Prawase Wasi,⁴² could be seen as his intellectual followers.

Though Somluk does not specifically acknowledge an intellectual connection with Buddhadāsa,⁴³ I believe an analysis of Wat Pa’O in relation to his writings

³⁹ quoted in *Ibid*, 16.

⁴⁰ Suchira Payulpitack, “Buddhadasa’s movement: an analysis of its origins, development, and social impact” (Universitat Bielefeld, 1991), 201.

⁴¹ Sulak Sivaraksa, et al., eds. *Radical Conservatism, Buddhism in the Contemporary World. Articles in Honour of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa’s 84th Birthday Anniversary* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development. International Network of Engaged Buddhists, 2533).

⁴² David Gosling, *Religion and Ecology in Indian and Southeast Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 96.

⁴³ It is important to point out however that he did not acknowledge any other Thai writer or social activist.

succeeds at presenting the complexity of the temple's artistic and social goals.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Suchira Payulpitack's extensive study of Buddhadāsa's impact on Thai society shows that it is sometimes impossible to concretely link Buddhadāsa or Suan Mokh to many modern and contemporary activists groups and social movements, as his reevaluation of Buddhism and interest in social relations has had long lasting impacts on Thai society and has now been assimilated to different discourses on politic, society and ecology. I believe the straightforwardness of Buddhadāsa's writings on merit, morally guided social activities and social relations are an important overture for an analysis of Wat Pa'O. Indeed though many modern social activists include Buddhism in their writings; Buddhadāsa's reevaluation of Thai Buddhism is paramount to our interpretation of Wat Pa'O and its radically different approach to merit and morally guided social activities.

Buddhadāsa, Buddhism and society

The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true from humans and animals, trees and the earth. Our bodily parts function as a cooperative. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering, and death, then we can build a noble, even a heavenly environment. If our lives are not based on this truth then we'll all perish.⁴⁵

Buddhadāsa's interpretation of Buddhism is unorthodox. He has reinterpreted key canonical Buddhist concepts and departs from an individualistic interpretation of Buddhist salvation, to encompass the importance of social justice. Somluk's interest in community and balance shares similarities with Buddhadāsa's writings.

⁴⁴ Payulpitack, "Buddhadasa's movement: an analysis of its origins, development, and social impact."

⁴⁵ Buddhadāsa, quoted in Donald K. Swearer, "The Hermeneutics of Buddhist Ecology in Contemporary Thailand: Buddhadasa and Dhammapitaka," in *Buddhism and Ecology. The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams (Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997), 29.

Peter A. Jackson explains that prior to Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, the Thai *Sangha* was concerned about the centralization and maintenance of strict clerical practices, which is an aftermath of the *Sangha* acts of the beginning of the century. Therefore the *Sangha* never tried to enforce any central interpretation of the doctrine.⁴⁶ As Jackson explains, it was therefore possible for Buddhādāsa to reinterpret the doctrine without openly threatening the *Sangha* itself. Indeed, though monks and lay people have criticized his interpretations of the doctrine,⁴⁷ the *Sangha* never disapproved of Buddhādāsa.⁴⁸

In Thailand, the two official *nikai*, the *Thammayut*⁴⁹ as well as the *Mahānikai*, support an orthodox view of the political order. In other words, and among other things, Buddhism is used to maintain and support the political order, by reiterating conservative readings of the doctrine, focusing on *kamma*, rebirth and merit-making. For example, though Mongkrut rejected the cosmological worth of the *Traiphum* as being scientifically unfounded,⁵⁰ the concept of merit-making was maintained, as it gave legitimacy to social hierarchy, with the king, having the most accumulated merit in the land.⁵¹ The subsequent *Sangha* acts of 1902, 1941 and especially 1962,⁵² reinforced the centralized Thai government and social hierarchy.⁵³

⁴⁶ Indeed the major differences between the reformed *Thammayut nikai* of King Mongkrut and the larger *Mahanikai* order are questions of practices. For example, how to wear the robes and how many meals a day a monk should be allowed to eat.

⁴⁷ Louis Gabaude, "Thai Society and Buddhadasa: Structural Difficulties," in *Radical Conservatism. Buddhism in the Contemporary world. Articles in Honour of Bhikku Buddhadasa's 84th birthday Anniversary* (Bangkok: The Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 1990).

⁴⁸ Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989).

⁴⁹ See pages 68 and 76 of this dissertation. King Mongkrut founded this order in the 19th century.

⁵⁰ Winichakul, *Siam Mapped. A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, 33-47; Jackson, *Buddhadasa. Theravada Buddhism and Modernist reform in Thailand*, 36-40; Jackson, "Re-Interpreting the Traiphuum Phra Ruang: Political Functions of Buddhist Symbolism in Contemporary Thailand," 64-100.

⁵¹ This notion is well attested during the 19th century in Bangkok. The welfare of the kingdom depended on the merit of the king. Even in the late 20th century, that the king is the most 'meritorious' person in the realm is still an accepted notion. See Charles F. Keyes, "Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 2 (1977): 288.

⁵² The Sangha reforms followed political changes. The 1902 Sangha was promulgated during the absolute monarchy under King Chulalongkorn. When the monarchy fell in 1932, the new

On the other hand, Buddhādāsa's vision is primarily based on social balance and social relations. Buddhādāsa's interpretation of the doctrine does not negate meriti-making and social hierarchy, especially the king's position in the land, yet he focuses on the individual and his or her meritorious actions in society, instead of the 'established' social order.⁵⁴

Buddhādāsa felt that focusing on merit, *kamma* and rebirth was detrimental to someone's quest for awareness and insight, yet merit, *kamma* and rebirth are strong components of Thai Buddhism, as these concepts explain and maintain social hierarchy. He found the concept of *kamma* and rebirth problematic for two main reasons. First, acquiring good *kamma* through merit-making is potentially detrimental to the ultimate Buddhist goal, which should be to 'nibbānize'.⁵⁵ Indeed

democratic government reorganized the Sangha to parallel the new government (Sangha act of 1941). When the government changed again with the military coup of Marshal Sarit Thanarat (Sangha act of 1962).

⁵³ Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State*. ; Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism*,

⁵⁴ Jackson explains that Buddhādāsa's view on politics and society is problematic and even contradictory. Indeed after the 1976 political upheaval, Buddhādāsa expressed his approval of a society ruled by dictatorship rather than democracy. Yet he did not believe in tyrannical dictatorship, but a dictatorship based on Buddhism and the concept of *dasarajadhamma* or the ten traditional virtues of a Buddhist king: almsgiving, morality, no negative personal aspects, honesty, gentleness, self-control, not being able to experience anger, not being difficult, be patient and not detracting from social norms. His later writings accepted democracy, yet a peaceful democracy where the different parties are tools to achieve "the rule of Dhamma in the world" not to express their differences and oppositions. Jackson, *Buddhadasa. Theravada Buddhism and Modernist reform in Thailand*, 241, 249, 343-344n16. According to Jackson, while Buddhādāsa agreed with the first two baskets of the *Tipitaka*, the *Vinaya Pitaka* (rules for monks and nuns) and the *Sutta Pitaka* (Discourses of the Buddha and of his disciples), he rejected the third (*Abhidhamma pitaka*) as being superfluous for the majority of the population. Christopher Key Chapple, "Abhidharma as Paradigm for Practice," in *Pali Buddhism*, ed. Fran J. Hoffman and Deegalle Mahinda (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), 79; Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 59; Jackson, *Buddhadasa. Theravada Buddhism and Modernist reform in Thailand*, 101-08. He saw the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (meaning beyond *dhamma*, a series of philosophical, even metaphysical texts) as unnecessary, problematic and misleading for most Buddhist practitioners. Buddhādāsa saw the *Abhidhamma* as a body of texts for monks wanting to explore Buddhism, as it is more intellectual and more philosophical than the other baskets; yet the text could be detrimental to the general population, as he believes these texts were not intended for them.

⁵⁵ Indeed as seen in the previous chapter, Keyes believes that most people in Thailand do merit not to attain *Nibbāna*, but to be reborn in a heaven or on this plane of existence, yet to be reborn beautiful or rich. Keyes, "Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society," 283-302. See note 92, page 118 above for the term to 'nirvanized'.

“good *karma* causes one to linger on in the cycle of birth and death, albeit in a good state of existence. It is not complete extinction, not nirvana.”⁵⁶ Buddhādāsa also says that merit-making (tham boon, ทำบุญ) is only one sixteenth of the value of compassion and kindness (metta, เมตตา) towards others.⁵⁷ However it is important to emphasize that Buddhādāsa does not negate the importance of *kamma* and merit, yet he favors harmonious social relations rather than individualistic acts of merit. This importance of social relations is paramount in our analysis of Wat Pa’O Ram Yen. Indeed as will be explained, Somluk does not negate the importance of merit, yet he emphasizes the *wat* as a place for social gathering and social relations.

Buddhādāsa’s second objection to the concepts of *kamma* and rebirth is the concept of no-self. For Buddhādāsa this concept is central to Buddhism and cannot be tempered with. For him, the concept of birth is not to be taken in a physical, organic way, but in a metaphorical one; the concept of birth should be understood as an acknowledgement of the ego. A ‘birth’ is when someone acknowledges his or her own existence; when ‘I am’ is claimed. Buddhādāsa therefore lessens the importance of *kammic* residues of past lives influencing present lives, or desire for better rebirths. “Instead he maintains that the cycle of dependent origination should be taken as explaining the arising of suffering at any given moment.”⁵⁸ However, it is important to note that Buddhādāsa does not deny future births. What he does is refocusing the importance of Buddhism from the ‘distant future’ to the ‘here and now’.⁵⁹

[T]he popular Buddhist system is bound to fail because it tries to solve an immediate problem on a remote field. [...] the only rationale that the Buddha had ever thought of and the only one which is efficient because it quenches the fire in the fire itself. Suffering, which grows in the mind, must be eradicated in the mind. One has to deal with an im-

⁵⁶ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *What did the Buddha Teach? Buddha Dhamma for Students*, trans. Ariyananda Bhikkhu (Bangkok: Thammasapa & Bunlentham Institution, 2007), 77.

⁵⁷ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *The Truth of Nature. The Master Buddhadasa Explains the Buddha’s Teachings* (Bangkok: Amarin, 2006), 127-30.

⁵⁸ Jackson, *Buddhadasa. Theravada Buddhism and Modernist reform in Thailand*, 112-13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 120.

mediate, immanent, mental problem on the field of its im-
mediate, mental genesis and not slip outwards to another
plane of existence or another life.⁶⁰

The state of 'here and now' is important for Somluk as he wants the community to be aware of the present state of nature in the village. As will be explained he has designed Wat Pa'O so that social activities taking place at the temple will bring an awareness of social relations and their impacts on the environment.

Buddhadāsa's reinterpretation of birth and *kamma* also causes a reevaluation of the concept of dependent origination. Not only does Buddhadāsa's reinterpretation of the scriptures call for a personal awareness of the here and now, but he also rejects that Buddhism is an individual endeavor, a concept supported by popular Thai Buddhism. "Buddhadāsa thinks that in unjust societies where the rich selfishly hoard social wealth the poor have no opportunity for spiritual attainment because of the unbearable nature of their worldly existence."⁶¹ For Buddhadāsa social justice, which is promoted by 'morally guided social activities,'⁶² is vital to acquire a state of balance in society, so individuals can achieve their spiritual goals. In other words, we first need to achieve a just society so that individual people can achieve *Nibbāna*.

To attain social justice, Buddhadāsa describes three duties for the individual in society: first, a duty to nature (achieving a balanced healthy physical existence); second, a duty to *Dhamma* (to have a healthy mental life); third, to "relate together in a peaceful social life".⁶³ It is this relation to others, which is the moral and spiritual construct of socially aware relations. Buddhadāsa's vision of Buddhism is less hegemonic than Thai State Buddhism, as it focuses on individual actions within a society in the 'here and now,' affecting the 'here and now'.⁶⁴ It is also closer to nature as it sees dependent origination coming from the social and natural

⁶⁰ Gabaude, "Thai Society and Buddhadasa: Structural Difficulties," 215.

⁶¹ Ibid, 207.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 223.

⁶⁴ This does not mean however that a Buddhist society does not need leadership; on the contrary, it needs a leader who is capable of merging spiritual and social practices.

environment; our current actions affecting our current state. Therefore, people need to be aware of their actions and of their relations to the environment, nature and society. This concept of social awareness and engagement parallels Somluk's communal vision and engagement at Wat Pa'O.

The temple

The temple of Pa'O Ram Yen is still under construction and is at a much earlier stage than Wat Rong Khun. Though projects can change over time, the general concept behind the temple's construction is clear: this is the temple of a small local community.⁶⁵ Though small village temples are definitely not uncommon in Thailand, as will be explained, the concept of community is of primary importance to Wat Pa'O's construction and maintenance.

Wat Pa'O has become known as an important artistic project in Chiang Rai, and many artists support it.⁶⁶ Many artists are interested in the concept and are participating however they can. For example, Angkrit Ajchariyosophon, a contemporary artist working in a variety of media, including photography, drawing, painting, collage and even performance art, is now actively involved in the temple's promotion. A friend of Somluk Pantiboon's, despite difference in age and artistic career, the two of them have become friends and they both have a great respect for each other's artistic accomplishments. Yet, being a multi media artist, Angkrit did not participate in the artistic development of Wat Pa'O, though he is actively involved in its promotion. Indeed he is one of the four writers responsible for the booklet explaining Somluk's early ideas for the temple of Pa'O Ram Yen.⁶⁷ He is also behind Wat Pa'O's Facebook page and blogs, where he updates the information and downloads the photographic material he shot on-site.⁶⁸ As will be explained later,

⁶⁵ Ponwat Prathong, et al., "The temple of Pa'O Ram Yen," (2550). My translation.

⁶⁶ It is Angkrit Ajchariyosophon who informed me of the Wat Pa'O's project. Furthermore, during my stay at Chiang Rai in 2007, other artists I interviewed and members of the cultural scene in Chiang Rai mentioned Somluk and the project at Pa'O.

⁶⁷ See note 69 bellow.

⁶⁸ Ajchariyosophon, "Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.,"; Angkrit Ajchariyosophon, "Wat Pa'O Ram Yen," <http://picasaweb.google.com/watromyen/goTFiF#> (accessed December 20th, 2009); Angkrit Ajchariyosophon, "Wat Pa'O Ram Yen,"

Chiang Rai artist Songdej Thiphong is also helping, although in a manner that is more directly artistic, by painting the walls of both *ubosot* and *vihan*. Other friends of Somluk have helped with different details, such as Thowan Sawanwong (ทวนสว่างวงศ์) for the ceramic plates on the *na neb* and Thamnuak Haripithak (ท่าบุญหริพิทักษ์) for the carvings of the railing.

According to Somluk's vision, the construction of the whole project follows four interconnected principles or moral guidelines.⁶⁹ These principles must also be part of the symbiosis between the community, the monks, the village and the temple, once this one is constructed. The first principle is *Dhamma*, with the development of the teaching of *Dhamma*, the practice of meditation, and knowledge and observance of the four noble truths and the eightfold path. This is a Buddhist temple and promoting *Dhamma* should be its first function.⁷⁰

Nature (ธรรมชาติ/thamachat) is the second principle, with an understanding that nature can teach right livelihood. Nature and the environment are at the basis of physical health, both for humanity and the world in general. People who are disrespectful of nature and the environment cause imbalances in nature, such as flood and drought.⁷¹ In interviews and in his writings, Somluk says that these effects are a reality that can be witnessed the world over and show that consumerism and greed have reached global proportions. If people would only pay attention to their environments, they would realize the consequences of their actions, and see that our environment is now out of balance, something paralleling

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=164249&id=666882428> (accessed December 20th, 2009).

⁶⁹ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, August 11, 2007 and March 23, 2010, Pa'O Ram Yen. Ajchariyosophon, "Wat Pa'O Ram Yen," 4. My translation. Somluk's early concepts and ideas for the temple project were put in writings (Ibid.) in a small booklet of which only 100 copies were made. This small booklet is only in Thai and was printed for the population, friends and potential patrons interested in the project. Four of his friends are responsible to put his ideas in writings. Somluk acknowledges that he is not computer savvy, so his friends offered to help with the booklet. Yet the ideas and concepts written in the booklet are Somluk's. As I understand it, Somluk wants to make and publish another, more exhaustive, version of this booklet in the near future. Yet in March of 2010, this new version was not yet available.

⁷⁰ See Ibid, 8.

