This dissertation is about the changing physical conditions and social meanings of royal Buddhist monastic complexes (wat) in the Rattanakosin Historic District from the beginning of the Bangkok period to the 1997 economic crisis. In the pre-modern period, the royal wat was the key site for the ruler to consolidate his power and establish his legitimacy as a righteous Buddhist monarch. In this traditional context, these Buddhist monastic complexes became the centers for accumulating and redistributing wealth surplus in various forms of public facilities. With the advent of the modern era, the royal monastic complexes acquired new meanings and functions associated with the process of nation-building, becoming at once symbols of national heritage, loci for modern education, and models of development. And yet, paradoxically, because of the Thai state’s adoption of the Western philosophy of the separation of church and state, the royal monastic complexes which previously functioned as public facilities became more private and centralized under the power of the ecclesiastical authority. Moreover, the monastic land ownership and their space have largely been neglected in Bangkok’s urban planning. Monastic communities are not only invisible in the plans for Bangkok’s urban development, but they are also responsible for generating their own revenue and for the management of their monastic properties.

Comparing three case studies of royal monastic complexes, I show how changes associated with the making of the modern nation-state, including government policies in the affairs of Buddhist religion, transformations in the political economy, and the
urbanization of Bangkok, have affected the form and meaning of Buddhist wats. A central aim of this comparative approach is to demonstrate that these changes have not had uniform effects. Rather, as my case studies show, each of these three royal monastic complexes has responded differently to modernization and nation-building depending on the location and size of the monastic donated land, the scale of its major structures, the degree of architectural elaboration, and its social network. In conclusion, the study of problems and historical changes in each royal wat serves to pinpoint what is overlooked in current planning and preservation practice.
Worrasit Tantinipankul was born in Bangkok, Thailand in 1971, and he spent his first 25 years of his life with his parents and two younger sisters in a small alley of Soi Supharat 1, north of Bangkok. Worrasit attended the Faculty of Architecture at Silpakorn University, where he received his B. Arch in 1993 with 2nd Class Honors. In 1993, he joined the Synchron architectural firm, where he was assigned to work with the Committee for Historic Preservation and Development of Rattanakosin City, the historic district of Bangkok. It was this project which stimulated him to search for a better understanding of urban space, Buddhist landmarks and their histories. In 1995, he joined the School of Architecture at King Mongkut’s University of Technology at Thonburi, and won a scholarship from the Royal Thai Government to study abroad. He received a Master’s in Landscape Architecture from the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania in 1998, and in the same year, he enrolled in the doctoral program in City and Regional Planning with a concentration in Historic Preservation Planning at Cornell University. Upon graduating, Worrasit will return to Thailand with his wife, Alexandra Denes and his son, Aran.
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>BMA</td>
<td>Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (Krungthep Mahanakhon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMTA</td>
<td>Bangkok Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Khonsong Muanchon Krungthep)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFA</td>
<td>Department of Fine Arts (Krom Silpakorn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRA</td>
<td>Department of Religious Affairs (Krom Kan Satsana)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAT</td>
<td>Tourist Authority of Thailand (Kan Thongthial Haeng Prathet Thai)</td>
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Thesis Statement

This dissertation is about the changing physical conditions and social meanings of royal Buddhist monastic complexes or wats1 in the Rattanakosin Historic District from the beginning of the Bangkok period to the present. In the pre-modern period, the royal Buddhist monastic complex was the key site for the ruler to consolidate his power and establish his legitimacy as a righteous Buddhist monarch. With the advent of the modern era, the royal monastic complexes acquired new meanings and functions associated with the process of nation-building, becoming at once symbols of national heritage, loci for modern education, and models of development. And yet, paradoxically, because of the Thai state’s adoption of the Western philosophy of the separation of church and state, the royal monastic complexes has largely been neglected in Bangkok’s urban planning. Monastic communities are not only invisible in the plans for Bangkok’s urban development, but they are also responsible for generating their own revenue and for the management of their monastic properties.

Comparing three case studies of royal monastic complexes, I show how changes associated with the making of the modern nation-state, including government policies in the affairs of Buddhist religion, transformations in the political economy, and the urbanization of Bangkok, have affected the form and meaning of Buddhist monasteries. A central aim of this comparative approach is to demonstrate that these changes have not had uniform effects. Rather, as my case studies will show, each of these three royal

1 For the transliteration of Thai terms, for the most part I have followed the 1999 Royal Thai General System of Transcription, with a number of modifications by the Royal Institute of Thailand. Firstly, in the case of the names of historical figures, instead of using the Royal Thai System, in order to avoid confusion, I have opted for the conventional spellings of those names found in scholarly texts. For instance, I have continued to use the spelling “Vajiravudh” rather than “Wachirawut” to refer to this key political figure.
monastic complexes has responded differently to modernization and nation-building depending on the location and size of the monastic donated land, the scale of its major structures, the degree of architectural elaboration, and its social network.

The study of religious institutions and their role in the urban environment has been overlooked in urban design and historic preservation planning in Thailand, especially in the preservation planning of Bangkok’s historic district, which is locally called “Rattanakosin City.” Although the major historic sites in this precinct are royal Buddhist monastic complexes, which are also attached to a living community of monks, the monastic order and the social networks of these royal monasteries have long been marginalized from major modern planning and development discussions. For instance, by emulating the models of major European cities and tourist destinations, the master plan for the preservation and development of Rattanakosin City Historic District drafted by Committee for the Historic Preservation and Development Planning of Rattanakosin City in 1994 emphasized the visual and aesthetic aspects of historic structures, thus aspiring to raise Bangkok to the level of a world class metropolis. The plan was geared toward the improvement of public facilities according to an idealized image of clear and organized urban elements aimed at tourists, without recognizing the existing local communities around the monasteries, the religious residents inside the royal wats or their daily activities\(^2\). More recently, the sub-district preservation plan for Rattanakosin City Historic District drawn up by the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) in 1999 has attempted to redress these shortfalls by incorporating strategies to revitalize the urban neighborhood, preserve historic façades, and promote the participation of local

communities, but these plans emphasize secular activities and generally exclude religious activities.

It is commonly known that planning and development in Thailand were influenced by Western concepts of civility (siwilai) and development (khwam charoen) during the modernization period and by American planning practices after World War II. For instance, during King Chulalongkorn’s reign (Rama V: r. 1868-1910) the major public works of the city were modeled on the colonial settlement towns in Southeast Asia, such as Penang and Singapore. Although the monasteries, canals and some elements of the existing urban fabric were preserved, the major construction projects sponsored by the royal government shifted from building royal monastic complexes (wats) to building streets, markets, bridges and Sino-Portuguese shop-houses. Moreover, these major constructions were supervised by European architects, engineers and artists. Later on, during the regime of military dictator Field Marshal Sarit (1957-1962), the American firm, Litchfield & Associates, was commissioned to draft the first plan for

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3 See more details about local participation in Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Raingan Khan Sombun Khrongkan Wangphang Chaphohang nai Phuenthi Samkhan thang Prawattisat Yan Chumchon Thatien lae Pakkhlongtalad (Final Report: Specific Plan for Historic Area of Tha Tien-Pak Khlong Talad Community Project) (Bangkok: Rungnapha Kanphim, 1999) 5:8-5:15; Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University, Raingan khan Sombun Khrongkan Wangphang Chaphohang nai Phuenthi Samkhan thang Prawattisat Yan Chumchon (Final Report: Specific Plan for Historic Area of Tha Prachan Community) (Bangkok: J. Print, 2000) 355; Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Raingan Khan Sombun Krongkkan Wangphang Chaphohang nai Phuenthi Samkhan thang Prawattisat Yan Chumchon khet Samphantawong (Final Report: Specific Plan for Historic Area of Samphantawong Community) (Bangkok: Rungnapha Kanphim, 2001) 6:12-6:16. However, only the plan by Silpakorn University engaged the monks of Mahathat Monastic complex but still did not incorporate them as a key factor in the plan.


5 The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533, the first plan of Bangkok was proposed by American consultant team Litchfield and Associates in 1960, aimed to direct urban growth and regulated zoning with ideology of Western urban model without recognition of indigenous preferences of city. See more critic in Larry Sternstein, Portrait of Bangkok, (Bangkok: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 1982) and Walden F. Bello, Shea Cunningham, and Li Kheng Poh, A Siamese Tragedy. Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand (London: Zed Book, 1998).

Bangkok. The plan was based on modern Western cities, and subsequently misrecognized the old canal fabric as a sewage drainage system\(^7\) rather than a part of the traditional urban fabric providing vital transportation. The plan basically imposed the ideas common in a Western city onto an indigenous urban space\(^8\). And today, most planning reports produced by local planning authorities, such as the Bangkok Municipality Planning Department, follow the Western system of zoning, but they lack police power to regulate the plan\(^9\). The current planning policy aims to manage the metropolis according to American planning ideals\(^{10}\). The state development strategies also follow an American model.

After the adoption of the First National Development Plan in 1961, Bangkok expanded rapidly with highway and road construction aimed at fuelling national trade and the economy\(^{11}\). Several canals, comprising the indigenous urban pattern of Bangkok, were filled in the 1950s, and streets were constructed without any consideration of the old city fabric. By late 1990s, the National Development Plan was widely criticized for ignoring the social and cultural dimensions of Thai society. Moreover, urban design regulations also reflected the government’s intention to create an automobile city by enhancing the city’s physical legibility. These new regulations included the placement of street signs, the promotion of visibility within the street system, and the creation of public parks and landmarks. In addition, by emphasizing the preservation of the historic structures built before the end of the reign of King Chulalongkorn, which was widely considered to be

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\(^9\) Larry Sternstein, *Portrait of Bangkok* (Bangkok: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 1982), 111.

\(^{10}\) Marc Askew, *Bangkok, Place, practice and representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 55.

the golden age of Bangkok, the master plan for historic preservation and development of Rattanakosin City also shows the preservation commission’s subscription to the European nostalgic idea of restoring the lost glorious past12.

These colonial paradigms of planning and preservation were influenced by the separation of church and state, the epistemological ruptures of the Enlightenment movement, and industrialization in western and northern European societies. These changes instigated a split between scientific knowledge and traditional religious beliefs and led to the subsequent Romantic movements in preservation of antiquities, as in the case of England and the dramatic restoration movement in France during the Napoleonic period13.

Unlike the European social structure, which Mumford14 suggested was influenced by the separation of church and state since the end of the medieval period, Thai society has never experienced a radical split between Buddhist religious power and the state’s ruling authority. Buddhist countries in mainland Southeast Asia were influenced by the practice of King Asoka the Great, the Mauriyan king who united central India and expanded Buddhist Religion throughout the world. King Asoka purified Buddhist


13 Around 14th to 16th century, the rise of mercantilism, the corruption within Papal authority and the rise of scientific knowledge and the enlightenment movement reduced the significant influence of the Roman Catholic Church system and generated subsequent conflicts around the Papacy institution and other secular authorities in Europe. There were several consequences but we will discuss the two major consequences that contributed to the major concept of urban planning and historic preservation; the industrial revolution in England and French revolution. The industrial revolution in England was not only the successful outcome of the rise of scientific knowledge that confirming human progression but also generating deterioration of urban life condition in major cities. This situation created strong nostalgic movement to restore the landscape elements that represented the human devotion to god and romanticized the lost past of peaceful time in medieval period. The French revolution also created another form of rupture that overturned the political power of feudal and Catholic Church. The outcome generated the consequences in the state taking over properties of Catholic churches in France. The revolution and its political turmoil also contributed largely to the fervent historic restoration to reclaim the French’s glorious past when Napoleon took power.

religion by punishing impure monks, reorganizing the monastic orders and supporting the first Buddhist convocation of the Tripitaka canon. The Buddhist secular rulers in Thailand sought to emulate his model by managing the monastic orders and periodically purifying the Buddhist religion, acts which established the monarch’s legitimacy as a righteous Buddhist king. The planning and architecture of Buddhist cities in Southeast Asia kingdoms also reflected this politico-religious paradigm, albeit with regional differences. According to O’Connor\textsuperscript{15}, the presence of monastic complexes housing the Lord Buddha relics in the heart of the city reflects the fact that Central Thai (Siam\textsuperscript{16}) society has had a long history of unifying religious and secular power within the city. This social and spatial arrangement was also different from what is found in the Northern Thai and Laotian communities. Although Northern Thai, Burmese, Sri Lankan and Laotian cities featured the collaboration between church and state, they separated the realm of the ruler in the city from the Buddhist monasteries, which were located at sacred sites in the thick, tropical forest. By contrast, it was a common practice for central Thai rulers to bring Buddhist sacred relics into the city and to build a Buddhist landmark to house them, as this practice established the city as both a Buddhist sacred city and the exemplary royal center. In addition, the feudal ruling authorities took care of these Buddhist religious properties as a means of providing public welfare to their subjects\textsuperscript{17}. Thus it can be said that the gigantic pagodas and monastic complexes housing the Lord Buddha’s great relics constituted the unique urban character of central Thai cities.


\textsuperscript{16} The name Siam was first used by King Mongkut to refer to his kingdom. At the time of his reign, several parts of today Thailand were still semi-independent feudal states. For instance, the northern principalities of Chiang Mai and Nan were ruled by their own local lords. Therefore, the term Siam and Central Thai in this context refers to the region of central plain Thailand where the practices were regarded as difference from the regions of the north and northeast. After the modernization period, the area of today north and northeast principalities were unified under the ruling authority of Bangkok and Siam after the turn of twentieth century represented the entire kingdom of today Thailand. The name of the country was changed to Thailand in 1939.

\textsuperscript{17} For instance, as we shall see, \textit{wat} is the site where feudal lords and kings would redistribute wealth to local commoners.
However, with the colonial encounter in the mid-nineteenth century, Siam’s rulers realized that they needed to re-orient themselves toward modernity in order to maintain their status and prestige as being up-to-date leaders in the world context. As such, Bangkok and other major Siamese cities had to appear more civilized following the Western typology of a centralized and rationalized city—a process that excluded the religious dimensions of society. It is important to note that the Siamese elite’s adoption of Western concepts for creating a civilized city and rationalized public space had the effect of separating the management of religious properties and affairs from the state affairs. Therefore, to understand the consequences of these changing paradigms for royal Buddhist monastic structures in Bangkok, it is crucial to trace the history of the Siamese government’s appropriation and modification of the Western ideas of the civilized city during the era of King Chulalongkorn. Moreover, it is vital to understand how the Siamese governments of later periods—such as the royal-led nationalist movement period, the civilian-led nationalist movement after the end of absolute monarchy (1932), the U.S.-led development during the Cold War era and the subsequent rise of heritage tourism—adopted and reinterpreted the policies involving royal wats either in favor or against the westernized policy of separation of church and state.

**Literature Review**

This dissertation attempts to develop a new approach to urban design, planning and preservation that recognizes the Buddhist monastic complex not only as an isolated historic monumental structure, but also as a vital urban element of Bangkok. Broadly speaking, scholars of urban history have highlighted the importance of religious institutions as the genesis of urban space, but it is very rare to find literature discussing them as an element in urbanization after the medieval period. Kostof has described the

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religious influences on larger scale cosmological configurations of the holy cities in Asia such as Angkor and several Indian cities, while Vance\textsuperscript{19} and Mumford\textsuperscript{20} have shown how a monastic institution was the integral part of market activities and urban genesis in the medieval era. Lewis Mumford discussed the important role of religious institutions in urban space including the settlement of Sumerian cities in Mesopotamia and medieval towns in Europe; while Vance pinpointed that the relationship between the monasteries and merchants generated the urban form of several European medieval cities. Furthermore, Mumford also pinpointed that the transformation from medieval localism to Baroque centralism was the outcome of the split between religious, economic and political units; namely, the churches, merchants and the rulers\textsuperscript{21}. However, after this period, it is rare to find scholarship discussing how religious institutions figured as an element in urbanization.