⁷¹ Ibid, 8-9.

Buddhadāsa's teaching on dependent origination.⁷² Nature also affects characters and feelings, as the environment we live in has a strong impact on our emotions. One should not try to move away from nature when it comes to one's surroundings; too much decoration and embellishment, on temples for example, will bring excitement, greed and attachment. It is better to surround ourselves with the simplicity of nature, which will both calm our mind and teach us about impermanence. Nature is also a good environment for meditation, as one can keep consciousness and not be fooled by a superficial world.⁷³

The third principle is art. For Somluk, art is not only about aesthetics, but also about order and balance. Architecture and art should bring equilibrium with nature and not try to surpass it or cover it. Art should calm the mind with simplicity, not excite it with too much embellishment.⁷⁴

The fourth principle is 'believing'; believing in *Dhamma*, but also in the community of Pa'O.

The four principles behind Wat Pa'O dictate its style. It is obvious that the architecture of the temple will be simple and without much embellishment, which could distract the mind. Somluk also says that the architecture should always adapt itself to the environment, in this case, a small northern village. Culture and local traditions should also therefore be adapted according to the period and the people. There should be a dynamic equilibrium between culture, tradition, time-period and people. None is fixed; like with all things, there is progression and change. Somluk is therefore applying to the temple's architecture the same principles he is using in

⁷² Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, June 12, 2007, Pa'O Ram Yen; Pantiboon, "A Seed of Hope," 7. The concept of balance with nature is not uncommon in Thailand and is often associated with different spirits living in nature. For example, some spirits need to be appeased so they will not cause havoc, yet some can also be asked to cause trouble. A group of protestors against condominium projects in Chiang Mai claimed that the earthquake felt in the region in September 1989 was due to the rituals they performed, asking spirits to punish the project. Rosalind C. Morris, "Crises of the Modern in Northern Thailand. Ritual, Tradition and the New Value of Pastness," in *Cultural crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*, ed. Shigeharn Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (London: Curzon, 2002), 274. Yet in his writings, Somluk expresses that it is the greed of men that is responsible for the current imbalance in nature.

⁷³ Prathong et al., "The temple of Pa'O Ram Yen," 8-9. My translation.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 10-11. My translation.

his art; the transformation and adaptation of traditions. The four moral guidelines work together to bring a symbiosis between community, nature and Buddhism. Yet these aspects need to be specific to a contemporary environment.

General Plan

The temple will be an agent of a simple ideal. It will be in accordance with the art and culture of the region as well as with nature. For example, the *vihan* is in a Lan Na style because this style stresses simplicity and will therefore be conducive to practicing Buddhism.⁷⁵

The central building of the compound [Fig. 68] will be the *vihan*, with the *chedi* behind it [Fig. 69]. There is a much smaller *ubosot* than the *vihan* as well, in the southeastern corner of the compound, outside the main space of the *wat*. The bell-tower is currently behind the *ubosot* even if the original plan showed the bell-tower north of the *vihan*.⁷⁶ There are multiple *kuti* with a pavilion for the monks themselves and two more monastic pavilions on the west side of the main parking lot for the general community.

As of March 2010, the only buildings already in place are the houses for the monks or *kuti*, a pavilion of teaching for the monks, the *sala* for the teaching of the *Dhamma*, the bell-tower, the *ubosot* and the *chedi*, though these last two buildings are not yet finished. There is also the northern entrance gate and the *ran nam* or water jar stall.

Wat Pa'O's current northern entrance is in wood and is wider than it is tall, as it is commonly the case with traditional Lan Na architecture [Fig. 70]. The main supporting posts are recycled from old houses from northern Thailand.⁷⁷ Due mainly to deforestation, wood is now very expensive in Thailand and recycling wooden material is not uncommon for modern Thai architecture. One of the reasons why the traditional wooden house is no longer the main building type in northern Thailand is because people cannot afford to build their houses in wood

⁷⁵ Ibid, 17. My translation.

⁷⁶ The current location of the bell-tower is different than the original design by Somluk seen on figures 71 and 72.

⁷⁷ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, December 22, 2008, Pa'O Ram Yen.

anymore, preferring cement, a modern and cheaper material. The roof of the monument is two tiered, with the lower tier being wider than the upper one, as it is also common in Lan Na architecture. The roof's bargeboards are well defined and end in abstract finials, following Lan Na tradition. There is no central finial however, yet the central rib of the roof has four small spikes on its length.⁷⁸ The front gable is decorated with repetitive woodcarvings and is divided on its length and height, reminding of the coffered quality of traditional Lan Na architecture.

The temple has a *ran nam* (ร้านน้ำ) or water jar stall. It is a northern wooden structure part of household and temple traditions [Fig. 71]. These water jars and large coconut spoons or *nam boae* (น้ำมวย) are part of Lan Na hospitality tradition. They would be placed outside the house or on temple grounds so travelers could drink from them on their journeys. Unfortunately, this is a dying tradition and these jars are now often used as decorations rather than used for drinking water. Yet at Wat Pa'O, the structure is not intended as a decoration for tourists but is a functional structure, with fresh water and *nam boae*.⁷⁹ The structure is dark yet when looked at closely, it has delicate organic yet abstract wooden embellishments.

The *sala* for the teaching of the *Dhamma* is called *sala rienroorunglok gatam* (ศาลาเรียนรู้อวมโลกธรรม or the pavilion for learning the eight worldly conditions) [Fig. 72].⁸⁰ A *sala* is a pavilion of teaching where people can hear sermons. There are many different *sala* styles, yet, *sala* are usually rectangular and this one is no exception.⁸¹ This *sala* has walls, yet the walls are not solid; they are made of

⁷⁸ Some temples, both in northern and central Thailand, have a decorative spike on the middle of the central rib.

⁷⁹ *Nam Boae* are important in northern Thai culture and respected local artists are now making decorative *Nam Boae* an art form. See Phinituwan, ศิลปิน-ศิลปะ : บทความสาระน่ารู้ทางศิลปะและศิลปิน/ *Artists and Art: essays on art and artists*, 11-19, 169-177.

⁸⁰ The eight worldly conditions are part of the Pali canon: pleasure, pain, praise, blame, fame, disgrace, gain and loss.

⁸¹ Yet many *sala* are also constructed as opened pavilion. The Fine Arts Department of the Thai government offers blueprints at a reduce price so people can build standardizes temple buildings. The government offers more than one model for the *sala*, which shows the relative freedom for the design of such building. Yet the official government blueprints are rather elaborate, showing a large cruciform hall with multiple windows and multitier roof.

separate panels of latticed bamboo strips. The interior design is simple, with minimal wooden decorations. The roof is a gable roof, which is a roof that has a gable on one or both of its ends, with roofs that slope upward on the other two or three sides.⁸² The *sala* for the monks is a hip roof [Fig. 73]. Though the hip roof, which is a roof that slopes on its four sides, is not the traditional roof of Thailand – it is the gable roof – it is not uncommon to see them in modern Thailand. Indeed there are no conventions or tradition regarding *sala* roofs; they vary in style and medium within every region. Like the *ran nam*, the structure has delicate wooden carvings [Fig. 74]. The sidewalls are also semi-open, with latticed bamboo used for the upper and lower registers and sliding panels for the middle register [Fig. 75]. As with the gate and the water stall, the decorative details are subtle, the wooded structure is evident and the primary material is visible following Somluk's third concept that art should not have too much decorative embellishments.

The ubosot

The *ubosot* is now accessible to the laity and will continue to be until the *vihan* is constructed [Fig. 76]. Indeed until the *vihan* is built, the *ubosot* serves as the hall for the congregation. Indeed the *ubosot* has yet no *bai sema*. Only when the *vihan* is built, will the *ubosot's bai sema* as well as the *luk nimit* be installed.⁸³ For now the community can use the *ubosot*, so the building cannot yet be consecrated without the *bai sema*. Indeed in March 2010, I was able to enter the monument, as were any other visitors, male or female.

The *ubosot* is a well-balanced small building of roughly 7m long by 5m large by 6m high. The porch itself is roughly 3.5m long, which gives the *ubosot* a total length of 10.5m. The porch is decorated with four praying *deva* and the railings are embellished with mythological creatures, though they neither look exactly like the more common representations of the *makara*⁸⁴ or *naga*. Thamnuak Haripithak, a

⁸² Sthapitanonda and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand. A guide to traditional and contemporary forms*, 48-51. The hipped-gable roof was introduced in Thailand in the 17th century CE, from British and Dutch colonial architecture from neighboring countries.

⁸³ See pages 108-109 of this dissertation.

⁸⁴ A *makara* is a mythological creature with the trunk of an elephant and the tail of a fish.

friend of Somluk's, is responsible for the carving of these large unusual railings.⁸⁵ The mythical animals – one male, one female – are definitely lizard like, though their heads make them different than the gecko and the touquet, two common lizards in Thailand. The most common representation for the handrails of northern Thai temples is the *naga* coming out of the mouth of a *makara*. Both are mythological creatures originating in India. Yet there is no denying that the concept of the water dragon is an important Southeast Asian iconography and, for many Southeast Asian people, part of their cosmological worldview.⁸⁶ A powerful mythical animal, it is both a symbol of plenty and strength.

Even in Thailand, including northern Thailand, the water dragon or water snake is a common iconography of “Buddhism, of spirit religion and of nature.”⁸⁷ Indeed in Southeast Asia the water dragon, or water snake, is an animal that transcends religious boundaries. In northern Thailand, certain animals have different powers, each associated with different aspects of nature, such as water, air, land etc.⁸⁸ There is a respect and acknowledgement of the powers and spirits found in nature and in animals. It might be one of the reasons why there is a greater range of animals represented on northern temples than on temples of central Thailand. As we have already seen, the northern style eave brackets often show a greater diversity of subjects. The northern style railings also offer a great variety of subject, and like the eave brackets and the finials of northern Thai temple, they are also, very often, abstract and without zoomorphic elements. Wat Phra That Pha Ngao in

⁸⁵ See page 188.

⁸⁶ For example, the Belawin post of the Kenyah people, island of Borneo, is a representation of their cosmological worldview, including a hornbill, the animal of the male deity, and the water dragon, the animal of the female deity of the water underworld. The water dragon is a benevolent creature helping the souls to cross to the underworld. Fiona Kerlogue, *Arts of Southeast Asia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

⁸⁷ Susan Conway, *Silken Threads Lacquer thrones. Lan Na Court Textiles* (Bangkok: River Books, 2002), 182; Robyn Maxwell, *Textiles of Southeast Asia. Tradition, Trade and Transformation* (Hong Kong: Periplus, 2003), 283, 287.

⁸⁸ For example, the giant catfish found in the Mekong River, a powerful water animal, is only matched in strength by the bear, a land animal. That is why northern Thai fishermen used to go fishing the giant catfish on boats carved out directly from tree trunks using tools that wood mimic bear claws. The power of a great water animal could only be matched by its ‘land’ equivalent. I thank museologist Rebecca Weldon Sithiwong of Rai Mae Fah Luang for this information. Rebecca Weldon Sithiwong June 11, 2007, Rai Mae Fah Luang, Chiang Rai.

Chiang Sean province is a good example. This temple's numerous railings also offer a variety of different animals, including the *kotchasi*, a winged animal with the trunk of an elephant, the *naga*, the *makara*, elephants and what appear to be composite animals. Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, the *makara* and the *naga* are usually represented together, yet at Wat Phra That Pha Ngao, the *makara* is represented on its own. It has a rather large body, a large mouth, scales, fangs and a crest on the back of its neck [fig. 97]. This representation of the *makara* at Wat Phra That Pha Ngao does resemble the animal represented on the railing at Wat Pa'O. They are not exactly the same however. The animal at Wat Pa'O is heavier, yet both have crests on the back of their necks, they also have fangs and scales. The animal at Wat Pa'O is definitely a mythical creature, due to its elaborate embellished crest and large fangs, yet its body is so rounded and heavy, it does not have the usual fluidity of water creatures such as the more common representation of the *makara* with a *naga* in its mouth.

The *ubosot* is made primarily of wood, clay and ceramic. It has a two-tiered gable roof, with characteristic traditional Lan Na finials. The lower tier is at a wider angle than the higher one, which is a characteristic of historical Lan Na architecture [Fig. 77]. The *cho fa* is similar to *vihan nam tem's cho fa* of Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang, resembling the trunk of an elephant [Fig. 76].⁸⁹ The bargeboards are minimally carved with delicate *nag sadung*⁹⁰ or under decoration of the bargeboard, resembling waves of clouds. The *hang hong* or side finials are also typical of Lan Na finials and are carved as simple leaves [Fig. 18]. The eave brackets, only three of them on each side, are decorated as pineapples [Fig. 78]. In an interview, Somluk explains that the region is well known for the quality of its pineapples and so this fruit is therefore an apt decorative element even for such a sacred building.⁹¹ Nonetheless, though we find a greater variety of subjects decorated on northern Thai temples, the pineapple is an unconventional subject for a temple's eave brackets. The lower sections of the exterior walls are left bare and undecorated.

⁸⁹ See page 105 of this dissertation.

⁹⁰ See pages 105 of this dissertation. *Nag sadung* are the 'under' decoration of the bargeboard.

⁹¹ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, March 23, 2010, Pa'O Ram Yen.

The *na neb* (front gable) share some similarities with historical Lan Na temples, yet the decorative details are different. Indeed, as seen in chapter 4, historical Lan Na *na neb* are coffered, with a structural quality paralleling the articulated interior architecture. The *na neb* of the *ubosot* shows strong articulation, yet no coffered panels [Fig. 79]. Instead of wooden panels, the *na neb* is decorated with ceramic works, either small Buddha images or ceramic panels with representations of animals and waves of clouds. The animals differ greatly from one another, with mythological creatures such as winged elephants and horses, and other animals of northern Thailand, such as fish, deer and peacock. These animals do not necessarily give a narrative or mythological meaning to the *ubosot*. Yes, as seen in chapter 4, traditional Lan Na architecture uses a greater variety of animals for its finials or general decorations. Though there is no clear narrative on the *na neb*, we should see these animals as part of traditional Lan Na auspicious signs.

The interior of the *ubosot* is typical of historical Lan Na architecture, with an articulated roof that is paralleled on the walls [Fig. 80]. Though the ceilings of central Thai temples are also decorated, they are not articulated and the supportive frame is hidden. The sidewalls of northern Thai temples are not yet decorated, but the western wall, behind the statue of the Buddha, is. The interior mural paintings of the *ubosot* are the work of Chiang Rai artist and friend of Somluk, Songdej Thiphthong (ทรงเดช ทิพย์ทอง). Songdej has painted many, though not exclusively, northern Thai mountainous landscapes with recognizable Lan Na architectural monuments, such as Thawan's house, the double *chedi* at Phayao, or typical Lan Na *wat* [Fig. 81]. Born in Chiang Rai, he graduated from Silpakorn University yet he decided to come back to northern Thailand to establish his studio. In interviews, he explained that he found the landscape and architecture of northern Thailand so beautiful that he wanted to share them with other people. Songdej paints some of his canvases using acrylic and others using tempera. Although he prefers to paint with tempera, some of his patrons prefer acrylic, as tempera can deteriorate quickly and stain more easily than acrylic.⁹² Yet he prefers to paint with tempera because

⁹² Songdej Thiphthong, interview with the author, March 24, 2010, Mae Jan.

the colors are subtler and look more natural than acrylic. Songdej paintings, including the wall paintings at Pa'O are much calmer and subdued than Chalermchai's. He also focuses on landscape and historical monuments rather than representations of heavens and fantastic creatures.

The western wall of the *ubosot* is painted with a *Bodhi* tree and different celestial abodes; the highest are empty and the lower ones have *deva* inside them. [Fig. 82] This image is not a representation of the *Traiphum*. Indeed as mentioned earlier, though it is the norm in modern central Thailand to have the *Traiphum* on the western wall of religious halls, it is not a strong convention in Lan Na. Nonetheless Songdej's representation of the *Bodhi* tree also includes heavenly abodes. Interestingly the two types of celestial abodes represented follow conventional representations of the *Traiphum* with the empty structure on the upper level, while the ones with *deva* are at a lower level. Therefore, though the mural is not a traditional representation of the *Traiphum*, it does have some elements of it. The colors used are mostly in the shades of brown and grey. The medium used is tempera, which explains the subdued colors of the mural.⁹³ The colors of the mural blend with the interior space, as the recycled wooden beams were left in their natural dark colors. The sidewalls are not yet painted, though in interview, Songdej indicated that he would paint the walls with foliage and flowers.⁹⁴

Of all the buildings of the *wat* compound, the *chedi* and the *vihan* are the buildings that have occupied Somluk's mind since he was asked to participate in the project. Indeed, following the traditional Lan Na architecture, the *chedi* and the *vihan* are the two most important buildings of the *wat* compound. Furthermore, these two buildings will be separated from the others, including the *ubosot*, by an enclosing wall and galleries. The *ubosot* itself will be outside the wall enclosing the

⁹³ Songdej Thipthong, interview with the author, March 24, 2010, Mae Jan.