For Southeast Asian cities, Wheatley\textsuperscript{22} depicted the character of pre-colonial Indianized Southeast Asian urban space and capital cities as a central space for religious ceremonies, which reproduced the cosmic order by confirming the power of supreme rulers in the context of galactic polities\textsuperscript{23}. He links the arrangement of urban space to a traditional system of Southeast Asian social organization wherein a chiefdom consisting of a number of lesser chieftaincies was centered around a paramount religious structure where rituals and ceremonies mirror the celestial order. He concludes that urban design principles of the Southeast Asian city consisted implicitly of structures symbolizing celestial space with the transition between cosmic planes and the cardinal order.


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 347,371.

\textsuperscript{22} Paul Wheatley, \textit{Nagara and Commandery: origins of the Southeast Asian urban traditions} (Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Geography, 1983).

However, his work, which is based on archaeological evidence and historical literature, tends to portray a static picture of urbanism, which fails to articulate the nature of transformations resulting from the region’s vital maritime trade influences.

By contrast, Evers and Korff\textsuperscript{24} have attempted to analyze the social, cultural and economic transformations of Southeast Asian cities from the early stage of urban formations in the pre-modern period through the colonial and modern period. Their analysis integrated broader issues of current urban dilemmas such as land development patterns, population growth, and the expansion of the market economy resulting from colonization and rapid modernization. The patterns of urbanization and the transformation of the city from Theravada Buddhist sacred cities and trade depots to modern metropolises were described in comparative studies of Siamese, Sri Lankan and Burmese capital cities. However, Evers and Korff’s approach tends to neglect the centrality of religious institutions of Southeast Asian cities in the modern era.

Most literature pertaining to the physical appearance of the Buddhist \textit{wat} of Thailand primarily emphasizes the history, symbolism and style of architectural details. For example, Somkhit (2001) has described elements in the Buddhist monastic complex in terms of their functions, historical meanings and physical characteristics with minor attempts to connect to political factors. Karl Döhring (1920) was a pioneer in the study of Siamese Buddhist architecture and decorative elements\textsuperscript{25}. Kathleen Matics (1979) focuses on Buddha images, artifacts and mural paintings of Wat Pho, a first class royal monastic complex of Bangkok. The Department of Fine Arts, the state’s central agency for historic preservation of Thai culture, also published several articles and focused on the history and typology of Buddhist architecture in Thailand, detailing architectural styles and functions. General speaking, these works glorify Buddhist monastic architecture by

\textsuperscript{24} Hans-Dieter Evers and Rüdiger Korff, \textit{Southeast Asian Urbanism: The Meaning and Power of Social Space} (Hamburg: LIT, 2000), 70-84.
implying stylistic purity and cultural authenticity. In contrast, Clarence Aasen (1998) focused on the syncretistic character of Siamese architecture as a natural reflection of cultural streams. He has also criticized a previous generation of studies about Siamese architecture for interpreting architectural form as either Indianized or pure ethnic Thai rather than a combination of several civilizations and ethnic groups in the region.

As for the scholarship involving history, economics and politics of the Buddhist monasteries, it fails to consider the physical changes of the monasteries and the surrounding urban environment. For instance, Craig J. Reynolds (1972) focused on the Buddhist monkshood and the changing role of monks in society and religious institutions during the modernization period. Stanley Tambiah (1976) introduced the term “galactic polity” to describe the traditional Southeast Asian social organization, focusing his work on relations between the state’s despotic rulers and Buddhist religious structures during the period of military dictatorship in Thailand. He defined the “galactic polity” as the socio-political structure placing the king as the charismatic leader at the center of universe. Other authors include Uthit (1985) who shed light on the political role of the monastic complex and its economic changes during the modernization period, and Somboon (1982) who discussed the relationship and collaboration between religious institutions and political authorities. Walailak (1991) studied the monks’ financial system, and Phatcharaphon (1987) studied Buddhist religion and the formation of the Siamese modern state. Sunthon (1988) examined the legal status of the Buddhist monastic complex to determine whether it is a private entity or public entity. Phassana (1991) focused on the role of Buddhist monks in education during the modernization period.

Despite these many studies of the Thai monastery, however, there are few examples of scholars who integrate Buddhist religious studies and urban studies to show the interrelationship between the monastic complex and the broader urban community. Richard O’Connor (1978) is the sole Western scholar who has studied Buddhist
institutions as a means to understanding Thai urban society. He critiqued previous urban studies that neglected issues of the “moral order” in urban community by focusing too heavily on a market model. On this point, he argued that Western urban studies are based on a market model which assumes a homogeneous urban space that separates local units from the city’s larger structure, disregards the historical perspective of traditional relationships, and views urbanization as a direct measurement of quantitative changes in equal opportunities of citizens. In his study, urban Bangkok is a web of heterogeneous communities, which are linked together in a hierarchical social order from the local to the city level. This interconnected order perpetuates traditional interdependent relationships among several social units around the center, reinforcing the hierarchical structure which organizes urban dwellers based on their personal connections.

O’Connor’s anthropological research analyzes how social and economic transformations affected the social life of one particular monastic compound. He highlights how the hierarchical social structure and sanctity of supportive monastic communities tended to resist the fragmentation that usually follows secularization and modernization, although he recognizes that the Buddhist monastic complex was gradually marginalized from society. Based on his readings, he concludes that the persistence of hierarchical structure in Thai society is the central character of Bangkok urbanism. However, he did not deal with questions of how the built form signified this character or how urbanization based on a Western colonial model of development has affected the physical character of the monastic complex. Another author who has dealt with social and economic dimensions is Netnapis Nagavatchara (1982). She discussed the changes in land use, activities, and environment of monasteries in Bangkok over 200 years (1782 B.C.-1982 B.C). She also describes the general architectural typology and functions of buildings in a Buddhist monastery, but does not draw links between the changes in land use and urban environment and the transformation of historic structure in monastic complexes.
The Scope and Goal: Bridging Social Analysis and Architectural History

As seen from the forgoing review, most literature regarding Buddhist religious institution in Southeast Asia can be divided into two broad categories. The first category, which includes the scholarship of Reynolds (1972), Tambiah (1976), O’Connor (1978), and Uthit (1985), focuses on historical, political, social, and economic aspects of Buddhist monks and the monastery. The second category, which includes the work of Döhring (1920), Matics (1979), Aasen (1998), and Somkhit (2001), regards the Buddhist monastic complex as a tangible site of architectural history and artistic inspiration. By focusing only on social and economic aspects, the scholarship in the first category tends to exclude how these forces affect the physical condition of the monastic complex. On the other hand, the interpretation and description of architectural motifs by scholars in the second category tends to neglect the monastic complex as a center of social life and living activities.

This dissertation aims to provide a bridge between both these sets of studies by integrating a social and architectural history of the royal monastery. By tracing both the social and physical changes in the royal monastic complex from the traditional to the modern era, this thesis aspires to show how the adoption of Western policies of the separation of church and state transformed both the social function and architectural elements of the monastic complex.

There is scant literature studying the social organization of the Buddhist community in the pre-modern era. Most scholars investigating the social organization of Thailand in the early Bangkok period focus on the broader scale of the social structure of the whole kingdom. For instance, Akin (1968) described the pre colonial social organization of Siam as a form of semi-feudalism that centered on the control of conscript labor, whose management determined the rise and fall of the kingdom. Although he broadly described the existence of monastic forced labor, Akin’s analysis
neglected to offer a detailed analysis of the monastic complex or *wat* and the labor system. This dissertation will show that the role of forced labor in maintaining the royal monastic complex in the pre-modern era must be clarified and elucidated. The transformation of this system in the modern era has had a profound impact on the role, function and form of the monastic complex, particularly in the process of renovation and restoration.

In addition, I will show that a study of the changes in the social organization of particular royal monastic complexes, including their larger ecclesiastical networks and its relation to state authority, is vital to understanding the physical condition of these monastic structures, since these people are the major users. For instance, in his dissertation, O’Connor (1978) shed light on how the position of the abbot affected the condition of the monastic complex. He showed that the failure to assign an appropriate abbot led to the decline of the royal monastic complex since the abbot also managed the monks, built local webs of supporters, and reported the condition of the monastic complex to the king. Drawing on O’Connor’s approach, my comparative analysis of three royal *wats* will show how the social organization at each of these sites is reflected in the built form and space of these monastic complexes.

Another major focus of this dissertation is to describe and how the making the modern nation-state affected the changes in the meaning, urban patterns and the physical form of Buddhist structures. Several scholars in Southeast Asian studies have described the Buddhist landmark in the pre-modern era as the center of the cosmos where the supreme ruler articulated his power in balancing natural forces between heaven, earth and underworld in Southeast Asian cities. This built form of the religious place of the

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Buddha relic, royal palace and symbolic mountain or city pillar representing the social
and political structure of the traditional galactic polity with the supreme ruler at the center
that smaller chiefs and local lords would replicate on a smaller scale\textsuperscript{27}.

O’Connor\textsuperscript{28} described the social character of urban Bangkok in the pre-modern era
as a web of kin communities within a hierarchical order where the princes, nobles and
headmen, including important abbots, ruled localities from their houses. The smaller
princes had lesser relics that protected the people in their communities, while the great
relic or palladium of the royal ruler encompassed all the communities together to protect
the city. O’Connor described the urban form of Bangkok as the conglomeration of
communities where the palaces and sacred sites of temples were the centers generating
the image and identity of communities. Subscribing to Kevin Lynch’s concept of the
image of the city (1961), O’Connor argued that Bangkok’s image of the city in the pre-
modern era was not equivalent to the street scene of clear edges, paths, districts and other
urban elements found in European cities. Rather the image of the city was derived from
place names which indicated the meaning of a community, its activities and its center
which was either a monastic structure or a market or a palace. With the exception of the
city wall and major Buddhist landmarks, the districts or the places of communities were
unbounded, located among the unclear edges of canal networks and abundant tropical
vegetation. This was compatible with what Thongchai (1994) argued about the nature of
space in pre-modern Siam. Unlike the European states, the traditional kingdom in
mainland Southeast Asia was a borderless state that concentrated on the sacred center or
the abstract meaning of holy realm, not on defining the periphery.

\textsuperscript{27} Stanley Tambiah, \textit{World Conqueror, World Renouncer: A study of Buddhism, and polity in Thailand
\textsuperscript{28} Richard A. O’Conner, “Place, Power, and Discourse in the Thai Image of Bangkok,” in \textit{Sacred Place
and Modern Landscapes: Sacred Geography and Social-Religious Transformation in South and Southeast
Following the encounter with European countries in the 19th century, however, Siamese rulers adopted Western knowledge and strove to transform the kingdom into a modern nation-state by modeling Bangkok on neighboring colonial cities to be the center of colonial administration. Unfortunately, not many scholars have discussed how the process of creating the modern nation-state affected the royal Buddhist monastic complex and its environment. O’Connor (2003) discussed how modernization changed the relationship between local lay communities and monastic complexes, pinpointing that one of the consequences of a centralized administration was that it erased the local identities and pre-modern modes of spatial orientation. However, his analysis lacked an explanation of how the modernization of Siam’s administration led to physical changes in the monastic complexes.

As stated above, a major aim of this dissertation is to show how the making the modern nation-state affected changes in the social meaning and the physical form of Buddhist structures. Toward this end, of central interest is the restructuring of government agencies responsible for religious support and policies toward Buddhist religion. Other government policies that relate to Buddhist monasteries that deal with educational policy, history, urban development and public welfare are also studied to explain the whole picture of the monastic complex’s transformation.

**Design Precedence of Urban space**

Although there is no study discussing the relationship between the changing state policies and Buddhist monastic spatial organization, there are a few scholars exploring similar subjects in major stronghold cities of the Christian religion. Richard Krautheimer (1980) discusses the history of Rome and its political and spatial transformation from being the imperial center of the Roman Empire to the central administration of the
Papacy and the Medieval Christian World\textsuperscript{29}. His later work also discusses the internal politics of the Papacy in relation to the church construction and urban space of Medieval Rome\textsuperscript{30}. For instance, one of his works examines the urban revitalization programs and the political situation of Christian Rome during the Renaissance period, when Pope Alexander VII took office\textsuperscript{31}. However, his works emphasize the early and Medieval Christian period with some discussion of the Renaissance period, but they do not address the activities of local communities. Besides Krautheimer, Spiro Kostof (1973) also discussed the urban development of Rome at the juncture of the modern period. Kostof described how Rome was transformed from the holy city of Christianity to the modern capital city of unified Italy. Although Kostof provided some important insights into the relationship between the larger organizations of the Vatican and the Italian National Government, his work focused on the secular aspects of the master plans of Rome and some secular urban design projects while neglecting the local-level issues of how these changing state policies affected Catholic churches in the city, including their urban fabric and their communities\textsuperscript{32}. Via Della Conciliazione was the only project where the fascist state dealt specifically with the religious property; however, even in this case, Kostof did not describe directly how the Vatican dealt with the Italian National Government.

Although Bangkok is similar to Rome inasmuch as it was governed by rulers who were divine icons and political leaders, it was in the reverse side. The temporal rules of Pope Pius IX over Rome ended after the breach of Porta Pia in 1870, marking the clear separation of church power from the modern Italian state. From this point forward, the patrimony of the people represented by the Italian National Government could overrule

\textsuperscript{32} Most of the case studies he conducted are the civic plazas dealing with new automobile linkages and nodes to serve the growing demand of residential space. See more in Spiro Kostof, \textit{The Third Rome 1870-1950: Traffic and Glory} (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1973).
the Holy See’s power over the historic landmarks of the Catholic Church in Rome. There is no English language study about this political shift that looks at whether or not it gave rise to conflicts among the church, its local communities and state officials. In contrast, the Thai monarchs have long assumed the role of spiritual leaders who controlled the monastic order. As we shall see, there was never such a radical separation between the Thai Buddhist ecclesiastical government and the secular state, even during King Chulalongkorn’s modernization program (1880-1910). Moreover, by the first religious law of 1902, the Siamese Royal government gave up the power over monastic estate property to the Buddhist ecclesiastical institution but the king still held his power to govern the ecclesiastical cabinet and tightly control all abbots in management of Buddhist monastic places.

Research Methodologies

Data Collection

Determining the scope and selecting methods for studying the connection between the social organization and the built form of the monastic complex was a challenge. On one hand, by conducting archival research and in-depth interviews with key government officials, my research has focused on the framework of the government policies that have shaped the built forms and social meanings of Buddhist structures. However, taken alone, this approach would tend to overlook the details of social contexts and specific sites, leading to a totalizing framework and top-down approach that looks at historic site as a place of lost past. This is currently a major problem in the practice of preservation planning in Rattanakosin, Bangkok’s historic district33.

33 Charnwit Kasetsiri, Yai Thammasat pai Rangsit kap awasan mahawithayalai (Moving Thammasat University to Rangsit Campus and the end of the University) (Bangkok: Khrongkan Asia Tawan ok Chiang Tai Suksa, 2001).
To avoid the pitfall of this totalizing framework, this work also incorporates three case studies of particular Buddhist landmarks in order to reveal the perspectives of monastic key residents, administrators, government agencies, and local supporters directly involved in construction and renovation. This is a comparative study of three monastic complexes, each of which have the quality of being an urban landmark and which are located in different urban contexts of Historic Bangkok. Within the monastic community of each case study, my key informants were both administrative and resident monks. Archival research and a study of government policies pertaining to each site demonstrate the intention and influence of ruling authorities and the monastic order regarding the transformation of built form of the monastic complexes, as well as urban neighboring land owned by the royal monastic complexes.

There are limitations in the power of written expression to reflect the tangible realities of change. Edward Soja (1989) has argued, for instance, that one of the shortcomings of orthodox Marxist theory is its failure to uncover the reality of labor exploitation as its manifests in social geography. John Agnew (1993) also criticized the hermeneutic approach in social science for its neglect of the cultural representation of space and construction of place. However, there are several works describing the changes in social organization and political structure by analyzing built form and its representations. For instance, James Duncan (1993; 1989) utilizes the idea of built form and its representation to analyze the power struggle and social transformations of the Kandyan Kingdom in Sri Lanka. Thongchai (1994) has also linked the transformation of social organization, national identity and political structure to the conversion of geographical knowledge, representations of space and construction of territoriality.

**Spatial Analysis: Buddhist Historic Place as Palimpsest**

What these scholars call attention to is the need for studies which go beyond the textual to investigate how culture, history, and power are expressed in space. In keeping
with this spatial focus, this dissertation will analyze the physical structure of the monastic complex and its environs over time by using the concept of palimpsest to read Buddhist architecture and urban space as a text which contains multiple layers of stories and meanings both past and present.

The New Oxford Dictionary of English defines the term palimpsest as “a manuscript or piece of writing on which later writing has been superimposed over an effaced earlier writing.”34 In a figurative sense vis-à-vis a landscape, a “palimpsest” is a place which has been reused or altered but still endures visible traces of earlier function and meaning. In architectural preservation, the concept of palimpsest has been employed to refer to an architectural concept of using vestiges of abandoned or historical structures to create new spaces for contemporary activities. Hill (1999) pinpoints that architectural palimpsests are the stage of transition between past meanings and the present texts of architectural languages, thus it creates sense of place through the development between old and new structures. In the field of urban design, Roger Trancik (2000) is a pioneer in exploring the urban palimpsest by showing the coexistence of both new design and old structure in the urban fabric of Rome's Campus Martius. The fact that new architectural development patterns were based on the old foundation of the historic urban structure demonstrates how the existing urban fabric can also be considered an urban palimpsest. Paul Henri Gleye (1981:12) uses the term “palimpsest” to create policies that merge theories of urban design and historic preservation together “by recalling previous urban forms and thus lending a sense of historical identity and security.” Andreas Huyssen (2003:64) describes Berlin as a palimpsest focusing specifically on how voids, mistakes and elimination mix with traces, memories, restorations and new constructions in the lived urban space. Thus, he shows that palimpsest can refer not only to continuity but also rupture as result of political contestation.

In the interpretation of landscape representation, McAlpin (1997) used the idea of a palimpsest to interpret to the layers of meanings in painting that express visual representation of particular place. McAlpin described the shifting landscape of Malay colonial settlements and the social transformation in mainland European colonial communities by analyzing the composition of painting, perspective and historical background of travelers/artists in different periods. In this sense, palimpsest refers to not only the trace of architecture and the physical landscape but also the layers of representation of a place through the time. Ina Merdjanova (2002) uses the idea of palimpsest to describe the post-communist condition in Eastern European societies which are attempting to impose a new meanings, symbols and interpretations on the revival of religious institutions amidst an emergent civil society which still possesses ideas of the communist past which reappear in unexpected ways. Thus, the palimpsest is used to identify ambiguities in societies that still bear two controversial ideologies synchronously.

Using a range of visual media about my three case studies of royal monastic complexes, including historical maps and Form Z computer generated images, this dissertation will illustrate how socioeconomic transformations and government policies from the beginning of the Bangkok period have transformed the built space of the monastic complex. Historical images and maps are used to create a set of digital models of each royal monastic complex and its environment during key periods of social and political transformation in order to depict the effects of different government policies on Buddhist monastic structures and their urban environments.

**Data Analysis: Buddhist Historic Place as a Site of Contestation**

Although Hans Dieter-Evers and Korff mention transformation and the fluidity of culture in their study, they nevertheless essentialize Buddhist religious sites by defining them as manifestations of the sacred in Thai society which completely lose their
indigenous character and power to modernity. By contrast, Richard O’Connor (1978) tried to avoid the totalizing frameworks and pitfalls of Western approaches to urbanism, instead adopting emic, indigenous concepts such as moral hierarchies. Nevertheless, O’Connor was criticized for seeking to define the authentic Thai character of urbanism as rooted in its religious hierarchical structures, ignoring the fact that Thai urban communities represent a confluence of many civilizations including Western cultures with activities driven by the market economy.

In this dissertation, rather than seeking a single definition of the religious site, the wat or monastic complex is analyzed as a contested landscape reflecting the struggles for power between several political groups who use the Buddhist structure as an instrument for legitimating their righteousness and balancing their power structure. This approach to analyze the monastic complex as a “contested landscape” is adopted from James Duncan who describes the building program of the Kandyan Kingdom as a discursive field for political power, whose process of physical construction reflects the contestation of different discourses among political groups. In the case of Bangkok, several power groups are in constant competition to use the monastic complex and their social connections with the monastic order to give the new meaning to the monastic complex. Together, these contestations resulted in transformations of the symbols and functions of the monastic complex in the pre-modern era. But do the monastic community and its built form represent and reflect this political struggle and contestation? First, we must understand that the Thai monastic complex has acquired more meanings through time. Beyond the traditional connotation of Buddhist holy space, it is also a tourist spot, a place of national heritage and a formal educational center. These different functions and meanings generate conflicts among modern government authorities including conflict.

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35 Find his critique in Hans-Dieter Evers and Rüdiger Korff, Southeast Asian Urbanism: The Meaning and Power of Social Space (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), 89-90.
with the monastic order. These agencies still bear feudal hierarchical habits within their current systems of administration. It is my key argument that Buddhist monastic places have been the loci of contestations and thus their built forms which were the physical result of these contestations became the identity of Thai urbanism. A key point of this dissertation is to show how different groups have their own discourses about the *wat*. These discourses are generated from different identities and memories, a feature which John Gillis (1994) calls the “sense of sameness over time and space” for a particular community which can be traced through various forms of commemoration. There are other academic works which have described how the monastic structure was used ideologically in Thai society, but these works lack a detailed explanation about how the use of the royal monastic complexes as ideology differs among groups in Thai society.

For example, O’Connor (1978:187) has analyzed the contestation in royal *wats* regarding the appointment of abbots, but he revealed only the tensions among royal authorities, the monastic order and lay communities in the modernization period. What I aim to depict is that the implementations, renovations and reconstructions of Buddhist built forms have certain political meanings, representing the contested ground among different political groups who try to assert their identities and power within the parameter of urban Bangkok. Therefore, the “discourses” of the monastic complex in this dissertation is meant to embrace not only languages but also built forms, symbols, and representations of the monastic complex between different political groups.

**Defining the Thai Wat**

The meaning of the Thai Buddhist *wat* or religious place is essential to this work. To understand clearly how it should be translated into English is important. To clarify the meaning of the *wat*, a comparison between the Thai *wat* and Buddhist institutions in other Southeast Asian countries should be helpful. By examining how the Buddhist *wat* is related to the meaning of the city in Thailand as compared to Buddhist institutions in the
cities of neighboring countries, such as Burma, Laos and Sri Lanka, we can gain an understanding of its contribution to urban life.

**The Wat vs. Western Meanings of Temple, Church and Monastery**

Most English texts translate the Thai *wat* as “temple”. However, the connotation of “temple” fails to encompass all the meaning of the term *wat*. A temple generally means a building dedicated to religious ceremonies or worship\(^37\), or the dwelling place, of a god or gods, or a place for housing other objects of religious reverence\(^38\). In contrast, the English translations of Thai *wat* in several major dictionaries are either limited or ambiguous. For instance, the Oxford-Duden Pictorials Thai & English Dictionary defines *wat* as a monastery, whereas the Thai-English Student’s Dictionary by Mary R. Haas defines *wat* as a temple or temple compound\(^39\). In the Thai-English Dictionary by George Bradley McFarland\(^40\), *wat* is interpreted as a sacred place for worship, a church, a temple, monastery or tabernacle. According to the Royal Institute of Thailand, the term *wat* refers to a place which is comprised of an ordination hall, a shrine, pagodas and residential quarter all dedicated to Buddhist religion\(^41\) which is similar to the definition of Sri Lankan *vihara*. Based on Siam’s first religious law of 1902, the official meaning of *wat* is a community of monks that received consent of the king to use his land to establish a Buddhist holy space, called a “Wisungkhamasima.” This term actually refers to the space inside the holy markers or the bounded space of an ordination hall. However, it is generally known that the whole compound of the *wat* becomes the sacred land of the Buddhist religious realm in present day practice. Therefore, a *wat* means specifically a


\(^{40}\) *Thai-English Dictionary* (1944), s.v. “wat.”

bounded group of religious structures that must at least have the holy space of *ubosot* or an ordination hall for completing ecclesiastical rituals, a shrine and a living monastery. This character is different from general Western concept of religious places of worship where a church and a monastery and a temple can stand separately. The English meaning of temple completely misses out on the legal status of a *wat* as a holy space granted by the secular rulers and the existence of a monastic community residing in a monastery section of the *wat*.

My dissertation deals with the links that those religious structures, designated to be urban landmarks of historic Bangkok, have to their wider urban neighborhood. Therefore, in this dissertation, the *wat* is taken to mean the entire monastic complex including the monastery compound (Sangkhawat), and the sacred precinct (Phutthawat)\footnote{The area of the Phutthawat is usually comprised of an ordination hall or holy space, image hall or shrine displaying Lord Buddha’s statue and pagoda as its major elements. However, minor structures could also be included in the Phutthawat, such as Bodhi tree, learning hall, Tripitaka library and bell towers.} of holy place or ordination hall with other worship structures which may or may not be combined into one structure or one area. This dissertation also discusses the monastic donated land (Thoranisong)\footnote{The monastic donated land is the land that is not a part of monastic precinct but belong to the *wat*. It may be the land that supporters donated to the *wat* for generating revenue or other purposes. This piece of land may or may not be attached to the *wat* precinct. The revenue from this kind of land is called *Kalapanaphon*. There is another type of land called *Thi Kalapana* that the owner donates revenue to the *wat* but the owner does not give up the land rights to the *wat*.} that relates to the changes of urban space around the precinct of the royal *wat* (see Figure 1.1).

**The Character of Bangkok Wats compared to other Buddhist Places in South and Southeast Asia**

A *wat* of the Bangkok period also has a unique spatial arrangement of the holy space or *ubosot*. A comparative look at the architectural arrangement of Buddhist monastery or *vihara* in Sri Lanka and *kyaung* in Burma is crucial for pinpointing the unique character of Thai religious place. The monastery of Sri Lanka has long influenced
Theravada Buddhist practice in Southeast Asia. According to Bandaranayake, the viharas of Sri Lanka in Anuradhapura have two arrangements of monasteries. The first type features a great stupa and other buildings including the ordination hall, shrine, image hall and monasteries which are freely located around it. The worshipping structures were separated from ecclesiastical and residential functions. The second type concentrates the holy space of the ordination hall, shrine, Bodhi tree and stupa in the central compound embraced by groups of smaller residential structures. The spatial arrangement of the Buddhist religious place of Burma is similar to the first type of Sri Lankan vihara in that all Buddhist functions can locate separately. However, Kyaung or the monastery buildings become large and stand independently from the shrine and ordination hall. The ordination hall of the Burmese monastery is not in a main sacred precinct of the pagoda or shrine. Some of them are attached to monasteries, but not all monasteries have ordination halls. The kyaung of Burma is in contrast to the Thai wat that connotes the second type of vihara.

Since the different Buddhist places in different Theravada Buddhist kingdoms have been discussed, it is also appropriate to distinguish the types of wats found within Thailand. At least three or four different kinds are obvious in the field and in the literature. The wats in Thailand differ across regions largely depending on influences from neighboring kingdoms. The wats in the north historically have had a different spatial arrangement from those in central Thailand in that the shrines are the main focus in front of the gigantic pagoda while the ordination hall or ubosot is not a significant

building. It was usually placed behind the pagoda or at the corner of the wat’s boundary, or in many historic monastic complexes, it does not even exist\(^{47}\).

Central Thai wats in the early Ayutthaya period also had a similar spatial relation but later on developed into a different arrangement and influenced Thai wat of Bangkok period. Similar to Sukhothai and Lanna Thai, wats of early Ayutthaya had large shrines and big Khmer style pagodas with square or rectangular arcades embracing the sacred precinct. The ordination hall at this time was not important, but in the middle period of Ayutthaya the construction of the shrine became smaller. The scale of the ubosot became larger and finally replaced the shrine in front of pagodas in the main axis of the plan in late-Ayutthaya. This character became the unique arrangement of the Thai monastic complex or wat in Bangkok and was a crucial part of the religious law for the official definition of the Buddhist religious place or wat. In several wats built in early Ayutthaya period, holy markers were added to shrines for transforming them into ordination halls signifying the layer of change in Buddhist practice that impacted the built form and space arrangement of wats.

From these examples, we can see that most Buddhist religious units in Sri Lanka, Burma, Northern Thailand and Central Thailand have similar essential components for ritual, ecclesiastical and residential functions, but they have different focuses. The monastic complex of Central Thailand in the Bangkok Period is unique for placing the ordination hall at the center in stead of a shrine or pagodas. This indicates the importance of the ecclesiastical congregation in Thailand. Moreover, as a central precinct of the monastic compound, an ordination hall also serves as a main shrine for ritual. Thus, the ritual and ecclesiastical functions are overlapping in one place. This structure and other related buildings in the sacred precinct are likely to evolve to be monumental edifices that contribute to the distinctive character of Thai wat (see Figure 1.2).

\(^{47}\) The examples of these wats are the historic ruins at the former capital city of Sukhothai Kingdom and wats of Chiang Mai, the former capital city of Lanna Thai Kingdom.
The Historical Importance of the Thai Wat to the Urban Community

The Buddhist monastic complexes are a major urban element. They are and continue to be significant landmarks articulating Hindu-Buddhist cosmological principles. The monasteries with great pagodas housing the Lord Buddha’s relics were constructed first in major cities of Central Thailand and located at the center, near the rulers’ palaces. Major cities of the kingdom, such as Petchburi, Nacho Srithammarat, Lopburi, Sukhothai, and Ayutthaya, all have a “Wat Mahathat” or a monastic complex of the Lord Buddha’s relics at their centers. Moreover, in the Siamese kingdom, it became a unique practice to build a great shrine housing sacred image or relic of Lord Buddha as a palladium within the palace compound of the king. The previous capital city of Siam, Ayutthaya, has ruins of both Wat Phrasisanphet and Wat Mahathat, the monasteries housing the royal palladium and the Lord Buddha’s relics. The monastery of the Lord Buddha’s relics was constructed first at the establishment period of the city (1371 A.D.) and later on the palladium of Phrasisanphet was established during the reign of King Barommatrailokkanat (1448-88 A.D.). (See Map 1.1)

In many respects, the construction of the major monastic complexes and the urban fabric of Bangkok followed the model of Ayutthaya. Wat Mahathat in Bangkok was constructed on the old monastery ground of Wat Salak. The ordination hall and the shrine of the Emerald Buddha were constructed in the Grand Palace of Bangkok and were called Wat Phrasrirattanasatsadaram. These two wats once were named Wat Phrasisanphet after the one in Ayutthaya. The establishment of great monumental pagodas of the Lord Buddha’s relic at several wats and Buddhist palladium inside the Grand Palace confirms that Buddhist landmark were fundamental to the creation of the core of Bangkok (see Map 1.2).
Figure 1.1. Diagram showing different areas belonging to wat

Map 1.1. Ayutthaya showing major building footprints

Figure 1.2. Diagram of Thai Wats, Sri Lankan Viharas and Burmese Monasteries.
Map 1.2. Bangkok in late 1890s showing building footprints.