⁹⁴ Songdej Thipthong, interview with the author, March 24, 2010, Mae Jan. In interview Somluk stated that Songdej was responsible for the murals, although he had asked him to paint them because he agreed with his subdued approach to Buddhist painting and his quality as a colorist using 'natural' colors. It therefore seems that although Somluk might not be directly involved in deciding the subjects representing on the wall, Somluk chose Songdej because of their mutual understanding and appreciation of the project and of Buddhist art.

vihan and the *chedi*, as it was often the case with historical Lan Na *chedi*. The *chedi* is well under construction, yet not finished. The *vihan* is not yet built, though Somluk has already drawn the blueprints.

When designing the *vihan*, Somluk traveled and visited many places in northern Thailand and studied historical temples still in existence, as well as new ones modeled after traditional buildings.⁹⁵ Though the *vihan* of Wat Pa'O will be in the tradition of Lan Na architecture, it will not copy any temple in particular. For Somluk, understanding the past is better than copying it. Indeed, Somluk wants to build a *vihan* based on traditional models because he thinks these temples are best suited to the northern valleys and mountainous environment, not because he wants to copy the past [Figs. 100 and 101].

National temples, standard blue prints and local architecture

As demonstrated in chapter three, Buddhism has been an important force behind the creation of the Thai nation. With the new centralized government, the administration of Buddhist institutions became firmly based in Bangkok, with all regions being under its domination, whether it be the *Sangha* or the secular government. Yet, the centralization of Buddhism in Thailand does not stop at the hierarchy of the *Sangha*, the conformity and unity of the texts and language used. Indeed, although no regulation of conformity exists in contemporary Thailand for religious architecture, with the *Sangha* acts of 1941 and 1962, laws were passed regarding architectural standards in Thailand. When a new temple is to be built or restored, the district abbot needs to give his approval and accept the plan for the temple. To help with this process, the government sells State-approved blueprints for *sala*, bell towers and temple halls. Yet these blueprints show Bangkok style buildings. The blueprints show elaborate monuments with intricate decorative details for the capitals, the windows, the *cho fan*, *hang hong*, *na neb* etc. Each blueprint set – of 200 *baht* a set – comes with instructions and complete plans for the construction of a building. This enables small villages to get blueprints even if they cannot afford architects. These prints have been available since 1941, after the

⁹⁵ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, August 11, 2007, Pa'O Ram Yen.

second *Sangha* act, and though they are updated on a regular basis, they are still in the Bangkok style, even 70 years later.⁹⁶ There are two different *vihan* or *bot* prints, for small and larger buildings. The buildings' proportions are more-or-less the same however, following Bangkok style halls, with tall, long and narrow size buildings of roughly 1 wide by 2 high by 3 long.⁹⁷ The drawings also give the decorative details for the finials, bargeboards, eave brackets, columns drums and capitals etc. These details are elaborate and stylized.

Only the richest of temples can afford architects which can enable them to avoid the Bangkok-standard blueprints, with the result that most small villages around Thailand have standard temples of the Bangkok style. Indeed when the villagers first approached Somluk, their original idea was to build a temple in the Bangkok style, with elaborate colorful decorations. Yet Somluk was successful in persuading them to build a temple of the more subdued Lan Na traditional style.⁹⁸ As explained in chapter 4, the traditional Lan Na *vihan* are relatively large and low to the ground; Somluk used the metaphor of a hen protecting her eggs.⁹⁹ This not only allows a larger congregation within the building, but also traps the heat closer to the ground, as the climate is colder in the north. Since Somluk wants the *vihan* at Pa'O to be suitable for the environment of the village, he finds that a *vihan* in the Lan Na tradition is more appropriate. He also wishes to erect a small and simple temple

⁹⁶ The government is currently working on blueprints showing Isaan (north-eastern Thailand), Lan Na (northern Thailand) and southern Thailand styles buildings. Although I saw a blueprint prototype for the La Na style hall during a 2007 visit to the department of architecture of the Fine Arts Department, the new blueprints were still not available in 2010. See http://www.finearts.go.th/th/view_dservice.php?ID=0000000018&ID_Name=ID_Arc&TBL_Name=tbl_parchitect&Part_Image=parchitect. Accessed March 9th 2010. I am thankful to khun Tinnakorn Nugul of Chulalongkorn University and khun Tanawan of the Fine Arts Department, architectural division, of the Thai government for giving me this information.

⁹⁷ The larger *vihan* is 23 meters long by 16.5 high by 8.15 meter wide. The smaller *vihan* is 15.5 long by 11.75 high by 5.30 wide. To produce the new blueprints of Isaan, Lan Na or southern Thailand styles, the government in Bangkok studied historical temples as well as contemporary reconstructions. For example, one of the models for the Lan Na blueprints is at Ray May Fa Luang in Chiang Rai, where there is a reconstruction of an ancient Lan Na hall ceiling articulations and roof [Fig. 92]. I thank museologist Rebecca Weldon Sithiwong of Rai Mae Fah Luang for this information. Rebecca Weldon Sithiwong June 11, 2007, Rai Mae Fah Luang, Chiang Rai.

⁹⁸ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, March 23, 2010, Pa'O Ram Yen.

⁹⁹ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, March 23, 2010, Pa'O Ram Yen.

for the village, without the fancy decorations and embellishments of the Bangkok style seen on the standard blueprints. This is in accordance with the second and third principles behind the temple at Pa'O: art must be in harmony with nature, without too much embellishment. The elaborately decorated government blueprints do not convey simplicity, while traditional Lan Na architecture, because of its subdued decoration, its media and overall look, is closer to nature.

Somluk wants the community to have a relation to the temple; he therefore wants the architecture to be related to the local rather than to a national standard. Yet I argue that it would be wrong to interpret Somluk's intention as a negation of Thai national identity. However, it seems that he sees the 'general' and state approved Bangkok style blueprints as having played a part in the eradication of a once diverse architectural culture.¹⁰⁰ Yet, to build a temple hall with historical Lan Na elements and characteristics is not a negation of Thai national identity, but a desire for a stronger 'local identity' *within* Thai nationalism. Indeed, even a Lan Na identity (ancient kingdoms of Lan Na centered on Chiang Mai) is not what Somluk wants to portray at Pa'O. As will be shown in the analysis of the *chedi*, even royal Lan Na symbolism is not represented at Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.

Vihan

The *vihan* at Pa'O is not yet constructed though the blueprints are available [Fig. 83 and 84]. Somluk indicated in interviews that the *vihan* would follow traditional Lan Na architecture even more closely than the *ubosot*.¹⁰¹ The *vihan* will be in an axis with the *chedi*, in close proximity to it. Following historical Lan Na architectural traditions, the *vihan* will be much larger than the *ubosot*. The building will be roughly 20m long by 13m large by 10m high. It will be a two tiers gable roof with the lower tier at a wider angle than the upper one. The *vihan* will also be lower to the ground than the *ubosot*; the *hang hong* will be only 1m above ground, emphasizing the largeness of the hall, as opposed to its height as we see with the Bangkok style halls. The media will be the same as the *ubosot*: wood, clay and

¹⁰⁰ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, December 22, 2008, Pa'O Ram Yen.

¹⁰¹ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, March 23, 2010, Pa'O Ram Yen

ceramic. The *na neb* (front gable) will be coffered with carved wooden panels, following historical Lan Na traditions. The interior space will also have an articulated ceiling, windows (larger than tall) and wall paintings. As for the *ubosot*, Songdej Thiphong will paint the walls, though the artistic program is not yet established.

The temple will therefore stand apart from those built according to the standard Bangkok style blueprints still in circulation in Thailand. What is interesting at Wat Pa'O is that Lan Na architecture is preferred over that of Bangkok because it offers a design better suited for the northern regions. What is important is not so much the Lan Na identity, but the knowledge of historical Lan Na. The historical temples of the Lan Na traditions are better suited to the local environment of Pa'O. The wooden structure of historical Lan Na temples would also blend more easily than the cement temples in the Bangkok style.

Chedi

The other important building of the temple compound is the *chedi*. Though *chedi* are a common occurrence both from a historical or contemporary standpoint, the medium used for its construction sets it apart from other Thai *chedi*. Furthermore, it is with the *chedi*, more than with the *vihan*, that Somluk's concepts of community, localism and the importance of nature are best expressed. Though the blueprints and final details have changed between 2007 and 2010, the most important principle has remained the same: the primary medium for the *chedi* is bamboo. This choice of medium is unusual, if not unprecedented, in Thai Buddhist architecture.

Although bamboo can be used as temporary material to indicate where a future 'permanent' *chedi* will be [Fig. 85], bamboo has never been used as the main material for a Thai *chedi*.¹⁰² These temporary conical constructions have bamboo frames, with sand poured to fill the structure. However, bamboo is never used as the main surface material for the primary and 'permanent' *chedi*. As seen in chapter 4, Thai *chedi* are usually made of bricks and covered with stucco, as is the case for a brick Lan Na *chedi* and most early Indian and Sri Lanka's *stupa*. They are supposed

¹⁰² Temporary structure at Wat Pantao (วัดพันเตา), Chiang Mai. July 2007.

to withstand time as a historical and religious marker; as explained earlier, in Thailand they also stand for royalty and nationalism. A bamboo *chedi* would simply not represent ‘grandeur’, solidity and permanence. Yet, grandeur, solidity and permanence are not what Somluk wants to convey with this monument.

In one of our interviews Somluk explained that his first idea regarding the *chedi* was to build a simple structure made of unprocessed bamboo. The *chedi* was to be a simple structure of receding platforms of vertical bamboo posts [Fig. 86].¹⁰³ Yet this first plan was abandoned for a structure made of bamboo strips [Fig. 87]. Somluk explains that this system would allow a greater freedom of form and he is now able to give the *chedi* a more traditional and fluid shape. Working with bamboo strips is common in Thailand for relatively small objects such as basketry, hats, mats etc., yet not for such large objects as architectural monuments. And, left to the elements, bamboo strips are even less durable than unaltered bamboo stems. Somluk therefore decided that the *chedi* would be covered with a layer of lacquer, so it would resist the elements better. Unfortunately although there is a northern Thai lacquer industry oriented towards tourism, Somluk knew of no one in Chiang Rai who could help with such a large monument. In a 2008 interview he said that he had found an artist from Myanmar working with lacquer who could come and help with the project.¹⁰⁴ However, the communication ceased between the two and Somluk was left to find new avenues.¹⁰⁵ He discussed the problem with villagers and other people involved in the project¹⁰⁶ and they came up with an alternative plan, to mix lacquer with natural glue made from Buffalo hide. This glue is relatively common in Southeast Asia and was used in Thailand as part of the ‘primer’ for

¹⁰³ Prathong et al., “The temple of Pa’O Ram Yen,” 16.

¹⁰⁴ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, December 22, 2008, Pa’O Ram Yen.

¹⁰⁵ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, March 23, 2010, Pa’O Ram Yen.

¹⁰⁶ Other artists who are Somluk’s friend have offered to help with the temple. The contribution is varied. For example Chiang Rai artist Angkrit, who is a multimedia artist, helps with filming the different activities at Wat Pa’O and uploading the information on the Internet. Due to Angkrit, the temple of Pa’O has a Picassa page, is on FaceBook and has its own blog. See <http://picasaweb.google.com/watromyen/goTFiF#> accessed December 20th 2009. See <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=164249&id=666882428>, accessed December 20th 2009, and see <http://watromyen.blogspot.com/>, accessed December 20th 2009.

temple murals. Clay and buffalo skin glue were mixed together and applied to the walls that were then, when dry, painted with tempera.¹⁰⁷

Somluk explains that though there is a northern Thai tradition for lacquer ware as well as traditional glue made from buffalo skin, this is not a skill that endured in the village of Pa’O Ram Yen.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter 3, lacquer was probably never a common craft in northern Thailand and was practiced only by a few craftsmen, often relocated war slaves. Delicately made lacquer objects were also part of the elite paraphernalia (see chapter 4). Lacquer objects are now more common in northern Thailand, yet most of these objects are primarily made for the tourist industry; lacquer is still not a craft practiced on a regular basis by local communities in northern Thailand. Neither Somluk, the other artists involved in the projects or the villagers knew much about either lacquer processes or working with traditional glue made from buffalo skin. They therefore decided to experiment with the two media by mixing them and applying the mixture to the surface of the *chedi*. It is Somluk’s hope that the lacquer will help protect the *chedi* against the rain, while the glue will help protect against the sun.¹⁰⁹ The lacquer and glue were mixed together producing a rather thick paste that was applied on the outer surface of the *chedi*. This caused the appearance of the *chedi* to be very different from small lacquer objects, either historical elite artifacts or contemporary tourist souvenirs. The unusual lacquer mixture was applied thickly, making the surface of the *chedi* not as smooth and polished as a traditional lacquer artifact; the *chedi*’s surface looks rough and somewhat uneven [Fig. 93].

As Somluk mentioned in an interview, they are experimenting with the media and they do not know if the mixture will work and if so, how long it will protect the *chedi*.¹¹⁰ Yet because of the lacquer, the *chedi* is now black and Somluk has decided to cover its surface with thin gold leaf. As I understand it, Somluk won’t use the gold

¹⁰⁷ Beek and Invernizzi Tettoni, *The Arts of Thailand*, 37-38. Not many mural paintings have survived time in Thailand. One of the reasons is the application of tempera on dry walls, instead of wet walls. By applying tempera on dry wall, the pigments do not adhere to the wall as strongly as if it was applied to wet walls.

¹⁰⁸ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, March 23, 2010, Pa’O Ram Yen.

¹⁰⁹ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, March 23, 2010, Pa’O Ram Yen.

¹¹⁰ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, March 23, 2010, Pa’O Ram Yen.

sheets found on many historical Lan Na *chedi*, but will use the thin gold leaf often used by the laity to embellish statues and other sacred objects as an act of merit [Fig. 88].¹¹¹ Furthermore, lay commoners normally use these leaves, as they are not expensive. These leaves are very thin and do not usually stay long on the objects they embellish. Again, though these gold leaves are common in Thai and northern Thai *wat*, they are usually not used on such large architectural structures. Furthermore, because these gold leaves are so thin, they do not stay on an object for very long and they need to be reapplied often. The *chedi* will therefore need ongoing maintenance.¹¹²

For this new *chedi*, Somluk was inspired by a work by Songdej Thipthong (ทรงเดช ทิพย์ทอง), the artist responsible for the murals inside the *ubosot* and the future *vihan* at Wat Pa'O Ram Yen [Fig. 89].¹¹³ The painting by Songdej that Somluk used as a model shows a typical Lan Na *chedi*, with a multi layered large base and a small bell-shaped *anda*. Wat Pa'O Ram Yen's *chedi* is loosely based a painting by Songdej. It has, like most traditional Lan Na *chedi*, a very large base divided into three sections. The lower section is itself divided into three large circular tiers. It is then followed by a small section of three thin circular receding tiers. The upper section of the base consists of three receding circular tiers of roughly the same size [Fig. 90]. These receding tiers are then topped by the finial. There is therefore a lack of a clearly defined *anda*, which is a singular, non-traditional detail for a Thai or northern Thai *chedi*. Therefore, the form of the *chedi*, though reminiscent of Lan Na *chedi*, does not specifically follow the acknowledged traditional form discussed in chapter 4. Yet the structure could still be recognized as northern in style, since the base of the *chedi* is the largest section of the *chedi* and the *anda*, if there at all, is unimpressive. Again, copying the past is not what Somluk wants to do at Pa'O. He

¹¹¹ A very thin layer of gold is pressed onto a thin layer of rice paper. To embellish an object, one applies pressure on the rice paper, golden surface down, so it will detach from the paper and stick to the surface of the object. It is a common act of merit in Thailand.

¹¹² Though maintaining the *chedi* is also an act of merit, following Somluk's argument, it is clear to me that he is more interested in the social aspect of the maintenance rather than in the act of merit. However one does not negate the other.