In contrast, in Mandalay, the last capital city of the Burmese kingdom before its fall to the British colonial empire, the palace of the Burmese king was located at the center of the city with a grid pattern. Although there were numerous Burmese monasteries, these royal monasteries and pagodas were constructed at the outskirt of the palace’s wall far away from the central compound, which is comprised of throne halls, residences of major queens, royal relatives and bureaucrats’ houses (see Map 1.3). The great pagoda called Maha Lawka Marazein Stupa and the great monastery called Athumshi Kyaung (1855 A.D.) were constructed at the southwest corner of Mandalay Hill outside the rectangular city wall. Although there were some minor Buddhist facilities inside the palace wall, the inner city possesses neither a monumental edifice of Lord Buddha’s relics nor a Buddhist palladium. In this regard, the king was more of a cakkravatin (World Conqueror) or the Lord Buddha-to-be, and thus there was no need for Buddhist palladium. He himself was the palladium. The great pagodas of the Lord Buddha’s relic in the Burmese kingdom are located on the hill tops such as the Shavedagon pagoda at Dagon or present day Rangoon which was not a major city until the British’s victory over Ava Kingdom. This is different from the Thai social and political structure in that the ruler was considered the great dharmaraja or the righteous king and the supreme protector of Buddhist religion. He confirmed his righteous power 49. He confirmed his righteous power

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48 Dagon or today Rangoon had never been a capital city of Burmese kingdom, it was made capital city of British Burma colony after the defeat of Burmese at the end of Second Anglo-Burmese war. In Burmese history, from the end of Pagan Empire to the fall under British rule, there were only two dynasties but there were various numbers of capitals. In contrast, there were several dynasties ruling Ayutthaya (Siamese) kingdom but only two capital cities of the kingdom. See more detail in this argument in Hans-Dieter Evers and Korff Rüdiger, *Southeast Asian Urbanism: the Meaning and Power of Social Space*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: Singapore, 2000.

49 It is common to find the general eulogy of the kings in Southeast Asian Buddhist kingdoms as future Lord Buddha, Cakkravatin (world conqueror) who moves the world with righteous wheel; Bodhisattva (great savior god) who can reach nirvana but chooses to save people instead, Lord Indra (Sakka) who is the protector god in Buddhist cosmology and Dharmaraja (the righteous king) who is the supreme protector of Buddhist religion. However, it is more likely to find historical document that in the Burmese culture, the king acted more as Cakkravatin than Dharmaraja while in Siamese or Central Thai history, the king pursued the pattern of being Dharmaraja.
Map 1.3. Mandalay showing building footprints.

Based on V.C. Scott O'Connor, Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma (London: Hutchinson & CO. Paternoster Row, 1907).
by supporting Buddhist religious activities, possessing palladium and creating Buddhist landmark to confirm his position.

The city of Chiang Mai in the northern region of present day Thailand also reflects a mixed influence in terms of Buddhist palladium and landmarks of the Lord Buddha’s relics. The great pagodas of Buddha’s relics were constructed outside the city wall at Wat Suan Dok (1371 A.D.) and Wat Prathat Doi Suthep on the hillside of Doi Suthep Mountain (see Map 1.4). The city did not have any form of Buddhist palladium at the beginning of the city’s establishment but rather a city pillar, a symbol which combined beliefs of the traditional Tai with Brahmanism from the powerful Khmer. However, it is the belief that the original place of the city pillar was the site of the royal pagoda monastery, or Wat Chedi Luang. The royal pagoda to house the kings’ relics was constructed and renovated to be a monumental edifice of the city in 1448, and twenty years later, the Emerald Buddha was installed at the eastern niche of the pagoda. Thus, Chiang Mai did not have any Buddhist palladium or relics at the time of its establishment but gradually absorbed the Buddhist practice of housing palladium along with the Hindu-Tai belief of the city pillar.

Similar to Chiang Mai, in the case of Vientiane, the great pagoda of the Lord Buddha’s relic is located outside the city. The That Luang pagoda, which is the biggest pagoda housing the Lord Buddha’s relic, is on the outskirts of the city of Vientiane, while the palace inside the city is surrounded by major wats such as Wat Sisaket and Wat Phrakaew, which once housed the Emerald Buddha (see Map 1.5). The turning point for building the pagoda to house relics was during the reign of King Ramkamhaeng of Sukhothai, which is regarded as the first independent state of the Tai. According to O’Connor, he dug up the Lord Buddha relics from the ground and built the pagoda to

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50 It is the practice of the Tai to have a city pillar at the center of cities or villages. In Brahmanistic belief, it is believed that the pillar was given by the god Indra dwelling in Tavatimsa heaven to the city.
house them inside the city of Sukhothai. This was a practice that distinguished the central Thai or Tai Siam from the northern Tai or Tai Yuan’s tradition (see Map 1.6).

Beside the landmarks of Buddhist palladium and the Lord Buddha’s relics, the large scale monasteries housing a large number of monks were constructed in the inner city of Bangkok and became major landmarks. The gigantic Wat Chetuphon was constructed on the site of the old local monastery of Wat Photharam. It became the biggest monastic complex in Thailand within the adjacent area of the Grand Palace. The monastery section of Wat Chetuphon once was recorded by foreigners as housing more than four hundred monks (a thousand monastic persons if including novices and temple boys) and facilitating monastic education, while Wat Mahathat, which was also the place of great relics and the seat of the supreme patriarch, housed several hundred monks for its Buddhist study system.

This is different from several Buddhist cities such as Kandy and Mandalay which have large-scale monasteries at the periphery of the palaces, but similar to major cities of Northern Thailand and Laos. The palace of Kandy has the temple of the Tooth Relic but the major sacred precincts around it are “devale,” or temples of Hindu and Mahayana gods and goddesses. In contrast, the major Buddhist monasteries are in the suburban area of Kandy and the forest. The three temples of Vishnu, Siva, and Pattini, and a temple of the Mahayana Buddhist god, Nathan, who is protector god of the city, confirm the divine status of the king in Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism. One of the large Buddhist monasteries around the periphery of Kandy was used as a sanctuary to save the kings who ran away with the Tooth Relics when the Western colonizers attacked the capital (see Map 1.7).
Map 1.4. Chiang Mai in 1950 showing building footprints.

Drawn after Krom Yotha Thetsaban (Department of Municipal Contraction), Phaenphang khet thetsaban Nakhon Chiang Mai (Plan of municipal district of Chiang Mai), 1950.

Map 1.5. Vientiane in 1958 showing building footprints.

Based on Laos Service topographique Royal, Plan De la Ville De Vientiane, Ed. Provisoire, 1958.
Map 1.6. Sukhothai showing building footprints.


Map 1.7. Kandy showing building footprints.

In the case of Burma, Mandalay is the present day center of Myanmar Buddhist Study with several large monasteries, but these monasteries are located around the outer part of the city or near Mandalay Hill, and far from the center of the city where the palace is located. This practice also shows that within the city area, there is a separation of secular and religious domination. The structures surrounding the king’s palace at the center belong to the secular world and serve to enforce the king’s power, while monastic complexes are located on the periphery of the city and near the mountain articulating the superior power of nature.

In contrast, the cities in Siam’s realm mostly had monastic complexes within the inner city and close to the central precinct of the ruler’s palace signifying the high degree of overlapping domination between secular and religious power. This physical proximity suggests that the relationship between the king and the Buddhist religion in Siam was much closer. In Chiang Mai, for example, eighty-five monasteries were constructed within the city wall and the wall itself was sanctified as “bai sema” or the Buddhist holy marker. The inner city itself could be considered a great monastic compound and monks can conduct ecclesiastical activities such as ordination rites, everywhere within the city. The cities of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai had numerous ruins of monasteries within their walled islands. In Bangkok, there are fourteen royal monastic complexes within the inner moat and twenty-five monastic compounds between the city wall and the outer moat and a total of sixty-five within vicinity of old Bangkok.

Similar to Kandy and Ayutthaya, the grand palace of Bangkok embraces the palladium of the Emerald Buddha, which used to be the symbol of potency and righteousness of the Lanna king at Chiang Mai and the Laotian king at Luang Prabang.

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54 Two of them are royal shrine in the grand palace and the viceroy palace which can be considered as “wat.”
and Vientiane. However, the shrine of the Emerald Buddha was sanctified as an ordination hall that can serve both royal rituals and state sponsorship of several important ecclesiastical functions, such as the royal ceremony for ordaining new monks. Thus, the landmarks of monastic complexes not only articulate the axis mundi of Buddhist cosmological order but also signify the unity of church and state, Buddhist religion and kingship.

From the study of urban form of Buddhist cities in South and Southeast Asia, Bangkok stands out for its concentration of all the three important Buddhist landmarks (the great Buddha relic pagodas, the palladiums and the large-scale monasteries) together within the heart of the city while other cities still keep some of the large scale Buddhist landmarks outside the city wall (see Figure 1.3).

**Site Selection and Criteria for Case Studies**

The three sites for case studies were selected according to the following criteria. First, they are all royal *wats* which have garnered national attention as the subjects of serious contestation between state agencies, monastic communities and local supporter groups. Secondly, they were all constructed at or around the time that Bangkok was founded, so they can reveal the patterns of physical changes from the beginning of the city’s establishment. Thirdly, each of the selected royal monastic complexes represents a different scale of royal monastery, and they all have a unique monumental structure that represents a major urban landmark of their neighborhood. Finally, they are located in different neighborhoods in Bangkok’s historic district.

For the first criteria, I selected three royal *wats* that each faced serious contestation during different periods. These royal *wats* are Wat Pho, Wat Sraket and Wat Kor (see Map 1.8). Wat Pho is always featured in the national media since it is the biggest and most elaborate *wat* and it is located next to the Grand Palace. Contestations between administrative monks and the Department of Fine Arts in Wat Pho have
Figure 1.3. Diagram of Buddhist Cities in Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Thailand.
Map 1.8. The Sites of 3 royal wats within Bangkok’s historic area for case studies with their images, top; and detail maps, right.

occurred sporadically and easily gain the attention of major newspapers. Wat Sraket is also a large scale royal wat, and although it has less architectural elaboration than Wat Pho, it features a sizeable mountain pagoda and a larger area of monastic donated land. In 1969, Wat Sraket faced conflicts with state agencies and Bangkok preservationists for the real estate development on its monastic donated land—a story which gained national attention. Wat Kor is a very small royal wat in the Chinatown area, but it has a gigantic three-storey ordination hall that visually dominates the scene of Chinatown. The contestation over the construction of this immense structure broke out in 1969 and gained public attention nation-wide. These three royal wats also meet the second criteria since they were all reconstructed when King Rama I established Bangkok.

In terms of the third criteria, it must be noted that the royal wats in Bangkok have already been classified and categorized according to their structural scale, their historical relationship with the royal rulers, their possession of the Lord Buddha relics, and the level of detailed elaboration of their historic architecture—all of which can be understood as the physical expressions of the relationship between the rulers, bureaucrats and the monastic order. The class system for the royal wats was implemented by King Chulalongkorn in 1920 and the present classification system is the remodeled version by his half brother, Prince Wachirayan, who became the Supreme Patriarch during the reign of his son, King Vajiravudh (r. 1910-1925).

There are three levels of classes: first, second and third. (In Thai, these are chan ek, chan tho, and chan tri). The class was determined by the historical relationship to the king and royal family members. There are five levels of honor as follows: the royal great honor (ratchaworamahawihan), the royal honor (ratchaworawihan), the great honor (woramahawihan), the honor (worawihan) and the ordinary (saman). The royal honor was classified by the patronage and relationship with the kings or queens or viceroy princes. The great honor refers to the scale and architectural elaboration of the monastic complex. The royal great honor refers to both historical relationships with the royal rulers.
and large scale architecture. The honor and ordinary are the lowest ranks for the monasteries without significant architecture but nevertheless have some close historical relationship with the royal rulers. Wat Pho, Wat Sraket and Wat Kor are classified in each class respectively; the first, second and third. Even though Wat Pho and Wat Sraket belong to different classes, they are both designated as monasteries with the highest level of royal great honor (see Map 1.9). Wat Kor is designated as a monastery of royal honor of the third class.

In terms of the last criteria, these three wats are situated in different communities on the east side of the historic district of Bangkok or Rattanakosin City. According to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation and Development of Rattanakosin City\(^{55}\), the historic district of Bangkok is divided into five areas with the Chao Phraya River separating the historic district into the east and west side. The east side is comprised of the Inner Bangkok, the Outer Historic District and the Eastern Extension. These three are separated by the city inner ring and outer moats. The west side comprises of the Western Historic District which once was the old capital of Thonburi, and the Western Extension. Although the Western Historic District of Thonburi was historically connected to the eastern part of Bangkok, most major development has been concentrated on the east side and expanded eastward since the modernization period. Therefore, this research focuses primarily on the Inner Historic District, the Outer Historic District and the Eastern Extension which are the core areas of early urban development.

In total there are twenty-eight monastic complexes on the west side (see Map 1.10). In the Western Historic District of Thonburi, there are eight wats and all of them are the royal monastic complexes. In the Western Extension, there are ten royal wats and ten commoner wats. Within the east side area there are a total of forty six wats in the

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\(^{55}\) From Synchron Co., Ltd., Phan Mae Bot phuea kan Phatthana Rabob Satharanupraphok Satharanuprakan lae Kan Chai Prayot Thidin Nai Boriwan Khrongkan Krung Rattanakosin (Master Plan for Development of Public Facilities and Land Use in Rattanakosin City District) (Bangkok: Office of Environmental Policy and Planning, 1999).
Map 1.9. The large scale royal monastic complexes in Rattanakosin City Historic District.

Based on Naengnoi Saksi, Ongprakob Thang Kaiyaphap Krung rattanakosin (Physical Composition of Rattanakosin City).
Map 1.10. The number of royal wats and commoner wats within the boundary of Rattanakosin City Historic District.

Based on a map in Synchron Co, Ltd., Phan Mae Bot Phua kan Phatthana Rabob Satharanuprapok Satharanuprakan lae kan Chai Prayot Thidin Nai Boriwan Khlongkan krung Rattanakosin (Master Plan for Development of Public Facilities and Land Use in Rattanakosin City District), ngo-33.
three historic districts of Bangkok on the East side. In this number, there are two special royal monastic complexes that have no monastic order residing in the complex precincts. These are the ordination hall complexes of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phrakaew) in the Grand Palace and the shrine (Wat Phrakaew Wang Na) within the Front Palace Compound. The other exceptions are two Mahayana Buddhist monasteries from Chinese and Vietnamese sects. Within these three historic districts, twenty-eight wats are entitled royal monastic complexes. Among these royal wats, Wat Pho is in the Inner Historic District. Wat Sraket is at the eastern junction outside the Outer Historic District and Wat Kor is in the southern tip of Chinatown. Both royal wats are in the Eastern Extension which has been the vital area of Bangkok’s urban development.

**Concise Description of the Chapters**

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I discuss the contemporary physical conditions, socio-political situations and urban environments of three royal wats I selected as case studies. The current problems of each of these three case studies and planning programs involved with their sites are compared, to show how government policies impacted these three royal wats differently. The issues and conflicts facing each of these royal monasteries can not be fully appreciated without an understanding of their respective positions within Bangkok’s urban history, and therefore in Chapters Three through Seven, I frame a discussion of each of these monasteries within the broader historical context of Bangkok’s urban development.

Chapter Three discusses the history and transformation of the Buddhist monastic complex from the period of the establishment of Bangkok (1782) to the end of King Rama III’s reign (1851). This chapter describes why and how the royal monastic complexes were crucial for recovering the manpower control system after the fall of Ayuthaya in 1767. It also discusses the changing symbolic meanings and political motivations behind the construction of religious structures during the first three reigns.
For instance, for the first and second reigns of the Chakri dynasty, the monarchy’s political motivation for building wats was primarily about establishing legitimacy to the throne and reviving the glory of Ayutthaya. This gradually shifted during the third reign, as monasteries became a space for emerging Chinese merchants to assimilate into Thai society. This chapter discusses how the three royal wats reflected the transformation of state policies vis-à-vis manpower, taxes, and the rising Chinese merchant class.