¹¹³ Somluk Pantiboon, email to author, August 21, 2009.

takes from the past to build a future; he is therefore more interested in the idea transmitted through architectural forms, rather than the simple copying of a particular model.

Somluk gives nine reasons why the *chedi* will be in bamboo:¹¹⁴ (1) nature is modest and bamboo is a modest medium, (2) bamboo has a beauty which easily blends in with nature, (3) it is a common and traditional local medium and has been for a long time, (4) to acquire this type of material, you don't need to exploit or destroy the forest, (5) it is cheap, economical and can be easily found, (6) bamboo work can be performed on-site by members of the community, (7) since bamboo grows fast, it can be easily replaced, (8) the qualities of bamboo shows the *Dhammic* truth of impermanence and (9) bamboo has a continuity, in other words, these characteristics will exist in the future.¹¹⁵ These nine points reflect the three main aspects of the project explained earlier: community, nature and Buddhism.

The Chedi and Buddhism

As mentioned earlier, studies of the *stupa* have shown that two important Buddhist symbolisms of the *stupa* are the Buddha and the *Dhamma*. Yet, as Swearer has convincingly demonstrated, in northern Thailand the Buddha's presence as well as the *Dhamma* is strongly felt through the image of the Buddha located in the *vihan*. Through different rituals, the power of the Buddha as well as his knowledge, the *Dhamma*, is imbued in the statue. Yet at Wat Pa'O, the *chedi* itself teaches about specific Buddhist teachings such as impermanence and, following Buddhadāsa's teaching, the importance of morally guided social interactions.

¹¹⁴ Prathong et al., "The temple of Pa'O Ram Yen," 24. See note 69 above. As indicated earlier, though the booklet contains Somluk's ideas and concepts, he is not responsible for putting them in writings.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 24. 1. มีธรรมชาติที่เรียบง่าย 2. มีความงดงามซึ่งสอดคล้องกลิ่นกับธรรมชาติ 3. ความเป็นมิตรและสัมพันธ์กับวิถีชาวบ้านอย่างแนบแน่นมาช้านาน 4. เป็นไม้ที่ไม่จำเป็นต้องเบียดเบียนบุกรุกและทำลายป่า 5. มีราคาถูกประหยัดหาได้ง่ายในท้องถิ่น 6. เสริมสร้างอาชีพและรายได้ให้คนในชุมชน 7. ไม้เป็นไม้ที่สามารถปลูกทดแทนได้ง่าย ใช้ระยะเวลาสั้นและมีประโยชน์ใช้สอยมาก 8. คุณลักษณะของไม้ไม้แฝงนัยยะแห่งสัจธรรมตามหลักไตรลักษณ์ คือ อนิจจัง ทุกขัง อนัตตา 9. เพื่อเป็นเอกลักษณ์สืบต่อไปสืบทอดไป. My translation.

Interestingly, at Wat Pa'O the *Dhammic* aspect of impermanence is not evoked through an iconographic representation (for example a turning wheel), but is experienced and realized through the *chedi's* medium. Impermanence is realized because bamboo is itself an ephemeral material, more so than brick and stuccos, the more usual media for South and Southeast Asian *chedi*. The *chedi* teaches about impermanence because, although bamboo is strong, if left to the elements, it will rot and start decomposing within 10 to 15 years. Though this time-span is enough for most bamboo artifacts, and indeed is longer than the life span for most of our modern appliances, it is hardly enough for a *chedi*. Though the *chedi* is now covered with a layer of glue and lacquer, the mixture is an experiment and the villagers will have to pay particular attention to the structure to see if it resists the weather. Furthermore, the last layer of gold leaves will also need maintenance as the material is very delicate and will probably not survive the elements for long, yet the actual life-span of the *chedi's* gold as well as lacquer/glue layer is uncertain. Furthermore, Somluk believes that impermanence can be recognized if the villagers pay attention to the environment.

Indeed Somluk hopes that by using a local medium like bamboo, the villagers will start paying attention to their environment.¹¹⁶ Indeed, by using bamboo, it is Somluk's hope that people will not take the bamboo that grows around the village for granted, and will start paying attention to the circles of birth and rebirth of bamboo in their daily lives.

Furthermore, as explained in chapter 4, before it became a royal symbol, the *stupa* was a monument for the laity, built so they could accumulate merit by embellishing it and calm their minds by circumambulating and looking at it. This *chedi*, more so than other royal Thai *chedi*, goes back to the original Theravadin rationale behind this type of monument: to accrue merit by embellishing it and gain calmness at heart by looking at it. Indeed Somluk wants the villagers to maintain and embellish the *chedi*, by using gold leaves to acquire merit. Also, by looking at

¹¹⁶ Pantiboon, "A Seed of Hope," 6-7.

the monument, working and meditating on the *chedi*, by reflecting on its media, they can gain insight into dependent origination and the balance of nature.

The Chedi and nature

Looking at Wat Pa'O's *chedi*, it is obvious that a respect for nature is fundamental to the project; the first, second, fourth and seventh points given by Somluk reinforce this fact and are self-explanatory: bamboo is modest like nature, bamboo's beauty blends easily with nature, acquiring it is non invasive and it is easily replaceable.

The original idea for the *chedi*, that is a *chedi* made of receding tiers made of unaltered bamboo stems, would have looked more natural than the currently planned golden bamboo. Yet, Somluk hopes that even with the latticed bamboo *chedi*, villagers who participated in its construction would acquire awareness by working with the medium. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous section, Somluk wants the villagers to gain an awareness of nature surrounding them. He believes that people do not pay attention to nature anymore, that they take for granted even one of the most common yet useful elements nature offers: bamboo.¹¹⁷ By using a common material like bamboo, by touching it and working with it as a communal activity, in other words by participating a in 'morality guided social activity,' it is Somluk's hope that people will regain an awareness and respect for the material itself as well as their own environment.

The Chedi and the local community

The third, fifth, sixth and seven points given by Somluk emphasize the relation between the *chedi* and the community. Not only is bamboo readily available in the countryside, it is also an essential material for Thai people, especially in country villages such as Pa'O, where many people use bamboo artifacts on a daily basis, from basketry, to scaffolding, to everyday tools. Bamboo is an important part of village life, yet making bamboo artifacts is not considered an official craft in Thailand.

There are eight 'official' crafts in Thailand: silverware, goldware, nielloware, mother-of-pearl inlay, woodcarving, ceramics, ivory carving and Royal Barge

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

processions.¹¹⁸ As seen in chapter one, promoting ‘official’ Thai crafts is a result of the intense period of modernization in the early 20th century. The official ‘crafts’ of Thailand were identified as a source of centralized national identity. There are many other crafts in Thailand which are not represented on the official list, like textile making, including cotton and silk, lacquer ware – very important in northern Thailand – as well as flower arrangements. In fact, ‘official’ crafts of Thailand are for ‘royal’ or elite patrons, as well as used or displayed in religious contexts, while most of the other crafts are for the general public.¹¹⁹ Since Somluk wants to build a small village temple, he finds it appropriate that the material used be local and contextual, and to Somluk, bamboo represents the quintessential village material.¹²⁰ Furthermore, as bamboo is a common material that easily grows around the village, it is not only a traditional medium, but since it is easily replaceable, this medium will be part of the village’s future.

Bamboo also emphasizes self-sufficiency, as mentioned in the sixth point. For Somluk, it is important that the community as a whole is able to construct the *chedi*. Indeed villagers of different ages, genders and occupations were physically involved in its construction, especially the latticing of the bamboo strips.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *Thai Minor Arts*. These are the crafts acknowledged, promoted and standardized by the Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Education of Thailand. Indeed the Fine Arts Department has standards of quality for each of these crafts.

¹¹⁹ Bowie, “Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand,” 797-823. Though wood can be a common medium, what is considered ‘artworks’ by the Fine Arts Department are temple decorations, screens, pulpits, cabinets etc... these artifacts are either seen in temples or in the houses of the elite. Furthermore it would be misleading to think that these crafts – wood, textile, bamboo etc. – were available and practiced on a regular basis by the majority of Thai villagers. Katherine Bowie shows that most of these artifacts were made by only a few. Even textiles making was probably not practiced in every household, though some studies of the Thai village assume differently. See for example Nartsupha, *The Thai village economy in the past*. Bowie shows that cotton cloths were expensive and not easily available. Bowie, “Unraveling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand,” 797-823.

¹²⁰ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with the author, December 22, 2008, Pa’O Ram Yen.

¹²¹ See Ajcharyosophon, “Wat Pa’O Ram Yen.” Somluk Pantiboon, email communication with author, December 20th, 2009.

Furthermore, it is very interesting that also the monks of Wat Pa'O are physically participating at the construction of the *chedi*,¹²² such as crisscrossing the bamboo strips. As explained in chapter 3, prior to the first *Sangha* act (1902), Lan Na monks were involved in the construction and maintenance of their temples.¹²³ The population expected them to maintain their temples and do physical work inside the premises of the *wat*. Yet the first *Sangha* act discouraged monks from doing manual work, even for the maintenance of their temples and contributed to their separation from the rest of the community. At Pa'O the monks are actively involved, working side by side with the lay members of the community. In a 2007 interview Somluk explained that being able to secure monks that would understand the concept of community and social involvement was essential. Somluk wanted to make sure that the monks at Pa'O would understand the importance of the relation between the local lay community, the monks and the temple and that all parties are participants in building and maintaining a local community. As of March 2010, there were nine monks residing at the temple. The abbot and two other monks who started the small community of monks at Pa'O are from Wat Mae Yoy (วัดแม่้อย) outside Chiang Mai. The other monks came little by little from different regions of northern Thailand. When asked why he came to Wat Pa'O, the abbot answered that as a monk, he needed to go where he was needed, but also that he liked Somluk's concept behind the temple's construction. When asked why the monks were also participating in the *chedi's* construction, the abbot answered that the monks were also part of the community and it was important for them to participate.¹²⁴

It is interesting that it is the *chedi*, not the *vihan*, which will depart more strongly from Lan Na traditional architecture. Indeed, as explained earlier, the *vihan* at Pa'O will definitely present Lan Na traditional characteristics. As explained in chapter 4, the *vihan* is the hall for the lay community and therefore does not need an additional 'communal' emphasis. The Thai *chedi* on the other hand, has a strong

¹²² See Ibid. Abbot Mahamonkhunkantathamo, interview with author, March 23, 2010, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.

¹²³ See page 65-68 of this dissertation.

¹²⁴ Abbot Mahamonkhunkantathamo, interview with author, March 23, 2010, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.

royal and hierarchical symbolism; it is therefore logical that this construction would diverge more radically from tradition in a more egalitarian village temple project. The architecture at Wat Pa'O therefore destabilizes the social hierarchy by altering the symbolism associated with it. As previously explained, Somluk is willing to transform and adjust traditions to better serve a modern local community and the bamboo *chedi* is an example of this.

Somluk wants the community to have a relationship with their temple but also to stay strong as a community. By choosing an impermanent material for the *chedi* Somluk ensures that the community will have to gather again to work together in the near future to take care of the *chedi*, either by reconstructing it entirely or by maintaining it. The construction, restoration and maintenance of the *chedi* will act as what Featherstone calls, 'ceremonies and rituals,' which help hold the local community together.¹²⁵ Participating in the temple's construction and maintenance and restoration will act as a force that will not only strengthen the bonds between the community members, but also bring an awareness of dependent origination and balance. Furthermore these social gatherings also replicate what Buddhādāsa called 111 'morally guided activities' that could bring insight to members of society. Though the monument they build is religious in nature, Somluk's goal is not necessarily for the community to perform specific religious rituals, but to gather together and participate in the construction of a communal place that becomes symbolically charged with local identity rather than simply religious identity, though the former does not negate the later.¹²⁶ Indeed in interviews, Somluk expresses a certain disinterest in religious rituals and ceremonies surrounding the temple's construction.¹²⁷ He explained that Wat Pa'O is the community's temple, so if members of the community want to participate in religious ceremonies, they have

¹²⁵ See pages 13-17 of this dissertation.

¹²⁶ Featherstone and Turner speak of a 'place' as a physical space that has been imbued with symbolic associations through the communal relations with the physical space. Turner speaks of this place as being emotionally invested due to a nostalgic relation with the past when the space first became a place. Yet at Wat Pa'O Somluk's concept is not imbued with nostalgia of the past, but a strong belief in the future. Bryan S. Turner, "A Note on Nostalgia," 4 (1987), 150; Featherstone, "Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity," 51.

¹²⁷ Somluk Pantiboon, interview with author, March 23, 2010.

the right to do so, yet he himself generally does not participate. He does participate, however, in the construction of the temple, as it is during these communal events that dependent origination based on social relations and balance with nature can be experienced fully.

Following previously explained concepts of agency and choices, the bamboo *chedi* would act as a present and future communal force, not as a guardian of past traditions. Indeed as explained, the bamboo *chedi* departs from traditional symbols and meanings of Thai as well as Lan Na *chedi*, which, as previously explained, were strongly related to royalty. Therefore, the *chedi* at Wat Pa'O is not based solely on cultural specificities of the past, but adapts cultural elements to a contemporary context. The *chedi* locates itself in a historical moment where discourses on localism can act as destabilizing as well as regenerative forces.

Furthermore, the project posits an ever-changing model of cause-and-effect. The temple and its parts will only survive if the community gets together again in the future to maintain the *chedi*, this also means that the community will be able to adapt the structure as they see fit. As the community changes, the transformative power of the future *chedi* will act as a marker of these changes and will not be stagnant or fixed in time.

Although it is not necessarily Somluk's intention to negate national identity, the *chedi* at Wat Pa'O does destabilize the national centralized vision of the *chedi* as a source of political legitimacy. This *chedi* should therefore be seen as a hybrid, which expresses a shift in the application of Buddhist teachings, as well as in the social relations to art and architecture since the centralization of Thailand and of the Thai national identity. It challenges the narrowness in defining a national identity based on Bangkok and the modern Nation State. Like other discourses on localism in Thailand, it calls for a greater emphasis on of the local rather than its assimilation.¹²⁸

As shown in chapter one, for Connors and Hewison the concept of localism in Thailand comes from disenchantment with the Thai capitalist structure and

¹²⁸ See pages 15-18 and 23-27 of this dissertation.

modernization. Following Connors and Hewison's arguments, this does not mean a disconnection from nationalism, but a wish to include the regions and the different localities within nationalism, without the local being absorbed by the center. An interesting example of such focus on the community would be the Rama IX *ubosot* at Wat PhraRam Kao Kanjana Phisek (วัดพระราม ๙ กาญจนานิเชก) [Fig. 91]. The temple is dedicated to the current king of Thailand, King Rama IX. It is located in Bangkok, at 999 Rama IX rd.

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX, intentionally chose the area around Rama IX Lake to be a model community that demonstrates the concept of "bavorn" in which home, temple, and school, play important roles in encouraging cooperation amongst the local residents which in turn would lead to the community's development and progress.¹²⁹

Before its construction, the King reviewed the blueprints and significantly changed the project. The hall's scale as well as the amount of decoration was reduced to "conform with the character of the community", in other words, that of a small community. His Majesty "preferred to see the Temple as a community temple where local religious activities at the scale of the community could take place."¹³⁰ The King asked for the hall to be smaller and less decorated. The temple is of the Bangkok style with a tall two-tiered roof, tall windows and a small portico with four slender pillars [Fig. 91]. The temple of Pa'O goes even further and instead of simply offering a 'space' for communal activity, the physical existence of the temple, at least of its *chedi*, depends on the community's participation. Wat Pa'O temple not only promotes communal participation; the temple cannot exist without it.

Though Somluk is interested in localism, he is not interested in idealizing the past. In fact, his vision of the temple leans towards the future. As seen in chapter one, Hewison believes that Thai discourses on localism are open to criticism because of their lack of applicability within contemporary society, especially because of their

¹²⁹ School of Architecture Department of Fine Arts, *King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Thai Architecture* (Bangkok: Silpakorn University Press, 2005). 'Bavorn' is บวร in Thai.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

idealization of the past.¹³¹ Yet Wat Pa'O's art and architecture do not copy the past, its construction and maintenance depend on specific concepts related to Thai localism, such as community culture, engaged Buddhism, social cooperation, balance with nature etc. Therefore, and as Somluk explained, the temple does not copy the past for the sake of preserving the past, but uses local knowledge¹³² to best produce a monument for a local community, which includes studying, reevaluating and in some respect rejecting, past knowledge, art and architecture. Yet only when the temple will need refurbishing and restoration will we know if the applications of the different concepts are successful. Indeed, though the construction itself seems successful because of the community's participation and the choice of media, the test of time will be a stronger determinant to the community's survival and the applicability of different concepts associated with localism at Pa'O.

Summary

The temple of Pa'O is a small temple outside Chiang Rai. The temple is still under construction and the community physically participates in its construction and maintenance. Somluk Pantiboon is the mastermind behind the concepts and moral guidelines behind the project. Following his vision, the temple of Pa'O will be a symbiosis between Buddhism, local community and nature. It is also evident that traditional architecture is studied yet altered to accommodate contemporary need and Somluk's vision. The Buddhist aspects of the temple are relatively different from the ones promoted by the central *Sangha*, which focuses, among other things, on social hierarchy and merit-making. The concepts primarily promoted at Pa'O are dependent origination, impermanence and morally guided social interactions. The temple also promotes a respect for nature, with the different media used, such as clay, wood and bamboo. Bamboo is, according to Somluk, the quintessential local medium, as it is easily available, used on a daily basis and cheap. It is therefore the most appropriate medium for the temple and the *chedi*. The architecture of the temple will follow historical Lan Na architecture; yet will not copy any monument in

¹³¹ Hewison, "Localism in Thailand: A study of globalisation and its discontents."

¹³² Clifford Geertz, *Local knowledge. Further essays in interpretive anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983).

particular. That is because Somluk is not necessarily interested in preserving the past, but he is interested in building a temple that is best suited for the community and the environment.

Analysis and Conclusion

In this dissertation I compared two contemporary northern Thai temples, Wat Rong Khun and Wat Pa'O, analyzing their artistic and architectural similarities and differences. Both temples are only a few kilometers from each other. Each temple is the artistic project of a northern Thai artist. Chalermchai Kositpipat is responsible for Wat Rong Khun, while Somluk Pantiboon is responsible for Wat Pa'O. The two contemporary temples studied in this dissertation were chosen as case studies because at first glance, both temples appeared to be stylistically very different.

Both these two temples are complex spaces where visitors and villagers can come and have an artistic experience that helps the transmission of certain Buddhist doctrines, the acknowledgement of social relations and have a religious experience guiding them towards a deeper understanding salvation. These experiences are possible both at Wat Rong Khun and Wat Pa'O. However, not only do the Buddhist doctrines are transmitted differently at both temples, but the religious interpretations, and therefore their social and soteriological implications also differ.

The artistic and stylistic elements of the temples also, at first glance, seem to differ. Yet both temples represent artistic innovations which set them apart from previous temples. Neither temple copies either traditional historical styles or regional styles indiscriminately. They both take from different accepted styles, such as Bangkok and Lan Na styles; yet neither simply copies the historical or regional prototypes. Each artist offers new artistic expressions or familiar elements. Therefore, though stylistically very different from one another and other temples in Thailand, both temples offer familiar forms and artistic vocabularies to the visitors and villagers so their experience is not weakened or overwhelming. Yet there is no denying that these new, yet familiar, artistic elements at both temples are almost polar opposite to one another.

Chalermchai Kositpipat was born in the village of Rong Khun where he is building the White Temple. When the regular village temple's renovation reached a standstill after the financial debacle of 1997, he offered to help with the construction. This led to his conceiving of a design drastically different from

previous Thai temples. Indeed the spatial organization of Wat Rong Khun, its sophisticated decorative program and the colors used are all artistic innovations making Chalermchai's project unique in Thailand. On the other hand, though the complex is artistically innovative, it retains a conservative reading of Buddhism and cultural identity formation by focusing on a centralized Thai national identity and by focusing on important standard texts such as the Traiphum Phra Ruang.

Somluk Pantiboon, on the other hand, was born in the village of Chiang Khong located within the boundaries of the province of Chiang Rai, though further away from the provincial capital. He established his home and workshop at the small village of Pa'O Ram Yen when he returned to Thailand after his study in Japan. A respected artist who employs many villagers to work at his workshop, Somluk was approached by the villagers to help with the construction of the village's first Buddhist temple.

The two men's respective artistic trainings and careers as independent artists are very different. Chalermchai followed a conservative path in his artistic studies, attending the Poh Chang school and then Silpakorn University. These two schools were established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the modern Thai government in the hope that schoolteachers and artists would propagate a State-approved artistic expression that would support the new modern State. Though current Thai artistic movements have evolved since the early 20th century, Silpakorn students still receive awards and recognition by entering State supported artistic competitions, such as the Annual National Art Exhibition. Most neo-traditional Thai artists were trained at Silpakorn University and Chalermchai is no exception. In fact, Chalermchai is arguably the most recognized neo-traditional artist in Thailand.

On the other hand, Somluk Pantiboon studied at a technical school in Chiang Mai. He then furthered his study outside Thailand, with two Japanese master ceramicists. He therefore did not follow the more recognized and prestigious artistic training of the Poh Chang School and Silpakorn University. His artistic path is also unconventional as he worked first, not as an independent artist, but in refugee camps sponsored by the UN, training refugees in the arts of ceramic making. Though he is well known in the ceramic community in Thailand and the Asia Pacific,

he has not received the recognition that other contemporary artists, many of them neo-traditionalist painters, are enjoying in the country. Indeed painting is still the most conventional and recognized modern art form in Thailand, with neo-traditional artists usually receiving the strongest accolades. Yet, and although both artists enjoy different positions within the national artistic art scenes, both Chalermchai and Somluk are well known in Chiang Rai. This provincial capital is an interesting city of northern Thailand, where we find a strong and vibrant artistic community.

Their respective places within the artistic circles in Chiang Rai are characterized by the two projects analyzed and compared in this dissertation. Chalermchai Kositpipat is very well known in the artistic community and many follow his lead in terms of artistic style (neo-traditionalism) and his flare for publicity. Indeed Wat Rong Khun is well known and is now presented as one of the main attractions of the city. Most touristic brochures will now include information on Wat Rong Khun, yet won't mention Doy Din Deng, Somluk's workshop. Furthermore, though Wat Rong Khun is well known, it is presented as the work of one artist: Chalermchai Kositpipat, even though Chalermchai employs roughly 70 people, from managers, to artisans, painters, supervisors, cleaning personal, security employees etc. Each employee receives salary and benefits.¹ Most of these employees are from around Rong Khun, some being from the village, nearby villages or the city of Chiang Rai. On the other hand, Wat Pa'O has become known as an important artistic project in Chiang Rai, and many artists support it.² Many artists are interested in the concept and are participating however they can. Furthermore, though Somluk Pantiboon has designed the temple, he also acknowledges the importance of the villagers' opinion regarding the temple. Indeed some changes were made to Somluk's design after different village meetings regarding the temple.

¹ Chalermchai Kositpipat, interview with the author, March 22, 2010, Wat Rong Khun. Chalermchai also said that the salaries were advantageous in relation to Thailand's current economy and that the benefits were better than what government officials receive. He also said that each employee could, if they wanted to, be incinerated at Wat Rong Khun when they died.

² It is Angkrit Ajchariyosophon who informed me of the Wat Pa'O's project. Furthermore, during my stay at Chiang Rai in 2007, other artists I interviewed and members of the cultural scene in Chiang Rai mentioned Somluk and the project at Pa'O.

For example, the first idea for the *chedi* was to use the bamboo posts without carving or cutting them, and mounting them vertically to form a conical stepped structure. Yet the villagers indicated to Somluk their fear that the *chedi* would need refurbishing too often, burdening them financially. The *chedi* was then modified and is now a latticed bamboo *chedi* covered by a thick layer of lacquer.

Furthermore, and most importantly, Somluk wants the villagers to get involved in the project on a communal, collaborative volunteer basis. This is what has happened with the construction of the bamboo *chedi*, where the population of Pa'O helped with the latticing of the bamboo strips. He also wants the villagers to get involved in the maintenance of the temple on a daily basis (cleaning and maintaining the property) as well as in the near future when the *chedi* needs refurbishing. Indeed, while Chalermchai pays workers to do the cleaning, construction and maintenance, Somluk wants the villagers of Pa'O to be involved in the continued existence and development of their own temple.

Both temples exhibit a very different aesthetic, yet as mentioned before, they both transform traditional artistic elements to help guide the visitors towards a deeper understanding of the different Buddhist doctrines they each emphasize. Wat Rong Khun is lavishly decorated while Wat Pa'O is more subdued; their respective media conveys this difference. Wat Rong Khun is made of cement covered in stucco, which is the conventional method of construction in modern Thailand. Each finial on this temple is first shaped with a metal core and covered with stucco. Shards of glass are then applied to the finial before installing it on a monument. The result is a complex construction with lavish and complex details. Unfortunately, though stucco is a relatively durable material, it can absorb water and become dirty. After only a few years since the exterior was built, some damage due to the weather are already visible at Wat Rong Khun, including mold, dirt, rust and also the dislodging of some shards of glass or mirror [figs. 98 and 99]. At Wat Pa'O, the temple ground is less defined or regimented. The overall project has a more natural look than Wat Rong Khun. Furthermore, while Chalermchai and the workers at Wat Rong Khun try to

salvage the different details damaged by the weather,³ at Wat PaO, the deterioration of at least one of the monuments, the *chedi*, is welcomed, even planned for. Indeed this deterioration of the monument is not a feature to be hidden, but one that is designed as an ongoing teaching method about impermanence. At Wat Rong Khun, the whiteness of the monument, as well as the cleanliness of the ground itself are hard to maintain and employees work to maintain the 'purity' of the temple. The complete lack of color for the *ubosot* of the temple is unusual in Thailand. No element seems out of place, which gives the complex a well-organized look. Yet Somluk is also interested in the cleanliness at Wat Pa'O. During my visit to the temple in March 2010 Somluk mentioned that one of the next steps would be to organize the cleaning of the temple, something that would have to be done locally by the villagers.

Yet, not only does Wat Pa'O look less constrained than Wat Rong Khun, but the artistic details are also closer to nature. For example, the color scheme at Wat Pa'O is more subdued than at Wat Rong Khun. Wat Pa'O's carvings and other decorations are also more organic; while Wat Rong Khun's artistic details are more complex and sinuous. This parallels the different architectural traditions in Lan Na and Bangkok. Indeed Lan Na traditional architecture was mostly made of wood, with decorative details that were more subdued than its counterparts from Bangkok. Yet both temples represent different animals, which could be interpreted as a northern Thai familiarity with animals and nature. Whatever the source of inspiration, acknowledged or not, artistic details from neither temple directly copy historical or regional prototypes. For example, both temples show familiarity with a variety of animals, such as the elephant, the makara, the naga etc., but they also show familiarity with more organic, yet abstract designs, as it was often the case in historical northern Thailand. For example, the bargeboards finials of the golden bathroom by Chalermchai are abstract representations resembling flames. Though they are more plastic than organic, they are abstract representations that can be

³ During the summer of 2007, one of the finial of the *ubosot* was rusting, probably because of the stucco had been applied too thinly on the metal core. In December 2008 the patch of rust had been covered with stucco. [Fig. 94]

traced back to Lan Na historical art. In the same vein, the bargeboard finials on the *ubosot* at Wat Pa'O are similar to historical Lan Na abstract finials. Historical Lan Na architecture is therefore a mixture of abstract and subdued designs, juxtaposed with a greater variety of zoomorphic representations, something visible at both Wat Rong Khun and Wat Pa'O. Yet interestingly, though Somluk openly acknowledges the historical Lan Na tradition at Wat Pa'O, Chalermchai is not as quick to acknowledge his sources of inspiration. Indeed though Somluk indicates that he studied and researched northern Thai temples for the design of Wat Pa'O, Chalermchai warns us not to seek historical prototypes to explain his design. One should see and understand his art as being *his own*.

Buddhism and Two Contemporary Northern Temples

In this dissertation, I have reviewed how Buddhism is the national religion in Thailand and one of the country's three pillars: The King, Buddhism and the Nation. In the *Sangha* acts of 1902, 1941 and 1962, Thai Buddhism became regulated and standardized, with common texts, language and a set hierarchy within the *Sangha*. It supports the Thai social hierarchy, which includes the separation of the monks from the lay population as well as the justification of the different lay social strata. Indeed the social hierarchy is partly maintained and justified through different acts of merit. The *Traiphum* emphasizes merit-making, which is often practiced through elaborate ceremonies, especially in Bangkok.

Going back to the two temples, depending of the architectural tradition, either Lan Na or Bangkok, the focus of the *wat* also differs. In Bangkok, the *ubosot* is the main building of the temple, reinforcing the importance of the *Sangha* and the centrality of the nation. Indeed following Pichard's analysis of Bangkok ordination halls, the *ubosot* became the primary focus of the Thai Buddhist monasteries for two reasons. First the *ubosot* is the building dedicated to the *Sangha*, and thus reflects a unified *Sangha*. Second, it has a royal connotation, as only the King can authorized the construction of a new *ubosot*, it therefore needs to be in a central position within the monastery.

In Lan Na, on the other hand, the focus of the temple was, and still is, an energized line between the *chedi* and the *vihan*, which culminates with the Buddha statue in the *vihan*. The *vihan* is the space where the lay congregation would experience the presence of the Buddha through the statue's power. This connection between the *chedi* and the *vihan* will be present at Wat Pa'O, as the *vihan* and the *chedi* will be aligned with each other and separated from the other buildings. Even the *ubosot* will be separated from the *vihan* and the *chedi*, following the northern Thai tradition. This does not mean a 'rejection' of the Bangkok convention, but a preference for the historical Lan Na convention. We should not see the design of Wat Pa'O as an act of 'rejection' but as the result of a choice that was made to convey a familiar design to the population of Wat Pa'O.

On the other hand, the main building of Wat Rong Khun is the *ubosot*. It is unconventionally placed at the front of the pavilion of relics, which could act as the *chedi*, while the pavilion of images further away from the *ubosot*. Wat Rong Khun is therefore following the modern architectural tradition of Bangkok *wat*, by emphasizing the importance of the *ubosot* rather than the energized line between the *chedi* and the *vihan*, as well as the presence of the Buddha through the statue inside the *vihan*.

Yet I argue that the presence of the Buddha is felt at both temples. At Wat Pa'O the Buddha is felt (or will be, when the *vihan* is built) by the physical relation between the *chedi* and the *vihan*. This is a conventional and traditional way to experience the presence of the Buddha in northern Thailand. Yet I argue that the presence of the Buddha is still felt at Wat Rong Khun, even if the physical and energized line between a *chedi* and the statue of the Buddha in a *vihan* is somewhat lessened. Indeed Wat Rong Khun is an elaborate construction with a complex Buddhist design. The temple is a three dimensional representation of the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*, with an evolution from, at the bottom, the Realm of Desire, to the Realm of Form and then, at the top, the Realm of Non-Form. At Wat Rong Khun the journey is spatially orchestrated as a personal journey through the different realms and bridges. It is a journey from the human realm of the *Kharawat* (section of the laity) to the celestial abode of the Buddha in the *Buddhawat* (abode of the Buddha). While

walking through the *Buddhawat* at Wat Rong Khun, it is Chalermchai's hope that people will realize the importance of merit-making by physically experiencing the rewards promised in the *Vimanavatthu*.⁴ Therefore, the importance of merit and dependent origination present at Wat Rong Khun. The presence of dependent origination is an iconographic one, leading the visitor horizontally and also vertically, into a higher plane of existence. The spiritual experience rendered through the complex iconographic representation of the Traiphum can guide the visitor in their understandings and awareness of dependent origination and merit-making. Yet, though the complex artistic representation at Wat Rong Khun is different from other temples in Thailand, the religious message is somewhat orthodox, with an emphasis on the vertical understanding of dependent origination and merit-making (a movement upward from the different realms of rebirth). In other words, though the artistic vocabulary is new, the Buddhist message is conventional and comes from a centralized Thai Buddhism.

The concept of dependent origination is also present at Wat Pa'O, yet the presence is not furthered by any iconography of Buddhist cosmology. Here, the concept of dependent origination is related to nature and is not spatially related to a cosmological order. It is however, related to the balance of nature. It is Somluk's hope that villagers participating in the construction of Wat Pa'O will gain spiritual awareness of dependent origination through a connection with their environment and by participating in morally guided social activities.