Turning to the reign of King Mongkut in Chapter Four, this chapter reveals how each of the three royal wats dealt with the policies of this progressive and reformist monarch. Because Wat Pho and Wat Sraket have a more detailed historical record of their construction than Wat Kor during this reign, this chapter will focus more heavily on the former two cases. In particular, I will discuss the religious and political movement of King Mongkut beginning with his tenure as a monk in the third reign, looking closely at how his interpretation of Lord Buddha’s disciplines (Vinaya), especially the idea of sima holy space, influenced his policies when he became the king. This chapter elucidates how King Mongkut’s study of the Vinaya and reformist politics shaped Buddhist monastic space, particularly the idea of clearly bounded sima holy space. His aspiration to demarcate clear and precise boundaries of the sima corresponded to British and French colonial aspirations to map the boundaries and internal geographies of their colonies in Southeast Asia, and arguably King Mongkut’s fixation with sima boundaries was linked to the emergent politics of cartography of his era. Aside from mapping, King Mongkut was also instrumental in opening the country to free trade, and together these forces would lead to the transformation of urban Bangkok.

Chapter Five elucidates the situation of the three royal wats in the transition to modernization and free-trade activities during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). This chapter shows how free trade gradually replaced the semi-feudal structure and Chinese tributary trade. In terms of the case studies, this chapter focuses more on Wat Pho and Wat Kor since these monasteries underwent significant changes during this
period, in contrast to Wat Sraket. In this period, Bangkok, which was once considered as a Buddhist exemplary center, was remodeled in the image of a colonial metropole. The royal wats that once were heavily supported by the crown, noblemen and Chinese merchants in the form of tax from conscript labor were separated from the state’s modern financial system. Instead, with the growing land value due to the trade activities, the government provided new forms of support by securing the lands around the royal wats and encouraging them to manage the rent revenue from these lands. The duties of supporting monks that had once been shared across various feudal departments were consolidated in the Ministry of Public Instruction.

Chapter Six continues with an analysis of the separation between Buddhist monastic complexes and state authorities from the end of King Chulalongkorn reign (1910) to the nationalist period. At this point, the king, who once assumed the duty of leading Buddhist monastic affairs, gave this responsibility to the Supreme Patriarch. By the reign of King Vajiravudh (1910-1925), the public schools in wats were no long operated by monks but by secular officials, creating contestation. When the new People’s Party government took power after the end of absolute monarchy (1932), the new government policies neglected the royal monasteries because of their historical association with the institution of the monarchy, leading to the physical decline of these religious sites.

Chapter Seven demonstrates how the new regime of the military dictator, Sarit Thanarat (1957-1962), led to a transformation of the physical appearance and symbolic meaning of royal wats, primarily through his revival of the monarchy and his promotion of American development propaganda. Ranging from tourists sites to models of development (wat phathana tua yang), royal wats during Sarit’s rule acquired new layers of meaning as sites of national heritage and progress. One outcome of the state’s policies vis-à-vis the monasteries during this period was that the royal wats became sites of contestation and spheres of overlapping power between the monastic order and the state.
On the one hand, the historic preservation law was proclaimed to protect monastic complexes as national heritage, while on the other hand, policies also protected the authority of administrative monks to manage their monasteries as “business enterprises” autonomously from the state.

Chapter Eight represents the conclusions I have drawn from these three case studies of Buddhist landmarks in Bangkok’s historic district. A key point is that the Buddhist monastic complex continues to face problems that originate with the state’s partial (and often ambiguous) separation of church and state. This chapter pinpoints the key contemporary conflicts involving state authorities, communities and monastic orders. It also provides some suggestions based on my fieldwork and my historical analysis of the three royal wats. At the most basic level, I argue that there is a fundamental contradiction in the state’s devolution of management of the wats to the monastic community, particularly the abbot. Rather than forcing monks to abandon their Buddhist principles by involving themselves in financial concerns of the monastic complex, I propose that the sacred precinct of royal wat should be managed by a non-profit organization comprised of all interested stakeholders in the community.
CHAPTER TWO
MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF THREE CASE STUDIES

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the contemporary physical conditions, socio-political situations, and urban environments of the three royal wats which were selected for case studies. Moreover, the current conflicts and problems in these three monastic complexes and their environments are also discussed in relation to their differences in scale of major landmarks, spatial arrangement, portion of monastic donated land and location. The historic preservation and urban planning programs involving these three royal wats launched in the 1990s are also discussed in terms of how the plans tried to solve the problems of the area. This chapter also aims to offer a critique of these planning policies, in order to demonstrate how state authorities and scholars have failed to include the monastic orders and their surrounding communities as vital partners in the planning process. As we shall see, urban planners tend privilege the royal wats as potential tourist spots and sites of the nation’s historic heritage at the expense of understanding the social meanings of these religious places and their unique urban problems.

Wat Pho

Wat Pho is the largest royal monastic complex in Thailand. It is located at the heart of historic Bangkok next to the Grand Palace. It possesses highly elaborated architectural embellishments and has a strong historical association with the royal rulers of the Bangkok period. It was classified as the first class wat with the status of royal great honor. There are only four wats of this class and status in Bangkok and a total of six in Thailand. The genesis of Wat Pho is in fact unknown. It was probably founded as a local wat sometime between the reign of King Phra Phetracha (r.1688-1703) and the fall of
Ayutthaya\textsuperscript{56}. Its original name was Wat Photharam was assigned as a royal wat when King Taksin established Thonburi as his capital. King Rama I renamed it Wat Phrachetuphonwimonmangkhalawat when he finished the renovation of this wat. During the reign of King Mongkut, the name was altered slightly to Wat Phrachetuphonwimonmangkhalaram Ratchaworamahawihan which is its official name until today.

\textsuperscript{56} Since there was no remnant of the monastic complex on the map of the French Army when they were installed at Bangkok during King Narai’s reign (R. 1656-1688), the history of Wat Pho has tended to be written by using the oldest possible date that it was established during the next reign of King Phetracha. For more detail, see Phrakhru Palat Samphihatthanaphrommachaariyachan (Bun), \textit{Prawat Wat Phrachetuphonwimonmongkhalaram} (History of Wat Phrachetuphonwimonmongkhalaram), cremation vol. Phra Ratchaprasitthiwimon, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkon Ratchawittayalai, 1993), 7.
**Location/Surrounding Environment**

Wat Pho is located in the Inner Historic District at the south side of the Grand Palace. The Department of Homeland Security and Sanamchai Road are located at the east side of Wat Pho. The Maharat Road and the 490 units of shop-houses (the northern section is the Tha Tien Market) and Chakraphong Palace are located at west side of this royal monastic complex. The Ministry of Commerce and Yaekthat Road are at the south side of Wat Pho’s monastery compound. The area of Wat Pho including both sacred precinct and monastery compound is approximately 19.80 Acres\(^5\). Wat Pho also has a small monastic donated land which is comprised of shop-houses (around 50 units) in the Tha Tien area.

**Visibility**

The major structures at the north side of Wat Pho are Thaiwang Road and the inner section of the Grand Palace. On the south and the east side of Wat Pho are two compounds of government buildings featuring modern and Baroque architecture. The buildings of the Grand Palace near Wat Pho are mostly constructed in a two-storey simple Thai style. These structures are in a small scale within the palace wall and compatible with Wat Pho’s appearance. Although the main buildings in the government compound of the Department of Homeland Security and the Ministry of Commerce are large scale three-storey Baroque style buildings, these buildings are located at a distance from Wat Pho and their compounds are surrounded by walls and old trees (see Plate 2.2 and 2.3). However, some of the newer, three and four storey buildings within the compound of the Ministry of Commerce and the Palace District Police Station were constructed later (see Plate 2.4). From the point of view of planners, these buildings are incompatible and could be viewed as creating adverse affects on the visual harmony of

\(^{5}\) It is 50 rai and 38 wa\(^2\) in Thai measurement unit and the conversion is 1 rai = 1600 m\(^2\), 1 wa = 2 m. 1 acre = 4,046.8564224 m\(^2\) (SI unit)
Plate 2.2 Bird-Eye-View from the North showing the Department of Homeland Security on the left.

Plate 2.3. Bird-Eye-View from the Southeast showing the Ministry of Commerce next to Wat Pho.

Plate 2.4. View from the South showing the Police Station of Palace District with a 4-storey buildings behind.

Key map based on the Physical Map of Bangkok (JICA) 1987. Plate 2.2 from Niyada Laosunthon, Prachum Jaruk Wat Phrachetupon (Compilation of Inscription of Wat Phrachetuphon); Plate 2.3 and 2.4 from Nangnoi Saksi., Ongprakop thang kaiyophap Krung Rattanakosin (Physical composition of Rattanakosin City), 325, 189.
Wat Pho. The scene of Wat Pho from the Chao Phraya River is also a major problem. The shop-houses that embrace the courtyard of Tha Tien Market are two stories high and feature colonial-influenced Baroque architecture which is not a visual problem. However, the modern style, three and four storey shop-houses next to the market are visually incongruous, and some of them have an additional structure and floor space on top (see Plate 2.5 and 2.6). Several of them that face Chao Phraya River also have some temporary shanty structures which create adverse visual effects on Wat Pho (see Plate 2.7).

**Transportation**

Wat Pho is embraced by a street network on all four sides and has one alley that cuts between its sacred precinct and monastery compound. The three major roads at the north, east and west are two-way roads. The small road between Wat Pho and the Ministry of Commerce and the alley that cuts between the sacred precinct and the monastery compound are one-way roads (see Map 2.1).

The major transportation node is the river port at Tha Tien Market that has a ferry service to bring tourists from Wat Pho to Wat Arun across the Chao Phraya River. The port is also a stop for Chao Phraya Express Boats. Along Thaiwang Road at the north side of Wat Pho is also a temporary station for No.47 BMTA\textsuperscript{58} bus.

The bus for group tourists normally stops at the entrance from the north side and parks along Thaiwang Road. Another parking area for smaller vans and cars of tourists and local visitors is the narrow parking along a one-way alley that cuts between Wat Pho’s sacred precinct and monastery compound. Both parking spots create traffic congestion. The buses parking at Thaiwang Road and the BMTA buses occupy a large portion of the road and obstruct the traffic flow. These large vehicles also create visual

\textsuperscript{58} It is an abbreviation for Bangkok Metropolitan Transportation Authority.
Plate 2.5. Historic Bird-Eye-View from Northeast showing the 3-storey shop-houses along Maharat Road.

Plate 2.6. View of the alley showing the 4-storied shop-houses

Plate 2.7. View from Chao Phraya River at the waterfront of Wat Pho

Plate 2.5 from Niyada Laosunthon, Prachum Jaruks Wat Phrahetupon (Compilation of Inscription of Wat Phrahetupon); Plate 2.7 from Naengnoi Saksi, Ongprakop thang kaiyaphap Krung Rattanakosin (Physical composition of Rattanakosin City), 338.
Map 2.1. Wat Pho and its vicinity showing key traffic patterns and transportation nodes
chaos for Wat Pho’s famous Reclining Buddha Shrine. The movement of cars parking along the Wat Pho’s narrow alley and the activities of small vans dropping off tourists create major traffic congestion in this one-way road.

**Land Use and Land Ownership**

The land use pattern in the vicinity of Wat Pho can be separated into four major categories according to usage: government, residential, mixed commercial-residential and educational activities. The major mixed commercial-residential activities occur in the area of the Tha Tien Market and the community on the west side of Wat Pho along the Chao Phraya River. The southern area of Tha Tien is the Chakkraphong Palace which is for residential use. The areas of the north, east and south of Wat Pho are the Grand Palace, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Ministry of Commerce respectively, which are classified as governmental use (see Map 2.2). There are six major groups of landlords in this area. The vicinity in the north (northwest of Tha Tien Market), east and south of Wat Pho belong to the Crown Property Bureau and the government respectively. The areas on the western side below the Tha Tien Market belong to private owners of shop-houses, Wat Pho, Chakkraphong royal family and the Rachini Foundation (see Map 2.3).

**Major Activities Beyond the Sacred Precinct**

The pattern of land use has a major impact on the transportation networks and major activities of this area. Since the area along the west side is Tha Tien Market with a port and four major clusters of shop-houses, it makes Maharat Road the busiest route in the area which is full of activities all day and night. The commercial activities of shops and street vendors occupy the pedestrian walk during the day, while at night, mini-trucks arrive for stocking and restocking produce. Moreover, next to this area is Rachini Girl’s School. Maharat Road becomes busy in the early morning and evening when parents drop
Map 2.2. Land Use pattern in the vicinity of Wat Pho.
Map 2.3. Landownership around Wat Pho.
off and pick up their daughters. Although the shop-houses along the Chao Phraya River create a degree of visual chaos, community members living in the second floor spaces of their shop-houses contribute to making this a strong neighborhood. In contrast to Maharat Road and the Tha Tien Community, the areas to the north, east and south of Wat Pho are relatively tranquil during the day.

Physical characteristics

Spatial Arrangement

Wat Pho is separated by a small alley called Chetuphon Road into two major parts: the sacred precinct at the north and the monastery compound at the south. Both of the compounds are enclosed within a wall that is approximately 8 feet high. Since its establishment at the beginning of the Bangkok period, Wat Pho has always had very clear precinct boundaries, because it has always been enclosed by streets on all four sides. In the sacred precinct, there are two major zones; the east zone and the west zone (see Figure 2.2 and Plate 2.8). The eastern zone is comprised of the ordination hall at the center embraced by double rectangular corridors, four Khmer prangs at the corners of the inner corridor, and four cardinal shrines (see Plate 2.9). Next to the outer corridor there is another ring of seventy-one small pagodas embracing the corridor. At the four corners of this zone, there are four corner shrines in an L-shape plan and four groups of pagodas (each has five pagodas on a cross base). There are two pavilions along the wall of each side (see Plate 2.10 and 2.11.). The western zone contains the grand pagodas of four reigns and the Tripitaka library in the middle of the area with the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha at the north and learning hall at the south end. There are two gardens with Chinese pavilions in between the Tripitaka library and the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha and the learning hall (see Plate 2.12-2.15).

The monastery compound at the south was originally comprised of four residential zones but the group of residential buildings at the southern tip zone was
Figure 2.2. Plan of Wat Chetuphon.


Plate 2.8. Bird-Eye-View of Wat Pho showing sacred precinct and the northern section of the monastery compound.

From Phra Thammaphanyabodi (Thawon Titsanukaro), *Hor Samut Somdet Wo Pho To Wat Phrachetuphon* (Library Somdet Wo Pho To at Wat Phrachetuphon) (Bangkok: Ammarin Printing and Publishing, 2002).
Plate 2.9. View of the ordination hall from the southeast corner of sacred precinct showing the order from corner shrine, double corridors and the ordination hall at the center with Shrine of Reclining Buddha and the Four-Reign Pagodas in the background.

Plate 2.10. View from the northwest of the ordination hall corridor looking at the pavilion and Four-Reign Pagodas.

Plate 2.11. Detail of small group of five pagodas at the corner outside the corridor.

Plate 2.12. Bird-Eye-View of Wat Pho from the west side showing the Tripitaka Library hall with Four-Reign Pagodas and the ordination hall in the background.

Plate 2.13. Chinese Pavilion and Garden next to the Learning Hall.


Plate 2.15. The Learning Hall.


Plate 2.17. The stone garden with hermits sculptures.

Plate 2.18. The Chinese Gateway at the Eastern Shrine.

From Niyada Laosunthon, Prachum Jaruk Wat Phrachetuphon (Compilation of Inscription of Wat Phrachetuphon).