Somluk's approach to Buddhism, is more closely associated with the concept of local community as opposed to a centralized national identity. Somluk wants people to physically participate in the temple's construction and maintenance. He wants the villagers to come together and participate in the temple's construction and has created a design, which will require an intensive degree of village community involvement. He also devised certain elements of the temple, the *chedi* in particular, in such a way that it will bring an awareness of the environment and social relations, which is similar to Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's interpretation of the

⁴ See page 162-164 of this dissertation.

concept of dependent origination in the ‘here and now’ as well as his emphasis on morally guided social interactions. Though Somluk, like Buddhādāsa, does not negate the importance of merit and, indeed, embellishing the temple will bring merit to the villagers, he does not emphasize individualized merit-making, but emphasizes merit gained through social activities rather than religious ceremonies. Regarding merit and the concept of dependent origination, each temple thus emphasizes a different aspect of Buddhism. Yet their respective teachings can be experienced through their respective artistic vocabularies.

Nationalism/Localism and Two Contemporary Northern Temples

In this dissertation I have examined the current problems associated with Thai discourses on localism. I have argued that the discourses have failed due in part to the fact that they do not allow for a dissociation of the concept of localism from a romance of the past. Yet I believe that Somluk’s work at Wat Pa’O offers an interesting and positive alternative to the discourses’ impasse.

I believe it is not Somluk’s intention to negate Thai national identity, yet I also acknowledge that the project has the potential to destabilize the standardized vision of Thai nationalism. As I have explained, the discourses on localism in Thailand have suffered from their apparent lack of applicability. Yet, rather than being a theoretical construct, Wat Pa’O is a community-based project oriented towards the future. This project has the potential to destabilize the national grand narrative and help the debate on localism in Thailand. Bhabha says that from a center’s perspective, “[c]ommunity disturbs the grand globalizing narrative of capital, displaces the emphasis on production in ‘class’ collectivity, and disrupts the homogeneity of the imagined community of the nation.”⁵ Yet Bhabha acknowledges that a “binary divisions of social space neglect” the complexity of the local’s power to create agency “through incommensurable [...] positions.”⁶ In other words, we need to locate the positioning of the community, its power of agency, rather than accepting its marginalization from a given center. Though localism can destabilize

⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 330.

⁶ *Ibid*, 330-31.

the homogeneity of the imagined national community, it has the potential to bring the national identity out of the bureaucracy and the official channel of propagation and “reconstructs it as a project relevant to everyday life.”⁷ I believe this is what is happening at Wat Pa’O Ram Yen. Furthermore, instead of rejecting a centralized Thai national identity, Somluk’s project emulates a very important aspect of Thai royalty, one of the pillars of Thai nationalism. Indeed as explained, Thai royalty, especially the king, is associated with rural Thailand in a positive and proactive way. One facet of Thai royalty is strongly associated in the regions, where the king is seen as helping the communities from a local perspective. The Rama IX temple, though situated in Bangkok, brings to bear the concept of community as a notion the king is interested to promote.

It is true however that the hierarchical division of society is somewhat lessened at Wat Pa’O due to the *chedi* now being a monument for the community rather than a symbol of elite power. It also destabilizes the homogeneity of Buddhist architecture by rejecting the national standard blueprints available through the Fine Arts Department of the Thai government. It also does not emphasize an idealization of the past, but an interest in local knowledge. Indeed Somluk believes that the knowledge acquired through past experiences can be presently useful. For example, Somluk believes that traditional architecture in northern Thailand is best suited for the region’s climate due to past experiences. Indeed the architecture is low to the ground, helping to keep the heat inside the building. Furthermore, media like glue made from buffalo as well as lacquer was used in the past, but at Wa Pa’O, the media are adapted to suit contemporary needs. Indeed knowledge is not to be used indiscriminately and simply applied to a current situation; it must be adapted and changed to answer the contemporary needs.

On the other hand, Wat Rong Khun reinforces a central nationalism by emphasizing social hierarchy. Rewards of accumulated merit are also presented as a hierarchical progress from hell to a celestial abode. Chalermchai also embraces modern Thai nationalism by emphasizing the *ubosot* rather than the *vihan*. And

⁷ Connors, “Democracy and the Mainstreaming of Localism in Thailand,” 266.

indeed I believe we should analyze Chalermchai's project at Wat Rong Khun as a reinforcement of centralized Thai social hierarchy, where his patrons can express and at the same time strengthen social positions. In addition, by producing such an important and complex work of art, Chalermchai expresses the importance and power of art production as an act of merit, which gives him the social standing needed to freely move between different levels of the Thai social structure.

According to Cate, Chalermchai both embraces and elevates himself from northern Thai identity in a manner that appeals to his rich urban patrons.⁸ He therefore can mingle amongst Bangkok's 'nouveaux riches,' while displaying a certain accepted Thai authenticity by embracing nonthreatening elements of northern Thailand, such as his clothes and the *tung* on the temple ground. Yet similarly to Wat Pa'O, Wat Rong Khun, as well as Chalermchai's art, can be associated with Thai royalty, especially the king. Chalermchai's art as well as a standard form of neo-traditionalism has received patronage from the king of Thailand, a fact Chalermchai does not neglect to emphasize. Yet in comparison to Somluk's project, Wat Rong Khun puts forth a somewhat different facet of Thai royalty, which is a sumptuous royalty that promotes the king as the legitimate and acknowledged center of the Thai social construct.

Neo-traditionalism, from the center to the local

Neo-traditionalism is believed to be the quintessential institutionalized "Thai" art form in Thailand. Practiced mostly by Silpakorn graduates, it is an artistic movement generally seen as promoting Thainess. Yet this Thainess is a rather homogenized Thainess resulting from the State supported discourses on Thai nationalism. Chalermchai is one of the best-known Thai neo-traditional artists, known primarily as a painter and muralist. One of the first to graduate with a degree in 'Thai Art' from Silpakorn University, he is known as one of the strongest

⁸ Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art. A Thai temple in Wimbledon*, 126.

promoter of neo-traditionalist styles. I argue that although Wat Rong Khun might look different from other Thai *wat* in the land, it is in fact a neo-traditional work of art. The temple is a three dimensional work similar to his neo-traditional paintings of the 1990's and early 2000's. The temple supports a State-approved standardized national identity, even if the temple appears to differ from other Thai temples.

Yet I argue that Wat Pa'O, a very different temple in many regards, is also neo-traditional. However it is neo-traditional in a very different manner, primarily in that it does not follow or support a standardization of Thainess. Indeed after the 1976 social unrests, the 1997 financial crisis and more recently in a post-Thaksin era, Thai nationalism and Thai values have been questioned. Yet Wat Pa'O is not a criticism of Thai nationalism, but is a reevaluation of the concept of nationalism from a community perspective. Following Homi Bhabha, I believe the project questions the central-Thai definition of national identity by bringing the act of agency and the assertion of identity at the level of the local community.

Based on this, I argue that art historical studies on neo-traditionalist art in Thailand would benefit from the study of local neo-traditional works of art, such as Wat Pa'O Ram Yen. Indeed by destabilizing the orthodox standardized Thai national identity, yet not directly confronting or negating the concept of nationality, Wat Pa'O also destabilizes the concept of neo-traditionalism as a stagnant and institutionalized artistic style. Indeed I believe art historical studies of Thai art will benefit from decentralizing artistic discourses and go beyond Bangkok's art scenes, to look at local forms of contemporary artistic expressions. This does not mean that local artistic products would always be created in order to destabilize a standardized national identity. The case studies presented here show that Wat Rong Khun, located only a few kilometers away from Wat Pa'O reinforces a variation on the theme of standardized Thai national identity.

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Figures



Fig. 1. Democracy monument, Bangkok Thailand. Jitrsean Apaiwong and Corrado Feroci, 1939. The picture was taken in March 2010 during a red-shirt rally



Fig. 2. The Victory Monument, Bangkok. Pum Malakul, 1941.



Fig. 3. Anupong Chantron, *Perceptless*, acrylic on Outer Robe of Buddhist monk, 2007



Fig. 4. Road to Wat Santikhini, province of Chiang Rai. This image shows the deforestation of northern Thailand as well as mono-culture

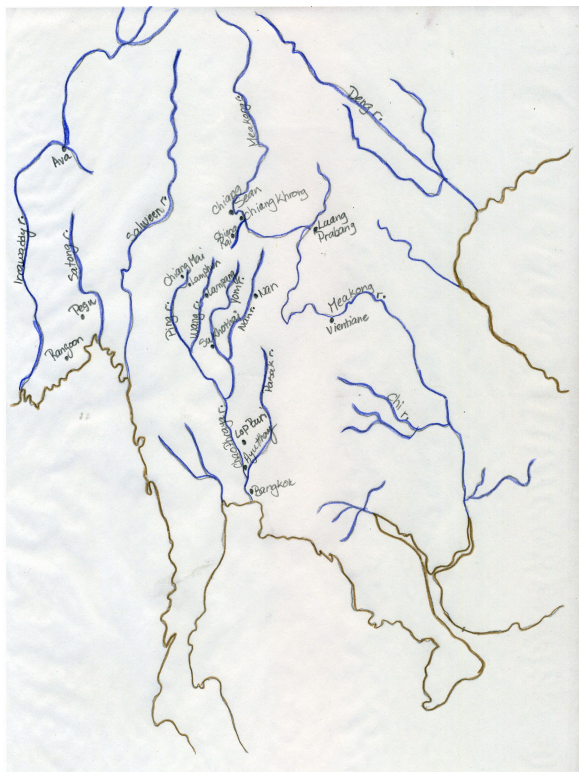


Fig. 5. Map of important rivers and historical cities of Lan Na and other Mainland Southeast Asian kingdoms

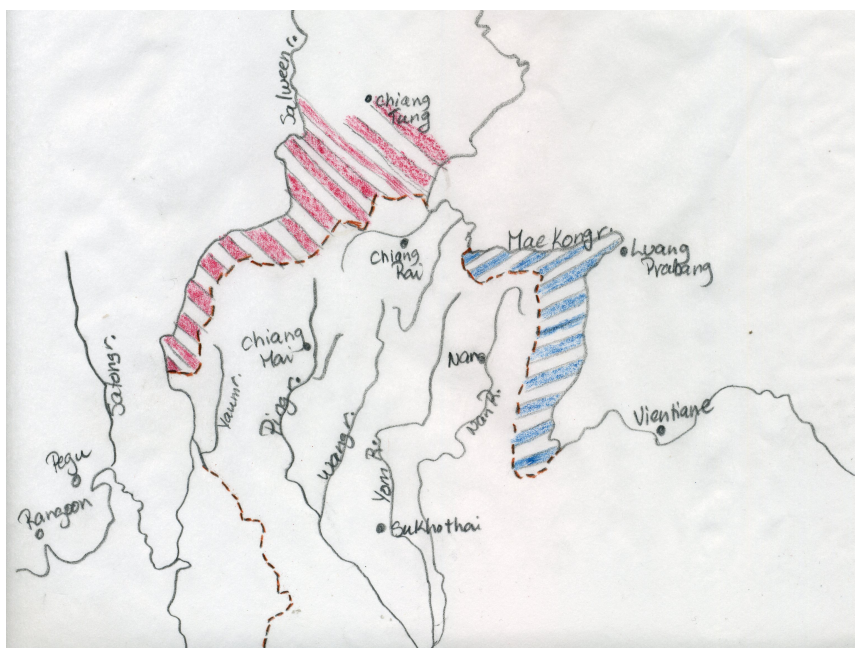


Fig. 6. Lost territories to France (bleu) and England (red). Based on Sarassawadee Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, trans. Chitraporn Tanratanakul (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), 12.



Fig. 7. Red shirt protest on Ratchdamnern Klang Road, March 19th, 2010



Fig. 8. Chedi, Wat Mahathat Haripunchai, Lamphun



Fig. 9. detail,
Chedi, Wat
Mahathat
Haripunchai,
Lamphun



Fig. 10. Mondop
protecting the footprint
of the Buddha, Wat
Phrathat Lampang
Luang, Lampang



Fig. 11. Detail, instruction leading to the *mondop*, Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang, Lampang



Fig. 12. Vihan Luang, Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang, Lampang. Built in 1476, subsequent renovations, last major renovation in 1830



Fig. 13. Wat Lai Hin,
Lampang. Built in 1683,
subsequent renovations, last
major renovation in 2010.



Fig. 14. *Ubosot*, Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang, Lampang. Built 1476, subsequent renovations.



Fig. 15. *Vihan Lai Kham*, Wat Phra Sing, Chiang Mai. Built 1345, subsequent renovations, last major renovation in early 19th century.



Fig. 16. *Nah neb's* lamyong of Bangkok style *ubosot* in Bangkok.



Fig. 17. *Ubosot* as Wat Phra Sing, Chiang Mai.



Fig. 18. *Vihan Nam Tem*, Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang, Lampang. Built 1501, subsequent renovations.

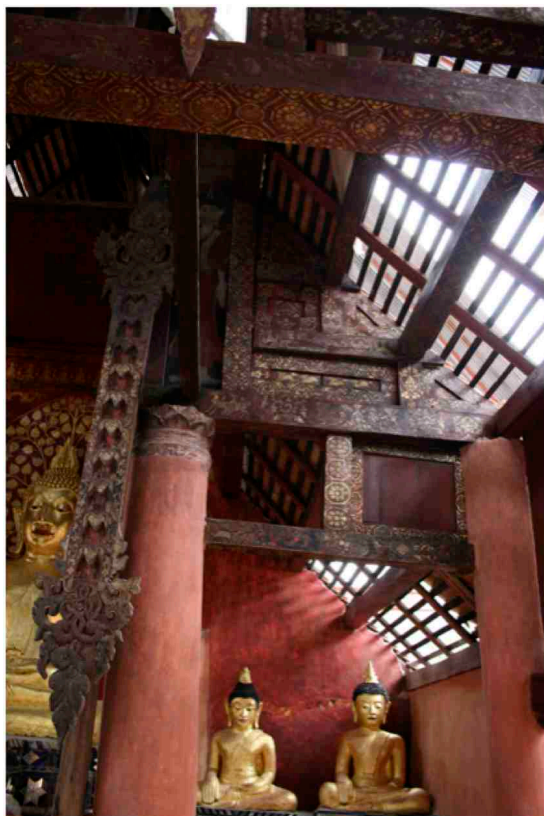


Fig. 19. Interior Vihan
Lai Hin, Lampang



Fig. 20. Contemporary *vihan*, Wat Don Ti, Ban Don Ti, Chiang Rai.



Fig. 21. Ubosot Wat Arun, Bangkok. Early Bangkok era.



Fig. 22. Simple *bai sema*,
ubosot, Wat Lai Hin,
Lampang



Fig. 23. Bai sema within *mondop*, ubosot Wat Arun, Bangkok.

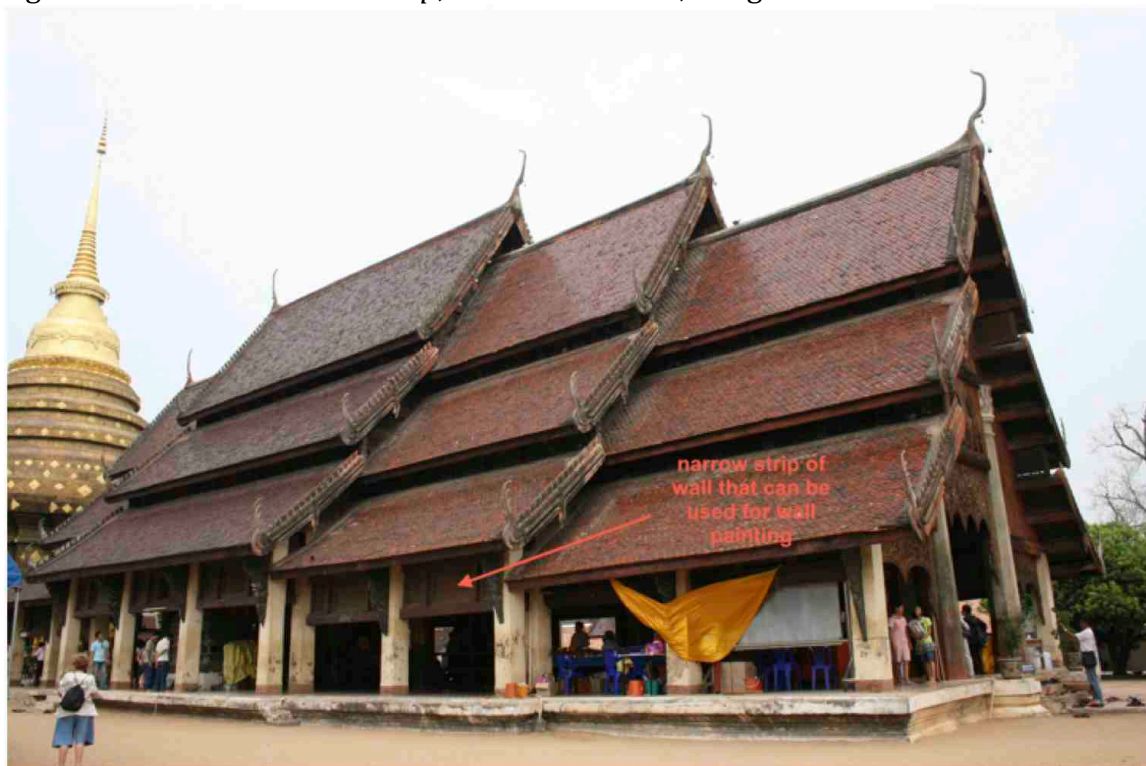


Fig. 24. Narrow strip of wall between pillars that can be used for wall paintings. Vihan Luang, Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang, Lampang.