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demolished in order to rent the space to the Tangrongchit Commercial School. However, the school structure is built on the foundation of the previous residential structures, which were two linear clusters of one-storey row houses. The remaining three residential groups are also in a linear arrangement. In each group, last of these small houses is a larger two-storey building which is the residence of the head monk of each group. At the present time, these areas have been turned into Wat Pho’s administrative and Buddhist educational facilities. There are some significant structures (the library and school) in the area next to the former abbot’s residence in the northern zone. This residential building has been listed on the national register of historic places because the former abbot was a famous prince and Supreme Patriarch during King Mongkut’s reign (see Plate 2.18).

**Major Architectural Features**

Wat Pho is considered the largest and most royally endowed monastic complex of the Bangkok period. In addition to the several significant structures with refined architectural elaboration in the sacred precinct, this complex also has several large-scale and highly elaborated residential buildings. Wat Pho’s grand scale ordination hall is the only one in Thailand that is embraced with a double rectangular corridor. In terms of the image of the city, the view of the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha and the group of the Four Reign Grand Pagodas which dominates the scene from the Chao Phraya River has been the image of Bangkok since the arrival of the colonial powers. The Tripitaka Library is also a grand structure gilded with Chinese-style ceramic tiles. The residential buildings of the former Supreme Patriarch Prince Poramanuchit Chinorot are also listed in Thailand’s National Register of Historic Places.

**Landscape Elements**

In addition to the Chinese ceramic details which adorn the major structure of Wat Pho’s sacred precinct, landscape elements of Wat Pho also contain several fine examples
Plate 2.19. The Bird-Eye-View of Monastery Compound.

Plate 2.20. Walkway between the Middle Group and the Southern Group.


From Phra Thammaphanyabodi (Thawon Titsanukaro), *Hor Samut Somdet Wo Pho To at Wat Phrachetuphon* (Library Somdet Wo Pho To at Wat Phrachetuphon) (Bangkok: Ammarin Printing and Publishing, 2002.)
of Chinese artwork, such as guardian statues, gateways and gardens with pavilions. These Chinese elements blend with the traditional Thai-style square-based pagodas, Buddha statues, pavilions with stone inscriptions and miniature gardens. The corridors, walls and gateways clearly separate the zones in the sacred precinct according to their different functions. The western zone with the Tripitaka library and learning hall is for educational purposes, and thus should have a calm and serene atmosphere. This area is separated from the eastern zone that contains eight shrines for busier worshipping activities. The corridors embracing the ordination hall also create a spatial hierarchy by raising up and separating the area of holy space. A similar spatial hierarchy is produced with the raised corridor that embraces the Four-Reigns Pagodas. In terms of the public facilities, Wat Pho has exceptionally clean street furniture, neat public restrooms and pavement. Most of the public signs are in both Thai and English displaying the fees for different services, donation boxes, guide plans and directions to major historic structures.

**Activities in the Wat Precinct**

Wat Pho holds five major events\(^59\). The first and most important is the royal *kathin* ceremony, when the king would traditionally make his donation of necessities to the monastic order of Wat Pho, which is the closest monastic complex to the Grand Palace\(^60\). It takes place during the week at the end of the lent period (the end of October), and traditionally it was an event that attracted many pilgrims and donors. The second event is the most popular event for local Thais—the New Year’s holiday (April 13-15). Wat Pho organizes the traditional chanting, merit-making and entertainment activities for this festival, which generates significant revenue for the monastic complex. Other major events are the four major Buddhist holidays, for which Wat Pho organizes meditation retreats with circumambulation around the ordination hall and overnight “camping” along
the corridor. The meditation retreat and participating in reciting the Lord Buddha’s canon is considered an act of merit-making for local pilgrims. Wat Pho also occasionally organizes events for national holidays such as Children Day, Thai New Year and the King’s Birthday with the cooperation with some government agencies.

Other minor events were the Chinese New Year and Chengmeng Day\textsuperscript{61} when Chinese from Tha Tien Community and other areas come to pay homage to their ancestor’s ashes installed at the base of several hundred Lord Buddha statues along the corridor and minor shrines. In terms of everyday life events, people who have social connections with residence monks also come and ask monks to perform blessing rituals for their important events, ranging from birthdays to funeral ceremonies. These rituals can be performed at one of the pavilions along the wall. Other people who may not have any connection to residence monks can come to worship the main Buddha statue at the ordination hall or other shrines.

\textsuperscript{61} This event is a Chinese ritual of worshipping spirit of their ancestors.
In terms of the routine activities of monastic and local communities, the residential monks are obligated to carry out the evening chanting, ordination rituals, punishment for vinaya violations, and full moon and half moon patimok recitation of Lord Buddha’s teachings in the holy space of the ordination hall. The ordination hall must be completely set apart from other public activities for these events. Monks also teach Buddhist principles to children in Sunday school in one of the ordination hall’s corridor areas. The two pavilions along the wall of the sacred precinct on the west side were used for a primary school under the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority. The space between the wall and the learning hall was sheltered and was used as a canteen. Most of the students were the children of porters and street venders in the area of Tha Tien. In the morning they sang the Thai National Anthem and in the evening some students played basketball in the open space in front of Tripitaka library.

The pavilions along the east wall were rented to the Wat Pho Massage School to operate Thai traditional massage training and services. The school became popular and has received attention from both Thais and foreigners. The space in front of these two pavilions is the waiting area for massage customers. Tourists normally come to Wat Pho in the late-morning and the activities of tourists focus on the major structures, mainly the ordination hall and the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha, while many tourists also wander through the pavilions and corridor around the Four Reigns Pagodas.

**Socio-political Conditions**

**Relationship with State Agencies**

Wat Pho has relied heavily on the Department of Fine Arts (DFA) for funding its restoration projects, and most of these projects were carried out by preservationists, architects and engineers of this department. However, Wat Pho has had many conflicts with this department. Wat Pho has also occasionally cooperated with the Tourist Authority of Thailand (TAT) for major festivities that promote cultural heritage and seek
to stimulate tourist activities. TAT also funded Wat Pho for some restoration projects. Some additional structures were constructed within the historic precinct to accommodate tourist activities, and many of these new structures created conflicts with the DFA since they were perceived as having adverse visual effects. Wat Pho did not have close contact with the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA) which supervises the revenue of monastic donated land since Wat Pho has only a small parcel of real estate properties and the rent revenue is very minimal.

**Relationship with the Supporting Community**

Based on my interviews with local supporters, most of the residents of the local community around Tha Tien Market were Thai with Chinese background. They had supported Wat Pho for two generations and admired the current lord abbot of Wat Pho, but they also complained that the monastery’s administrative monks were neglecting this unique historical relationship since Wat Pho could gain more revenue from tourists. They criticized the current administrative monks of Wat Pho for forgetting that the purpose of the monastery was to help poor people not to serve rich foreigners. The busy activities of tourists also disturbed them because they felt that the space of the *wat* should be tranquil and peaceful, not constantly noisy and busy. Most of them regarded the Reclining Buddha as one of the most sacred icons in Thailand. Another group of supporters was a Chinese business group. The members of the Tangtrongchit family have supported Wat Pho for a long time and they earned revenue from their business of herbal medicine and from the massage school. Senior members of this family have also been involved with Wat Pho’s major renovation projects for more than three decades. Today, Wat Pho receives major financial support from the liquor tycoon who owns the biggest rice whisky company, beer industry and luxury hotel group in Thailand. He was a temple boy of Wat
Pho, served the current abbot, and lived in the Wat Pho monastery compound when he first arrived in Bangkok62.

**Current Policies, Historic Preservation and Urban Planning Programs**

Wat Pho must comply with regulations outlined in the Religious Law for the management of monastic donated land and Historic Preservation Law for the maintenance of its historic structures in the *wat* compound. The Department of Fine Arts requires Wat Pho to send notice to them for permission to undertake any construction within the *wat* boundary. There are two current historic preservation and urban planning programs involving Wat Pho and its vicinity. The first one is the Master Plan for Historic Preservation and Development of Rattanakosin City Historic District (see Figure 2.3 and 2.4). This plan was produced by Synchon Group Company under the supervision of the Office of Environmental Planning and Policies, Ministry of Science and Environment and Committee for the Historic Preservation and Development Planning of Rattanakosin City. The plan became the cabinet resolution that all agencies must obey. However, the resolution did not indicate any punishment if state agencies did not follow this plan. Another plan was produced by Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut Institute of Technology Ladkrabang under the supervision of the Office of City Planning, Bangkok Metropolitan Authority. This is the Specific Plan for the Historic District of Tha Tien and Pakkhlongtalad, which is Wat Pho’s vicinity.

The Master Plan aimed to remove the shop-houses south of Tha Tien Market for opening the grand panoramic view of Wat Pho from the Chao Phraya River. If implemented, this plan would destroy the communities which support Wat Pho, whose residents offer daily alms to the monks and participate in monastery’s activities. The plan

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took a very top-down approach, and failed to gather data about the monastic community, the local community, or the legal status of Wat Pho. The Special District Plan had the goal of correcting the Master Plan by integrating the local community of Tha Tien, but it also failed to recognize the relationship between the local community and Wat Pho. It proposed the solution for solving the parking and drop-off area for tourists. In terms of the problem of visual chaos, this plan tried to reduce the total demolition of the community by introducing a program to redesign the façade of modern shop-houses and open space at the waterfront edge (see Figure 2.5 and 2.7). Both plans tried to solve the problem at a superficial level of the physical condition but ultimately lacked historical knowledge or knowledge about the social conditions of Buddhist religious place.

**Recent Conflicts/Problems**

The major conflicts and problems of Wat Pho can be separated into five categories. First is the traffic problem. Wat Pho has some traffic congestion along the Chetuphon Alley and Thaiwang Road due to the activities of tourist vehicles. Second is the visual problem created by three and four-storey shop-houses. The government buildings in the area of the Ministry of Commerce and the Palace District Police Station also create similar visual chaos.

Third is the conflict with the Department of Fine Arts (DFA) over the restoration projects of historic structures. The DFA has complained that Wat Pho has repeatedly violated the Preservation Law, but Wat Pho has responded that the DFA failed to reply to their letters requesting permission to undertake various projects. The DFA insisted that the Historic Preservation Law would use police power to protect historic structures, but the DFA staff never took steps to report or arrest the venerable lord abbot or senior patriarchs who violated the Preservation Law numerous times. Wat Pho’s latest conflict, which got nationwide coverage in major newspapers, was the reconstruction of two pavilions near the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha.
Figure 2.3. Plan of Tha Tien Market area according to the Master Plan.


Figure 2.5. Plan of Tha Tien and the Department of Domestic Trade according to Specific Plan for Historic Area of Tha Tien and Pakkhlongtalad.

From Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Raining Khan Sombun Khrongkran Wangphang Chaphohang nai Phuenthi Samkhan thang Prawattisat Yan Chunchon Thaient lae Pakkhlongtalad (Final Report: Specific Plan for Historic Area of Tha Tien-Pak Klong Talad Community Project) (Bangkok: Rungnapha Kanphim, 1999)

Figure 2.4. Perspective Rendering of Wat Pho according to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation and Development of Rattanakosin City.

Figure 2.6. Perspective of pedestrian walk in Tha Tien Community.

Figure 2.7. Perspective of waterfront along Tha Tien Community.
The fourth area of conflict is over the management and use of monastic space by local Thais vs. tourist related activities. Wat Pho has been criticized by local communities for losing touch with its original meaning and purpose. The fifth area of conflict relates to the state’s preservation and planning policies’ general lack of understanding about Wat Pho as a Buddhist religious place and its relationship to the lay community and local supporters.

**Wat Sraket**

Wat Sraket is a large-scale royal monastic complex that possesses the Golden Mountain Pagoda, which used to be the tallest structure in Bangkok in the pre-modern period. Wat Sraket is located at the eastern edge of the old city wall and the Mahanak Canal. It is classified as a second class royal wat with the status of royal great honor. Like Wat Pho, its genesis is unknown. However, when Bangkok was founded, it already existed and was called Wat Srakae. When King Rama I entered Thonburi to subdue the riot, he stopped overnight at this wat, and later when he became the king, he renamed it to Wat Sraket. Its official name is Wat Sraket Ratchaworamahawihan.

**Location/Surrounding Environment**

Wat Sraket is located in the Outer Historic District at the eastern junction of the City Moat and Mahanak Canal. Chakkraphatdiphong Road and one row of shop-houses (48 units facing directly to the wat) are located at the east side of Wat Sraket. Another row of shop-houses (70 units) and Boriphat Road are at the west side. Next to these shop-houses are the City Moat and an area of shanty houses behind the old city wall. There are a fortress and another two royal wats beyond the old city wall; Wat Ratchanatda and Wat Thepthida (see Plate 2.25). Another 200 units of shop-houses and Borommabaphot Road are on the north side. Further north from these shop-houses is Mahanak Canal to the east. The south side of Wat Sraket is an area that has clusters of shop-houses along the
Plate 2.25. View of the Golden Mountain of Wat Sraket from Ratchadamnoen Blvd.

Map 2.4. Wat Sraket and its vicinity showing traffic pattern and transportation mode.
edge of Bamrung Mueang Road and Chakkraphatdiphong Road, enclosing several
shanty wood houses inside. The area next to these shop-houses on the other side of
Bamrung Mueang Road is the Department of Capital Water Supply, the City Vocational
School and shop-houses. The total area of Wat Sraket’s precinct is approximately 17.70
acres\textsuperscript{63} but the monastic donated land of Wat Sraket, which is the land around Wat
Sraket’s precinct, is almost the same size as its monastic area. In comparison to Wat Pho,
Wat Sraket has less of a monastic precinct area but much more monastic donated land
around its edge.

Visibility

The area at the north side of Wat Sraket is a group of 200 units of shop-houses.
When they were originally constructed, these shop-houses were two-storey high with a
small gable on top of a flat slab roof top, but most of them have expanded to be 3-storey
high (see Plate 2.26). The buildings are in a modern style. Some of them along Mahanak
Canal have expanded and are now in 4-storey high. The Fire Department buildings at the
northwest corner of the Golden Mount Pagoda were constructed to be 4-storey high (see
Plate 2.27). The shop-houses along the canal also expanded to cover the road along the
canal and some even overhang the canal (see Plate 2.28). In strictly aesthetic terms, the
appearance of these shop-houses can be considered visually chaotic. The east side of Wat
Sraket is a wide street with two-storey shop-houses. The west side is also a row of two-
storey shop-houses but most of them have some additional floors with various roof styles.
Further west from the linear row of shop-houses is the city moat marking the Inner
Historic District and the old city wall with the Mahakan fortress. Next to the wall are
another two important royal \textit{wats}; Wat Ratchanatda and Wat Thepthida (see Plate 2.29, 2.30 and 2.31). The proximity of these two \textit{wats} to Wat Sraket creates a unique

\textsuperscript{63} It is 44.77 rai in Thai measurement unit and the conversion is 1 rai =1600 m\textsuperscript{2}, 1 wa = 2 m, 1 acre = 4,046.8564224 m\textsuperscript{2} (SI unit).
Plate 2.26. View from the Golden Mountain to the north side of Wat Sraket showing shop-houses with the expansion on roof-top.

Plate 2.27. View on Boriphat Road toward the north showing the 4-storey Fire Department building next to the Golden Mountain.

Plate 2.28. View from Phanfa Bridge to the south showing shop-houses with expansion over Mahanak Canal.

From Synchron Co. Ltd, Phaen Pratibatkan Amurak lae Phatthana Krung Rattanakosin Boriwan Pom Mahakan naew kamphaeng Mueang lae Boriwan Doi Rob
Plate 2.29. View from the Golden Mountain to the west side of Wat Sraket showing shop-houses along Boriphat Road with the uncoordinated expanding structures and Wat Thephida and Wat Ratchanatda in the background.

Plate 2.30. View along Boriphat Road showing the uncoordinated expansion of shop-houses and the 4-storey building of Fire Department.

Plate 2.31. View along Boriphat Road with busy activities of trucks carrying wood.

Plate 2.32. View from the Golden Mountain to the south side showing shop-houses along Bamrung Mueang Road, the City Vocational School and City Water Supply Authority.
atmosphere characterized by an aesthetic harmony of Thai architecture. The south side of Wat Sraket is messier with smaller shanty houses along the edge of the monastery compound. Although these small wood houses are concealed by two-storey shop-houses from the street view along Bamrung Mueang Road, they are still a visual problem for Wat Sraket if visitors enter the monastery from the two southern entrances (see Plate 2.32). There are two four-storey public school buildings on the eastern end of the monastery compound facing Chakkraphatdiphong Road. These two buildings are also constructed in the government’s modern standard design with hip roofs which are incompatible with the historic structure of Wat Sraket. They also block the view of Wat Sraket’s ordination hall from Chakkraphatdiphong Road.

Transportation

Wat Sraket and its vicinity seem to have fewer traffic problems from tourist activities than Wat Pho partly because Wat Sraket attracts fewer tourists. The Golden Mount Pagoda is not an elaborate or refined architectural edifice, but its height attracts some tourists who want to have a bird’s-eye-view of the historic district and Chinatown. The congested traffic occurs primarily on two major streets. First, Bamrung Mueang Road is a major route to a new central business area in the east. It is congested only in the morning and evening. Second, Chakkraphatdiphong Road is the street connecting Bamrung Mueang Road to Ratchadamnoen Nok Boulevard, which becomes congested only in the evening.

The main street that cuts between Wat Sraket’s sacred precinct and monastery compound is congested only for the important events because it is somewhat narrow. However, in these instances, the traffic congestion can be solved by opening the two gateways around the Golden Mountain, allowing traffic to flow easily to the wider, circular road around the Golden Mountain and exit to either Boriphat or Borommabanphot Roads. The only designated parking is at the open space behind the
Map 2.5. Land Use pattern in the vicinity of Wat Sraket.

Map 2.6. Landownership around Wat Sraket.
shrine which is in front of the funeral hall and incinerator. If the parking is full for some special events, pilgrims can park around the Golden Mount and shrine. Moreover, these cars can flow out to park at Boriphat and Borommabanphot Roads nearby. However, these two small roads can be jammed easily due to the major business of shops here selling and processing construction wood (see Map 2.4).

**Land Use and Land Ownership**

The land use pattern of Wat Sraket is very simple. There are only three types of buildings nearby. First is the mixed commercial-residential use of shop-houses and the second is the governmental use of the City Water Supply Authority at the corner of Bamrung Mueang Road. The third is the City Vocational School which occupies the site of the former Wat Sraket funerary service. The school is located behind the shop-houses on Bamrung Mueang Road. The land ownership of the adjacent area around Wat Sraket is even simpler. The areas of all four sides belong to Wat Sraket except for the City Water Supply Authority (see Map 2.5 and 2.6).

**Major Activities around Wat Precinct**

The major activities of the shop-houses around Wat Sraket are also mixed commercial-residential activities. The shop-houses along Boriphat Road at the west side and shop-houses at the north are famous for supplying wood for architectural elements and construction parts. Some shops still have small saw mills inside. However, this business has started to move out of the area to the northern edge of Bangkok called the Bang Pho area. The shop-houses along Chakkraphatdiphong Road have various businesses from selling party balloons to grocery and laboratory equipment. Many of them are vacant. The shop-houses along Bamrung Mueang Road sell primarily heavy machines and parts. On the other side of Bamrung Mueang Road there are restaurants, bakeries and barber shops that are the sites for apprenticeship for the City Vocational
School, as well as the Department of Religious Affairs’ printing house and one pharmacy. The areas of shanty wood houses behind the shop-houses along Bamrung Mueang Road are mostly for residential use.

**Physical characteristics**

**Major Architecture**

Wat Sraket’s major structures of aesthetic significance are the precinct of the ordination hall, the shrine and the Golden Mountain Pagoda which are all in a traditional Thai style (see Plate 2.33, 2.35. and 2.37). The wood carving embellishing the small Tripitaka library is another unique feature (2.36). Besides the grand scale of the Golden Mountain Pagoda, Wat Sraket’s architecture represents a typical Thai style with a medium level of elaboration. The monastery compound is also several clusters of typical Thai houses (see Plate 2.38). The structure is not a major tourist attraction. The Golden Mount Pagoda is also not an elaborate structure and in fact is an artificial mountain comprised of bricks, boulders and mortar. The base of the mountain is the place for local Thais to install their ancestral gravesites, which are not organized in any order and can easily become messy without regular maintenance.

**Landscape Elements**

The landscape elements of street furniture, trees, pavements and public facilities in Wat Sraket are in a simple design, fairly clean and durable, but not as neat, attractive or as elaborate as those of Wat Pho. The ground pavement is mostly a simple concrete surface with concrete curbs except for the inner courtyard inside the corridor of the ordination hall which was paved with expensive ceramic tiles (see Plate 2.39, 2.40 and 2.41). The signs in Wat Sraket are mostly Buddhist proverbs written in Thai reminding visitors about doing good deeds and making merit (see Plate 2.43). The signs for directions to major structures are in Thai with English translations (see Plate 2.42 and
Plate 2.33. View from the ordination hall to the Golden Mountain Pagoda.

Plate 2.34. View inside the ordination hall showing Triphum cosmology mural painting.

Plate 2.35. View from the Golden Mountain toward the the shrine.

Plate 2.36. Tripitaka Library.

Plate 2.37. View of the ordination hall.

Plate 2.38. Panoramic View of the monastery compound.

In contrast to Wat Pho, there are signs prohibiting the charging of any fees for parking service and the soliciting of tourists (see Plate 2.42).

**Spatial Arrangement**

The two major parts of the sacred precinct and monastery compound are separated by a narrow wall and a small inner road. However, the ordination hall and shrine are on the same platform and are embraced by the rectangular wall. The Golden Mountain Pagoda is outside this rectangular wall, and is embraced by a circular cast-iron fence and gates. This circular wall and the wall at the north side were constructed in the early-1970s to separate the area of the new development of shop-houses from the sacred precinct. The space of the monastic compound is organized into two major sections, the outer group on the east side and the inner group on the west side. The two sections are separated by the inner road starting at the corner of the wall embracing the shrine and the ordination hall. The inner group is comprised of ten clusters of Thai houses with grid pattern roads connecting them. The outer group is organized in linear system with a minor road separating residential buildings into two major groups. The edge of the monastery compound at the south side is not clear since the monastery buildings are small scale, scattered, and located very close to the simple concrete wall that separates them from shanty houses outside.

**Activities in the Wat Precinct**

The major activities in Wat Sraket are on a smaller scale and attract more locals than Wat Pho. Similar to Wat Pho, the most important event is the royal *kathin* ceremony when the king or his close royal members delivers necessities to the monastic order of Wat Sraket. Other minor events were the four Buddhist holidays, already described above. For these events, Wat Sraket also organized chanting rituals and circumambulation around the ordination hall in the evenings. Beside these major
Plate 2.39. Landscape around the parking area.

Plate 2.40. Parking lot with concrete pavement.

Plate 2.41. Inner courtyard with ceramic tiles.

Plate 2.42. Sign at the parking lot prohibiting soliciting parking fee.

Plate 2.44. Sign displaying history of Wat Sraket’s Golden Mountain Pagoda.

Plate 2.43. Sign displaying Buddhist proverb.
Buddhist ceremonies, Wat Sraket had its own unique form of alms offering for local pilgrims, where the monks walk down from the top of the mountain pagoda to receive necessities from pilgrims at the base of the mount (see Plate 2.45). This event is held during the week after the end of lent period (the End of October) and historically this was the event that attracted most pilgrims and donors. Another grand event was Wat Sraket’s Golden Mountain Celebration Festival which was a big event for local Thais. Wat Sraket organized this event autonomously without any support from TAT or other government authorities (see Plate 2.46). In contrast to Wat Pho, Wat Sraket does not organize special festivals to support official holidays or events such as Children Day, the Thai New Year and the King’s Birthday.

For the King’s Birthday, Wat Sraket just allows visitors to go up to the top of Golden Mountain until midnight to see the lights around Bangkok’s historic area. For the Thai New Year holiday, Thai pilgrims just come to pay homage at their ancestor’s graves around the base of Golden Mountain and some stay and picnic with their relatives or offer alms for lunch time (see Plate 2.47). In terms of everyday life events, Wat Sraket lay people who have connections with resident monks also come and ask monks to perform blessing rituals for special events, such as birthdays and funeral ceremonies. Other people who may not have any connection to resident monks can come to worship the main Buddha statue at the ordination hall (see Plate 2.48).

In terms of routine activities of monastic and local communities, the residential monks are obligated to conduct similar activities as the monks at Wat Pho, such as chanting and reciting the Lord Buddha’s teachings. From my observations, Wat Sraket had more ordination rituals for new monks than Wat Pho and the banquet was organized along the corridor of the ordination hall. Wat Sraket also had a funeral hall to serve people from all walks of life while Wat Pho was prohibited from conducting funeral services. If there was a funeral ceremony at Wat Sraket, its parking became packed and busy but cars could flow easily to park around the Golden Mountain. Wat Sraket also has
a public middle and high school in the monastery compound. The school has a small playground for students to play around in the evening. Therefore, the sacred precinct was not disturbed by sports activities of the school. However, occasionally, there were young men from the vicinity playing soccer at the base of the Golden Mountain.

The tourist activities in Wat Sraket were very minor since the main purpose of tourist visits was to experience the bird’s-eye-view of Bangkok’s historic district and Chinatown. Because this activity of an ascending long walk to the top of the mountain requires that one be in relatively good physical condition, Wat Sraket was not a popular destination for the elderly tourists who mostly came in large groups with large coach buses. Most of the tourists at Wat Sraket were young backpackers and came either by foot or by taxi. The parking in front of the funeral hall became the site where taxi drivers and food vendors relaxed while waiting for tourists to come down (see Plate 2.49-2.50).

Socio-political Conditions

Relationship with Supporting Community

Unlike Wat Pho, Wat Sraket has a relatively good relationship with the local community around the wat precinct because Wat Sraket has long served local poor people with funeral services for low fee. Moreover, Wat Sraket was their landlord and collected rent at a very low rate compared to the real land value. Monks of Wat Sraket did not handle the rent directly and let the Department of Religious Assets collect the rent. The revenue from the rent was not high but Wat Sraket had enough revenue from donations of rich patrons. These wealthy supporters are diverse, including the Chinese from machinery businesses in Worrachak District near Wat Sraket, the tycoon who owns Bangkok Airlines and Bangkok Hospital, and owners of local wood construction businesses. The family member of this airline tycoon, who monopolized the air route from Bangkok to Siem Riep, served Wat Sraket as the leader of the current renovation projects in the sacred precinct and had many pilgrims joining him voluntarily. All of
Plate 2.45. Monks walking down from the Golden Mountain in alms offering ceremony.

Plate 2.46. The Golden Mountain Celebration Festival.

Plate 2.47. Local Thai families picnicking at the Golden Mountain.

Plate 2.48. Atmosphere at the inner courtyard during the ordination process.

Plate 2.49. Parking lot in front of the funeral hall

Plate 2.50. Tourists visiting the Golden Mountain by tuk tuk taxi
these supporters admired the lord abbot who currently was the senior patriarch and acting Supreme Patriarch as the most venerable monk but they also complained that some of his fellows had affairs with women.

**Relationship with State Agencies**

Compared to Wat Pho, Wat Sraket had fewer conflicts with state agencies. The historic preservation projects were carried out by private donors that the abbot persuaded to help Wat Sraket. It is interesting to note that a close relative of one of these wealthy patrons argued that he could implement renovation projects that would preserve the quality of the monastery’s original workmanship, take a shorter time and use less financial resources than the company that the DFA commissioned. The senior landscape architect of the Department of Fine Arts told me that this person violated the Historic Preservation Law and that the DFA could arrest the violators. Despite these threats, the DFA never made any moves to arrest the violators, who included the retired engineer, his sister who was the wife of airline tycoon, and the abbot who was the acting Supreme Patriarch.

In terms of developing Wat Sraket as a tourist landmark, an administrative monk asked the Tourist Authority of Thailand to help Wat Sraket develop a strategy for attracting tourists, but did not get feedback. Thus, unlike Wat Pho, TAT has never been involved with Wat Sraket.

Wat Sraket did have a major conflict once over the construction of shop-houses at the north side of the complex. This development occurred in 1969 when the Committee for Exemplary Monastic Complex of Development under the Department of Religious Affairs supported Wat Sraket to develop the dilapidated area in the north of Wat Sraket to be clean and neat shop-houses aimed at generating rent revenue for Wat Sraket. The Association of Siamese Architects (ASA) protested on the grounds that the two hundred new units of shop-houses would create significant negative visual effects on the Golden
Mountain which ASA claimed as the nation’s heritage. Even though the protest received national coverage, it could not stop the construction of these shop-houses. Today, these shop-houses are not neat and clean as originally envisioned, but rather are messy buildings with additional floors contributing to the visual chaos.

**Current Policies, Historic Preservation and Urban Planning Program**

According to the Bangkok Municipal Regulation of 1999, the area of Wat Sraket is in an area that prohibits the construction of buildings higher than twenty meters. The adjacent area of Wat Sraket on the west side beyond the city moat is in Zone Number 6 under the Bangkok Municipal Regulation of 1987 that prohibits the construction of buildings higher than sixteen meters but the buildings around Wat Sraket were built long before this regulation.

Similar to Wat Pho, Wat Sraket must comply with the Religious Law and Preservation Law and it is also a part of the Master Plan for Historic Preservation and Development of Rattanakosin City. Another plan that included Wat Sraket was the Action Plan for Preservation and Development of the Historic Site of Mahakan Fortress. This plan was also produced by Synchron Group under the supervision of the Committee for Historic Preservation of Rattanakosin City and Office of Environmental Planning and Policies. Both plans proposed to remove all communities around the area of Mahakan Fortress and the old city wall which included the vicinity of three royal *wats*: Wat Thepthida, Wat Ratchanatda and Wat Sraket. For Wat Sraket, the plan proposed to demolish the shop-houses at the north and west side facing Mahanak Canal and the City Moat to open the view to Wat Sraket from Ratchadamnoen Khlang Boulevard but did not consider the dilapidated area at the south of Wat Sraket on Bamrung Mueang Road.
Figure 2.8. Proposed Plan for Development and Historic Preservation of Pom Mahakan and City Wall Area.

Figure 2.9. Perspective from Mahanak Canal.

Figure 2.10. Perspective from Phanfa Bridge.

Figure 2.11. Bird’s-Eye-View of Ratchadamnoen Khlang Boulevard at Phanfa Bridge area.

Figure 2.12. Bird’s-Eye-View from Damrongrak Road.

Recent Conflicts/Problems

Wat Sraket has rarely had conflicts or problems with key state agencies. Both DFA and Wat Sraket avoided confronting each other over renovations of historic structures. Wat Sraket did not ask for support from the DFA but rather persuaded rich patrons to conduct preservation privately according to faith-based action. Wat Sraket was also ignored by the Tourist Authority of Thailand for development as a major tourist destination. The sacred precinct of Wat Sraket clearly was not under contestation. Rather, the conflict occurred in the waterfront area at the north over the issue of the visual effects of the shop-houses on the Golden Mountain Pagoda in 1969. One of the key members of Committee for the Historic Preservation and Development Planning of Rattanakosin City that supervised the plan was the leader of the protesters in 1969. Wat Sraket’s sacred precinct was relatively calm, tranquil and serene. Although Wat Sraket did not have any conflicts over the use of its sacred precinct, it did not maintain the landscape elements around the Golden Mountain well and other public facilities were somewhat run down. The assistant abbot complained that the wat could not construct these public service facilities since the local users were poor and did not realize that they needed to share responsibility to help maintain the appearance of these facilities. He pointed out that Wat Pho could provide a very neat landscape and public facilities because the users were more highly educated people such as foreign tourists and Thai elites who were different from Wat Sraket’s daily users.