Fig. 25. A copy of *chedi* Ku Kut, Wat Wat Mahathat Haripunchai, Lamphun.

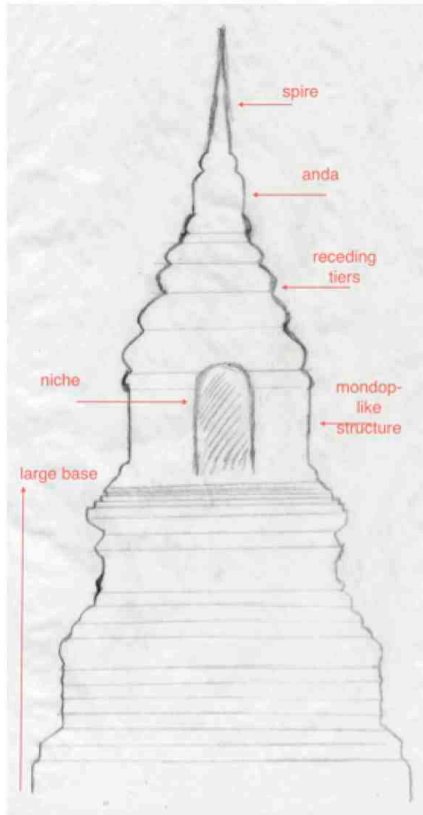


Fig. 26. General design for a Lan Na *mondop-chedi*



Fig. 27. Chedi at Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang, Lampang. The *chedi* is decorated with diamond shape *chang go*. The *chedi* is also directly behind *Vihan Luang*, with less than 2m between the two monuments.



Fig. 28. Chedi at Wat Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai (renovation, spring of 2010)



Fig. 29. Chedi
Luang, Wat Chedi
Luang, Chiang
Sean



Fig. 30. Panya Vijnthanasarn, *The Defeat of Mara*, Wat Buddhapadipa, 1984-1987.



Fig. 31. Chalermchai Kositpipat, Traiphum, Wat Buddhapadipa, 1984-1987.

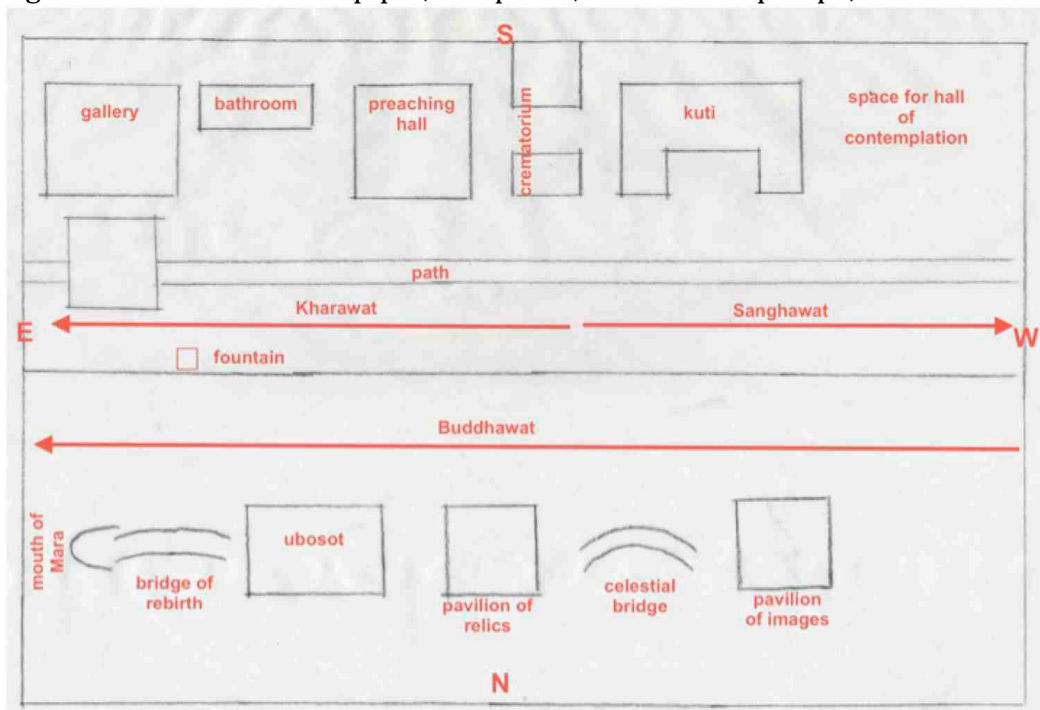


Fig. 32 Schematic drawing of Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 33. Water stains and mold on *kuti*, December 2008



Fig. 34. Watermarks still visible even after cleaning the roof, March 2010.



Fig. 35. Gallery, South-East entrance, Kharawat, Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 36. Golden Bathroom, Kharawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 37. Preaching Hall, Kharawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 38. Crematorium,
Kharawat, Wat Rong
Khun



Fig. 39. South-East entrance gate, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 40. Golden Fountain, Kharawat, at the entrance of the Sanghawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 41. Shaded area before entering the Sanghawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 42. Kuti, Sanghawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 43. *ubosot*, with bridge of rebirth at the front, and the pavilion of relics behind, Sanghawatt, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 44. Pavilion of relics (left), *ubosot* (right), *Buddhawatt*, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 45. Celestial bridge, Buddhawat, Wat Ron Khun.



Fig. 46. Pavilion of images, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 47. West side of the ubosot, high plinth, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun.

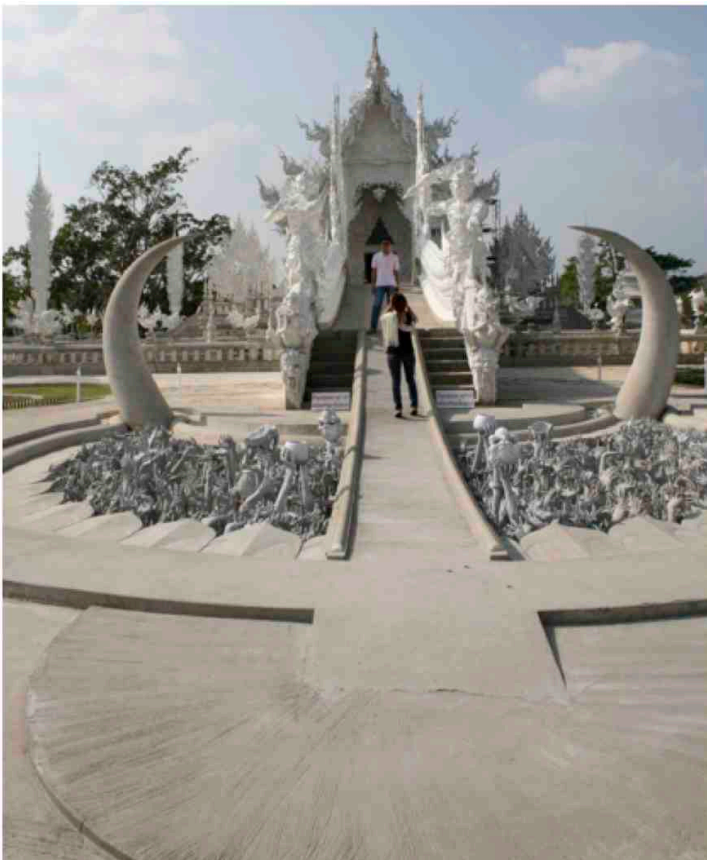


Fig. 48. Ubosot with Mara's mouth before the bridge of rebirth, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 49. Bridge of rebirth between the mouth of Mara and the *ubosot*, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 50. Fish holding a lotus bud, Buddhawat, Wat Ron Khun



Fig. 51. Three columns on each side of the bridge, representation of the mountains around Mount Meru, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 52. Walkway besides the ubosot, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun.

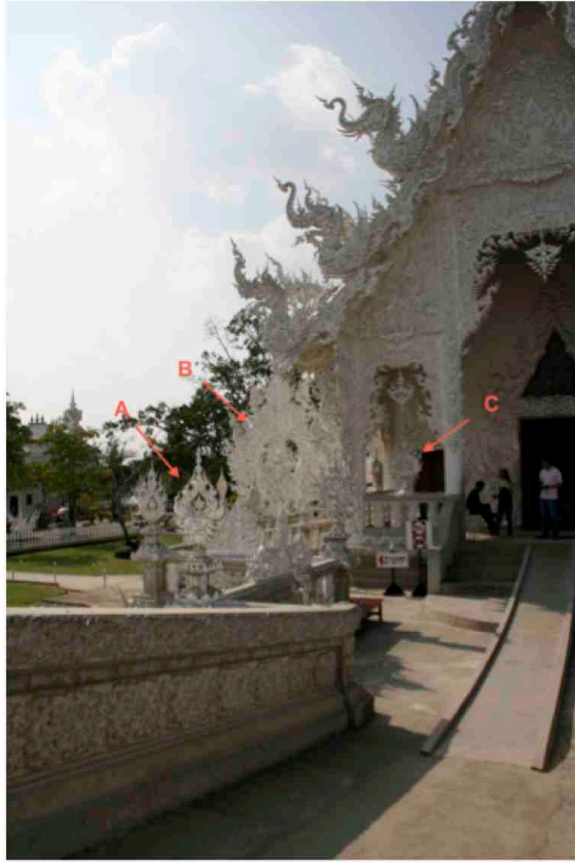


Fig. 53. Front of *ubosot*, showing different lotus buds. A. One of the 16 small lotus buds, representing the 16 heavens of the World of Form; B. One of the 4 larger lotus buds, with human beings; C. One of 4 lotus



Fig. 54. *Hang hong* as lion, ubosot, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 55. *Hang hong* as naga, ubosot, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun

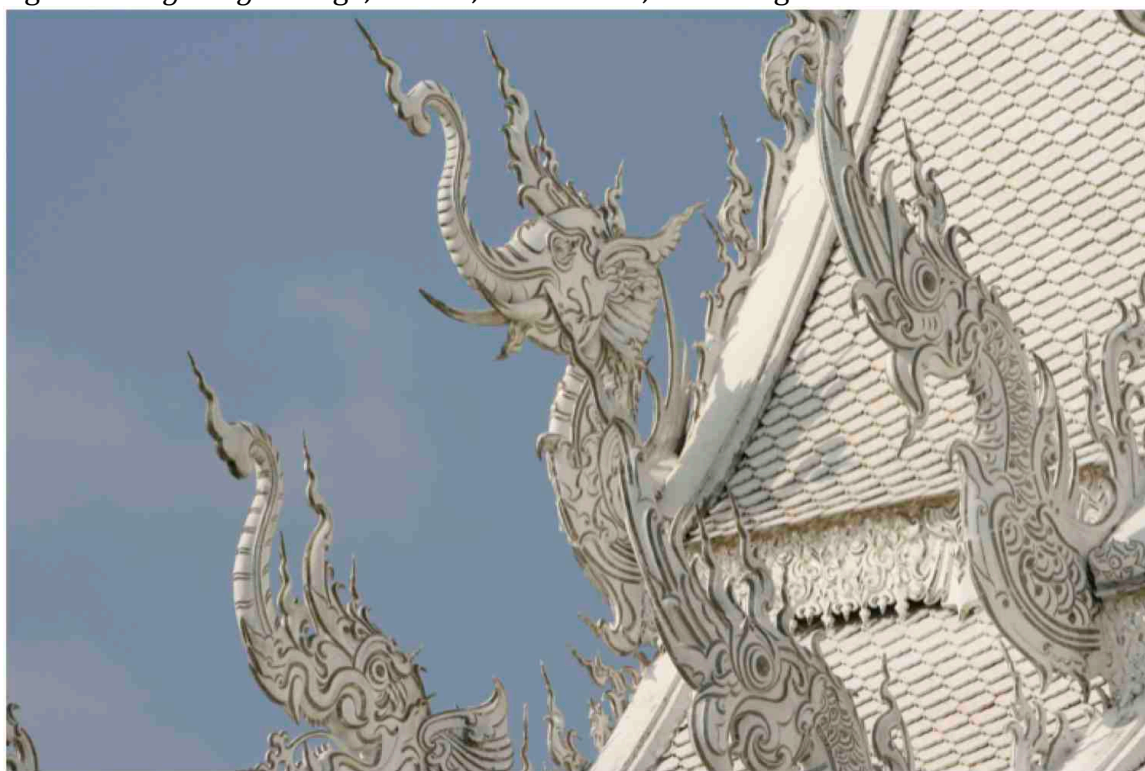


Fig. 56. *Hang hong* as elephant, ubosot, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 57. *Hang hong as swan*, ubosot, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 58. *Cho fa*, composite of four animals. Wings of the swan, chest of the lion, trunk of the elephant, fangs and ear of the *naga*.



Fig. 59 Main *vihara* with statue of Khruba Siwichain on the right, Wat Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai.



Fig. 60 secondary *vihara* with statue of Khruba Siwichai on the right, Wat Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai.



Fig. 61. Thung, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 62. Wooden Tung
inside vihan, Wat Lai
Hin, Lampang.



Fig. 63. Pavilion of relics, Buddhwat, Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 64. Detail of the upper section of the pavilion of relics, showing the glass section where the relics will be.



Fig. 65. Pavilion of images, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun



Fig. 66. View from the back of the Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun. From left to right, the pavilion of images, the celestial bridge, the pavilion of relics and the *ubosot*.



Fig. 67. Examples of ceramic on the business side at Doy Din Deng.

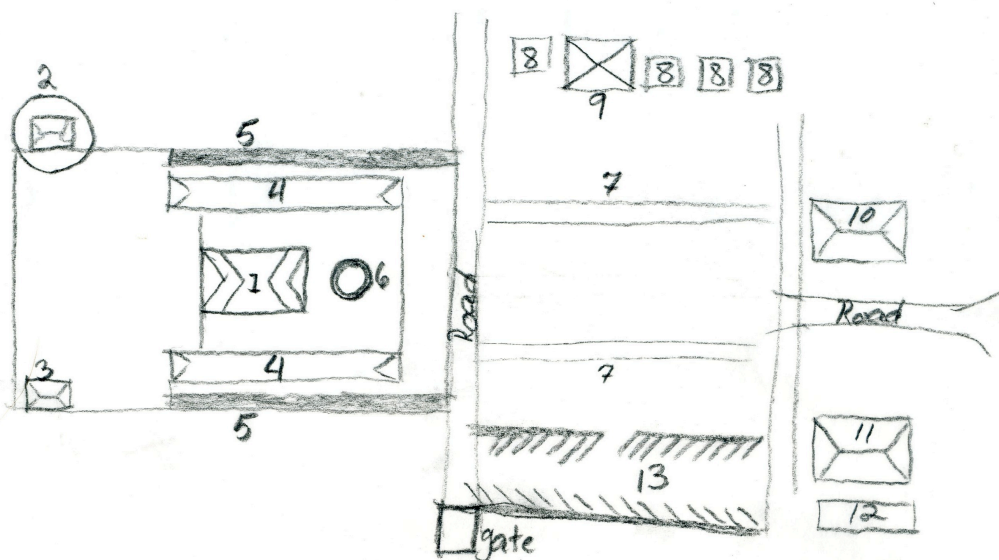


Fig. 68. Drawing based on Somluk Pantiboon's design, early schematic plan of Wat Pa'O Ram Yen, c.2007. (1) *vihan*, (2) *ubosot*, (3) bell-tower (has now changed place to be to the west of the *ubosot*, (4) *sala*, (5) wall, (6) *chedi*, (7) walkway, (8) *kuti*, (9) *sala* for the monks (has now changed place and is south-east of the *sala*, (10 and 11) *sala* for different activities, (12) bathroom, (13) parking.

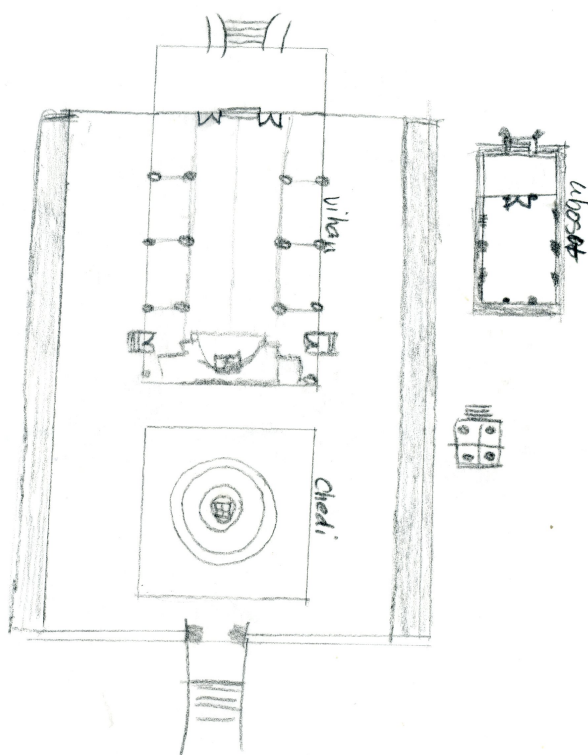


Fig. 69. Drawing based on Somluk Pantiboon's design, new schematic for the eastern section of Wat Pa'O, with the *ubosot* on the left, the large *vihan* at the center and the *chedi*



Fig. 70. Northern gate, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen, Chiang Rai.



Fig. 71. *Ran nam*, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.



Fig. 72. *Sala* for the teaching of the *dhamma*, Wat Pa'O. (#10 on early schematic plan of Wat Pa'O, fig. 84)



Fig. 73. *Sala* for the monks, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.



Fig. 74. Wooden decoration and paneled walls, *sala* for teaching of *dhamma*, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.



Fig. 75. Semi-opened wall, *sala* for the teaching of *dhamma*, Wat Pa'O ram Yen.



Fig. 76. Small *ubosot*, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.



Fig. 77. Small *ubosot*,
Wat Pa'O Ram Yen



Fig. 78. *Hang hong* in the Lan Na style of a leaf. Eave brackets in the shape of pineapples. Wat Pa'O Ram Yen

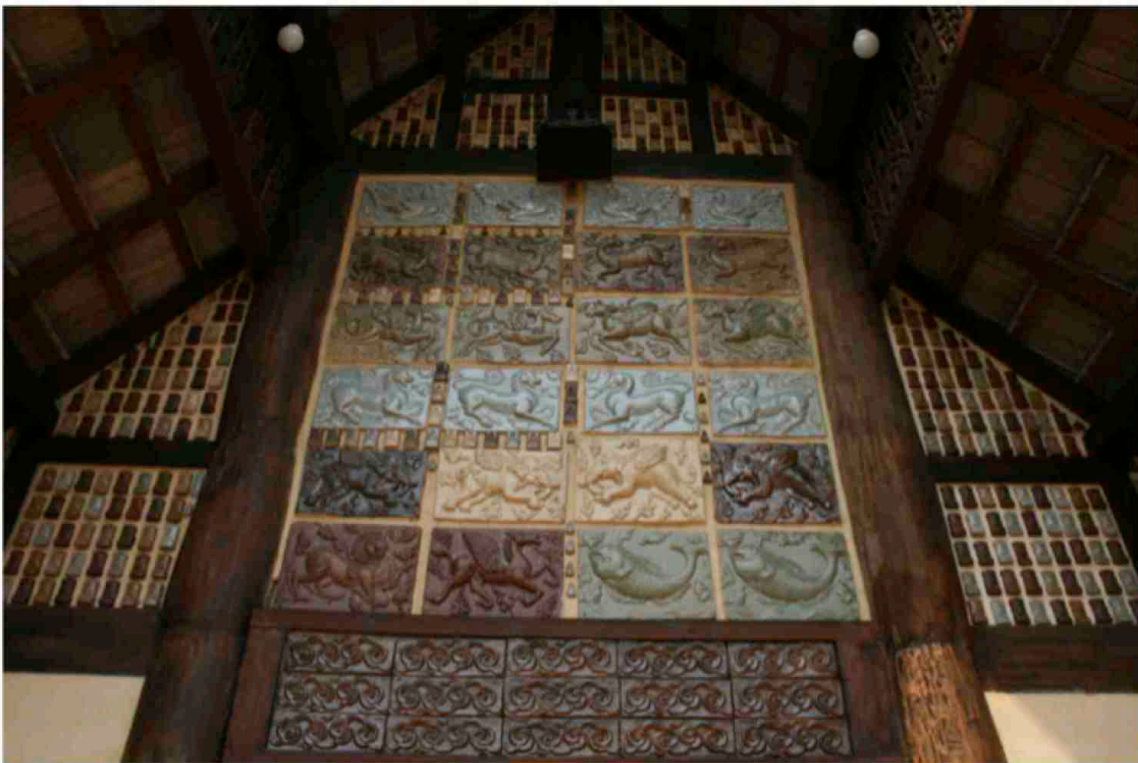


Fig 79. *Na nab*, ubosot, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen



Fig. 80. Interior space of *ubosot*, Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.

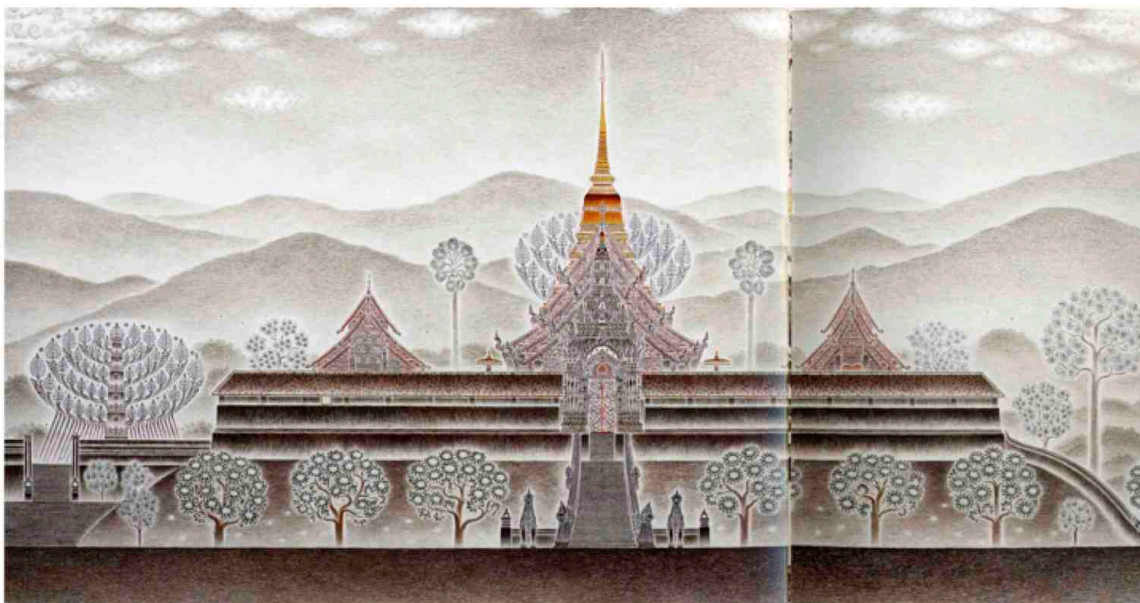


Fig. 81. Songdej Thipthong, Wat Lampang Luang, 2007.



Fig. 82. Interior space *ubosot*, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 83. Design for *vihan*, Wat Rong Khun. based on Somluk's design



Fig. 84. Design for *vihara*, Wat Rong Khun. Based on Somluk's design



Fig. 85. Temporary construction in laticed bamboo to indicate where the future permanent *chedi* will be. Wat Pantao, Chiang Mai. July 4th 2007.

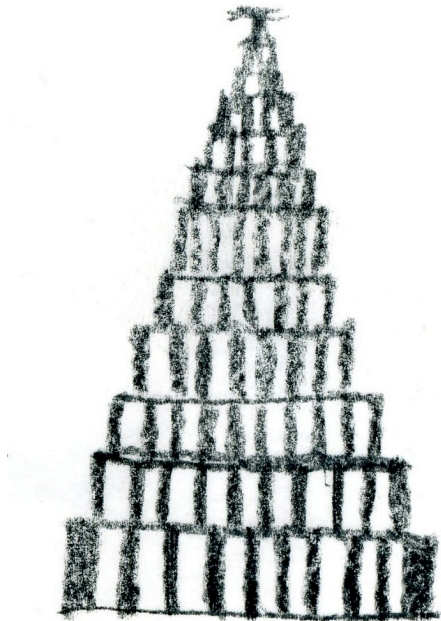


Fig. 86. Drawing based on Somluk Pantiboon's design, early schematic drawing for the *chedi* at Wat Pa'O Ram Yen, c. 2007



Fig. 87. Somluk Pantiboon next to the upper section of the *chedi*, under construction. March 2010.

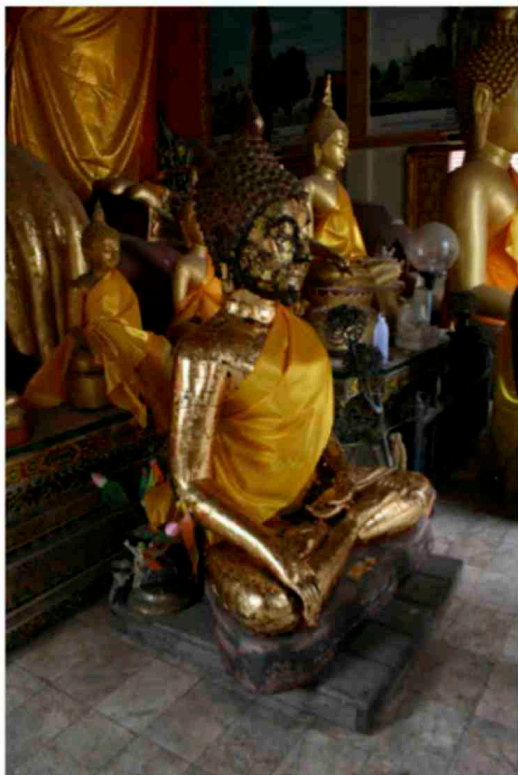


Fig. 88. Dark statue of the Buddha covered with thin gold leaves as an act of merit.
Vihan Phra Chao Pan Ton, Wat Phra That Haripunchai, Lamphun.

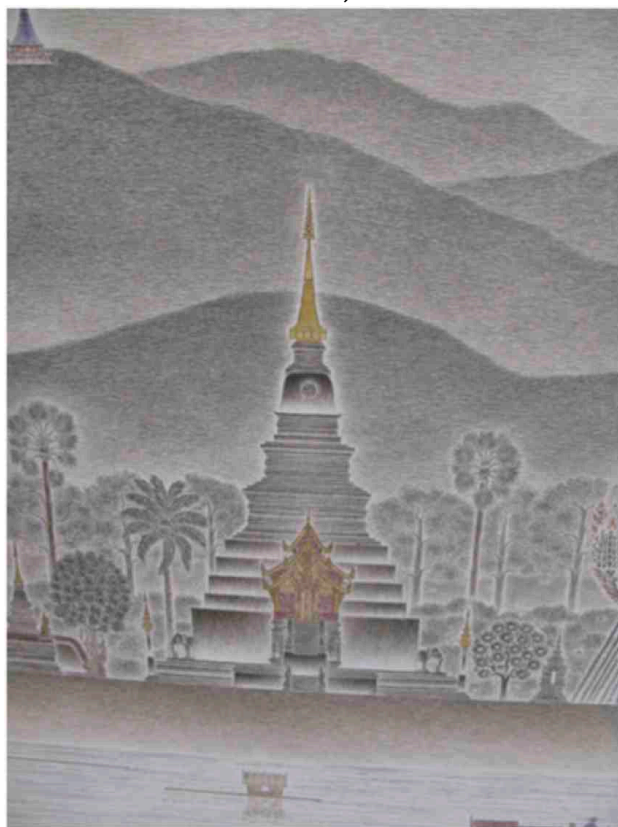


Fig. 89. Songdej Thiphong, title unknown, c.2000.

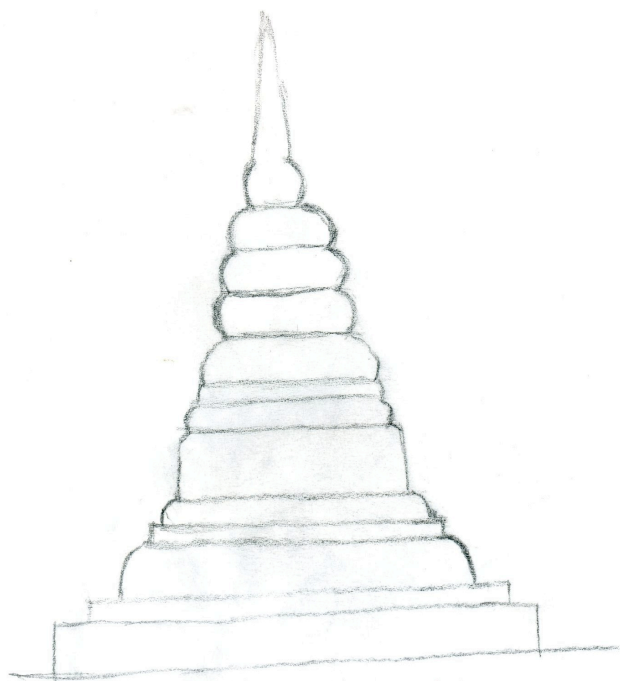


Fig. 90. Based on Somluk Pantiboon's design, schematic drawing of the *chedi* at Wat Pa'O Ram Yen.



Fig. 91. *Ubosot* at Wat PhraRam Kao Kanjana Phisek, Bangkok.



Fig. 92. Historical Lan Na ceiling and roof of an ancient temple hall. Rai Mea Fa Luang, Chiang Rai.



Fig. 93. Lacquered *chedi*,
Wat Pa'O Ram Yen,
March 2010.

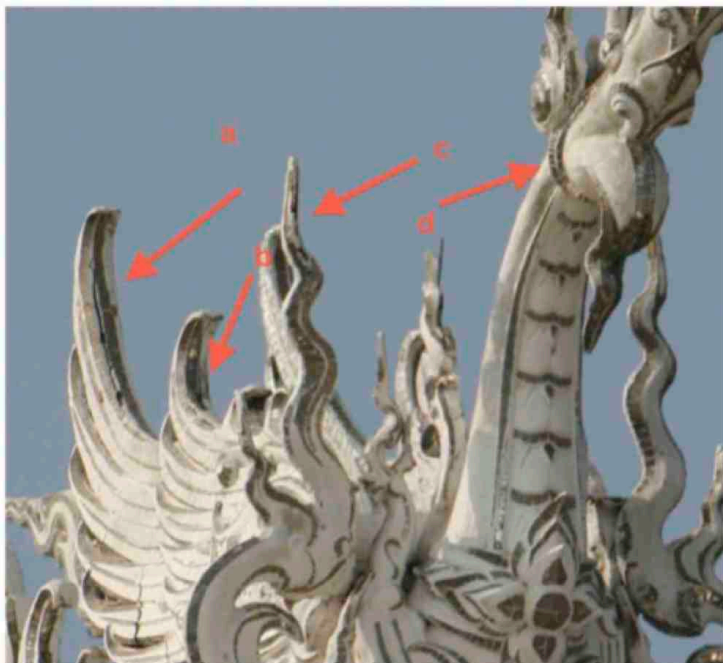


Fig. 94. Detail of the third *cho fa* finial, *ubosot*, Wat Rong Khun. (A), (b) and (c) show cracks while (d) shows missing shards of mirror.



Fig 95. Mold and dirt on *kuti*, Sanghawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 96. Rust on a finial of the *ubosot*, Buddhawat, Wat Rong Khun.



Fig. 97 *Makara* at Wat Phra That Pha Ngao, Chiang Sean



Fig. 98. Schematic drawing, central section, based on Chalermchai's mural, Wat Rong Khun