Wat Kor

In contrast to Wat Pho and Wat Sraket, Wat Kor is a small royal monastic complex in the Chinatown area. The most distinctive and controversial attribute of Wat Kor is a very large scale, three-storey structure which serves as an ordination hall, shrine and learning hall. It was classified as a third class royal wat with a status of honor. Although its genesis is also unknown, its name first appeared in a royal chronicle which
indicated that Prince Chui, a nephew of King Rama I of half-Chinese origin, renovated it to honor the king. Its original name was Wat Korkaewlangkaram, connoting links to the Theravada Buddhist lineage of Sri Lanka and reflecting its original topography of being surrounded by a canal network. There is no longer any canal in the vicinity of this monastic complex. During the reign of King Mongkut, he renamed it to Wat Samphanthawong (Monastic Complex of Family Relations) due to the fact that its first patron, Prince Chui, was his beloved uncle. Today, its official name is Wat Samphanthawongsaram Worrawihan.

**Location/Surrounding Environment**

Wat Kor is located at the southern area of Chinatown called Songwat. Today, the *wat* precinct faces Songsawat Road at the southeast side. This road connects Songwat and Sampheng Roads at the south to Chinatown’s main street, Yaowarat Road at the north of Wat Kor. There are four clusters of shop-houses along Songsawat Road opposite to Wat Kor. Next to these clusters of shop-houses, there is another royal *wat*, Wat Prathumkhongkha, to the southeast of Wat Kor. The four-storey building of the BMA public primary school is at the west side of Wat Kor. Next to this building to the west is a row of old shop-houses facing Sampheng Road, a narrow, historic, commercial street of Chinatown. The three rows of modern four-storey shop-houses are at the south side of the *wat* precinct. The north side of Wat Kor’s precinct is a group of shanty houses along the wall of Wat Kor. Next to these small houses is a small alley called Trok Kaosan. Wat Kor’s precinct is approximately 3.075 acres but, similar to Wat Sraket, its monastic donated land is almost the same size as its *wat* monastic precinct and is located at the south and southeast side of Wat Kor.

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64 His full name was Prince Krommaluang Phithakmontri. He was also a son of King Rama I’s elder sister and Chinese merchant. His sister was King Mongkut’s mother.
Plate 2.51. Wat Kor.

Map 2.7. Wat Kor and its vicinity showing traffic pattern and transportation mode.
Visibility

The view of Wat Kor from the Chao Phraya River is still partly visible since several shop-houses along Songwat and a part of Sampheng Roads are still the old style two-storey buildings with elaborated façade details. The shanty houses around the north and northwest of Wat Kor are in a small scale as well. However, most of the modern shop-houses at the south and southeast sides of Wat Kor are 3 or 4-storey high, which is tall enough to block the view to Wat Kor from the Chao Phraya River and from the junction of Sampheng and Songsawat Road at Wat Prathamkhongkha (see Map 2.8 and 2.9). Wat Kor’s BMA 4-storey primary school building is at the west side and also blocks the view of Wat Kor from the west and northwest direction. From the northeast approach of Yaowarat and Phatsai Roads, several buildings along Songsawat, Phatsai and Yaowarat Roads toward Wat Kor are between 3 to 5 stories (see Plate 2.55, 2.56 and 2.57). Moreover, the buildings at the corner of Phatsai Road and Yaowarat Road are about 7-storeys high (see Plate 2.52, 2.53 and 2.54). All of them are in a modern style. Although, the multi-purpose ordination hall of Wat Kor is very high with its three-storey structure and elaborate stacked rooftop with Thai style spires, these tall commercial buildings easily overshadow Wat Kor, blocking the view from Yaowarat and Phatsai Roads. Moreover, Wat Kor’s residential building at the corner of Songsawat Road is also a 6-storey structure.

Transportation

The street network in Chinatown is the most congested traffic in Bangkok but mostly along the main network of Yaowarat and Charoenkrung Roads. Wat Kor is in the area of minor street networks of Songwat, Sampheng and Phatsai Roads, which connect to the main street network of Yaowarat by Songsawat Road. Songsawat became the
Map 2.8. Building height in the area of Samphantawong District.

From Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Raingan Khan Sombun Krongkan Wangpheng Chaphohang nai Phuenthith Samkhan thang Prawattisat Yan Chumchon khet Samphantawong (Final Report: Specific Plan for Historic Area of Samphantawong Community).

Map 2.9. Tall structures within Wat Kor’s land
Plate 2.52. Several tall structures including 7-storey hotel at the north of Songsawat Rd.

Plate 2.53. Wat Kor’s 6-storey residential building.

Plate 2.54. Shop-houses next to Wat Kor’s 6-storey building.

Plate 2.55. BMA’s 4-storey primary school building.

Plate 2.56. Shop-houses opposite to Wat Kor.

Plate 2.57. 5-storey shop-houses at Songwat Port.
major connection to the main network, which can be congested during the rush-hour time. During the day, Sampheng Road which is a narrow path becomes wide enough for cars only around Wat Kor’s area. The area of Songwat Road historically used to be the busy road since this was an area of ports and warehouses where agricultural products were unloaded from boats carrying them from the upper Chao Phraya River Valley. Today, the area is still the warehouse and wholesale business for rice and flour with many trucks loading produce.

**Land Use and Land Ownership**

The land use around Wat Kor is a combination of commercial or warehouse use on the first floor and residential use on the upper floor. At the southwest side, the shop-houses along Songwat Road are mostly warehouses with residential use on the upper floors. Closer to Wat Kor, the shop-houses along Sampheng Road are retail commercial, warehouses and offices on the first floor and residential on the upper floor. The small shanty houses around the northern edge of Wat Kor are residential buildings. The shop-houses along Phatsai Road are also warehouses except for the shop-houses at the junction between Phatsai and Songsawat Roads which are for retail commercial (open-air restaurants, grocery and etc.) uses. The shop-houses opposite to Wat Kor on Songsawat Roads are also mixed-use on the first floor and residential on the upper floor (see Map 2.10).

Wat Kor owns most of the land around its edge. The five clusters of shop-houses opposite to Wat Kor on Songsawat Road belong to Wat Kor. In the pre-modern period, before it was divided by Songsawat Road, this area was part of the original monastic compound. At the southern edge of the complex is also another three rows of shop-houses that belong to Wat Kor. The group of shop-houses at the northeast corner of Wat Kor and the intersection with Phatsai and Songsawat Roads also belongs to Wat Kor. Another small row of shop-houses along Kaosan alley also belong to Wat Kor. The area
Map 2.10. First Floor Land Use.

Map 2.11. Upper Floor Land Use.

From Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Raingan Khan Sombun Krongkan Wangphang Chaphohang nae Phuenthi Samkhan thang Pravattisat Yan Chumchon khet Samphantawong (Final Report: Specific Plan for Historic Area of Samphantawong Community).

Map 2.12. Landownership in the vicinity of Wat Kor.
to the north of Wat Kor belongs to small private owners and the shop-houses along Sampheng Road belong to the Crown Property Bureau (see Map 2.11).

**Major Activities around the Wat Precinct**

The major commercial activities in the area of Wat Kor range from wholesale rice and grain distribution to small retail operations selling eggs, wood baskets, sacks, Afghani jewelry, Chinese seafood dishes, groceries, ceramics, toys and coffee. The transportation activities of trucks were concentrated along Songwat Road at the southwest area where the warehouses and Songwat port are located. These trucks used Songsawat Road to enter the other areas. Wat Kor also allowed the BMA primary school to operate at the northwest of corner of Wat Kor’s precinct, and in the morning and the evening, schoolchildren could be heard as they played around in the area of the northeast corner.

**Physical Characteristics**

**Major Architecture**

The major structure of Wat Kor is its unique three-storey ordination hall complex built in a Thai style with a Thai spire and stacked rooftop. This momentous building was constructed on the site of its historic sacred precinct that was demolished in 1969, creating nation-wide controversy among state agencies, media and preservationists. The building is in a cross plan which reflects the pattern of royal *wats* of King Chulalongkorn. It was also allowed to employ the symbol of the present king at the front gable panel. Other structures are the group of three and four-storey residential buildings which are in a unique simple Thai style. All of these structures are not older than 50 years.
Plate 2.58. The Khmer style gateway at Songsawat Road.

Plate 2.59. The main entrance approaching Wat Kor’s 3-storey ordination hall.

Plate 2.60. The dilapidated residential building near parking lot.

Plate 2.61. The neat pavement near residence of senior patriarch and meeting pavilion.

Plate 2.62. The small pavilion beside the ordination hall.

Plate 2.63. The nimit balls and bai sema of the old ordination hall along the wall of sacred precinct.
Landscape Elements

The pavement and landscape at the northeast side of Wat Kor facing Songsawat Road are in good condition. The gateways to Wat Kor from Songsawat Road are built in a Khmer style arch and the wall offers a very clear boundary. However, the area of the residential quarter further inside the wat has become unorganized because of the various styles of the structures. The public facilities are messy and incongruous. There are some good pavement areas around the buildings of the senior patriarch and the abbot, but the rest is a simple concrete pavement. There are small pavilions on the right and left side of the ordination hall complex with the fortune teller boxes. Along the wall of the sacred precinct at the entrance, there were eight holy markers and their nimit balls. Along the wall in the backyard of the sacred precinct there are lines of rectangular holes around one foot wide with glass windows for installing containers for ancestral ashes so people can come to worship their ancestor spirits (see Plate 2.58-2.63).

Spatial Arrangement

There is a rectangular wall with a cast iron fence to separate the ordination hall complex building from the rest of the wat precinct as a sacred precinct but there is no clear demarcation for the monastery compound. The major residential buildings are located at the northeast side of the temple. There are several residential buildings along the wall facing Songsawat Road, but there are also other two-storey buildings at the south side and residential structures with facilities at the northwest corner near the primary school. There are four entrances to Wat Kor from Songsawat Road. The southwest area is a parking lot. The vehicle route is so confusing and can be disturbing for the sacred

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65 The nimit is a stone in form of a ball buried underground to mark the area of holy space. The marker above the ground is usually in form of lotus leaf plate or cubic. The detail of nimit is described in detail in the chapter four.
precinct since the vehicles are allowed to drive into and park in the sacred precinct. The meditation pavilion and living quarter of famous nuns is in an enclosed compound separated by a wall from the open space parking.

**Activities in the Wat Precinct**

Wat Kor also organized events following a similar schedule to Wat Pho and Wat Sraket. As with the previous wats, the royal kathin ceremony and four major Buddhist holidays are the most important Buddhist rituals at Wat Kor. Interestingly, the most important event at Wat Kor was the abbot’s birthday. This is very different from Wat Pho and Wat Sraket where the most important events besides the royal events and national holidays were local festivities such as the Thai New Year and Golden Mountain celebration. Wat Pho and Wat Sraket also held a birthday festival for their abbots, but these were on a far smaller scale than other local and national events. It is also interesting to note that the events of the abbot’s birthday and ancestor day at Wat Kor were not entirely public festivals. Rather, participants who came to Wat Kor for these events were usually relatives from his hometown, disciples in his ordination lineage, or had social connections with the abbot through his ecclesiastical position. There are two other major activities related to Wat Kor’s space. The area west of the ordination hall complex precinct was a large open space for parking rented to the C.P. Group Company. The temple boys under the senior monks collected the tickets and guarded the parking from morning to evening when C.P. staffs came and drove their cars away. The traffic flows in from the main entrance on Songsawat Road to the west side entrance at Sampheng Road at the west side of Wat Kor. The parking space was also used in the morning for the congregation of students of BMA Primary School to sing the national anthem (see Plate 2.64-2.68).
Plate 2.64. The fortune teller boxes.

Plate 2.65. The wall with ancestor shrines.

Plate 2.66. The parking behind the ordination hall and meditation pavilion.

Plate 2.67. The meeting pavilion beside the ordination hall.

Plate 2.68. The parking lot near BMA's primary school.
Socio-political Conditions

Relationship with the Supporting Community

Wat Kor has strong connections with local Chinese business groups who rented space on Wat Kor’s monastic donated land and in Chinatown. The administrative monks also maintained close contact with the Montrikul and Worrawan families, who are distant royal kin of the first patron of the monastery, Prince Chui. The owners of machinery, cargo and rice sack businesses were also the active local supporters of Wat Kor. Many supporters of Wat Kor were also former temple boys and students of Wat Kor’s evening school who became successful in business. Nevertheless, there were several tenants renting Wat Kor’s land who complained that monks of Wat Kor cared only about money and rich patrons. Although, they admired abbot as the pious and highly venerable monk, they said that his young fellow monks possessed luxurious items and exploited donations. They viewed the donations to Wat Kor as an obligation and feared that if they did not donate, Wat Kor might not renew their rent contracts.

The major supporter was the family of the C.P. Group, which was also its original Chia Tai company office on Wat Kor’s land. The C.P. Group started as a small trader from southern China and expanded into the animal food business, which is connected to the frozen chicken export business. C.P. was also the biggest business conglomerate in Thailand which had a tight relationship with China and became the first company to register with the Chinese Government when China opened to the free market. It was awarded several lucrative contracts for real estate development in Shanghai. This company started to heavily patronize Wat Kor from the late-1970s until the present time. It acted on behalf of the king to deliver royal kathin support to Wat Kor and to support the construction of a new pavilion honoring the current abbot who was the senior patriarch on the level of Somdet (one of the eight highest positions before Supreme Patriarch).
Relationship with State Agencies

Wat Kor currently does not have contact with either the Department of Fine Arts or the Department of Religious Affairs, but historically they had some struggles with both the DFA and DRA. In terms of the DFA, it violated the Preservation Law to demolish the old historic precinct in order to build the new ordination hall complex. In terms of the DRA, Wat Kor tried to pull all management of shop-houses on monastic donated land out of hands of the DRA. Wat Kor was criticized by several scholars at Mahamakut University, the Reform Buddhist University, as being the most commercialized wat enterprise in Thailand because of its high land value.

Current Policies, Historic Preservation and Urban Planning Program

The area of Wat Kor is under Bangkok’s Municipal Regulation of 1999 (Ministry Regulation 414) which prohibits the construction of buildings higher than sixteen meters within fifty meters of Wat Kor, but most of Wat Kor’s shop-houses were constructed a long time before this regulation. The vicinity beyond the fifty meter radius of Wat Kor which is still in the District of Samphanthawong can construct higher than sixteen but not higher than thirty seven meters. Another local law is the Bangkok Municipal regulation that controls the construction of Bangkok’s riverfront. This regulation determines that the area within three meters of the Chao Phraya River must have a permanent barrier and prohibits the construction of buildings taller than eight meters in the area between three and fifteen meters of the water’s edge. In addition, the area that is between fifteen meters and forty-five meters of water edge is prohibited from constructing any structure higher than sixteen meters.

Since it has already demolished all of its historic structures, Wat Kor does not need to concern itself with the Historic Preservation Law. Wat Kor only needs to follow the Religious Law regarding monks’ practices and the Department of Religious Affairs guidelines regarding the management of long-term rent contracts from the Division of
Religious Assets. The area of Chinatown and Wat Kor was designated as being part of the Eastern Extension District by the Committee for the Historic Preservation and Development Planning of Rattanakosin City. However, in the Master Plan for the Development of Urban Facilities of Rattanakosin City, there was no clear proposal for what would be done with the area Chinatown and Wat Kor. The plan only determined that the F.A.R. (Floor Area Ratio) was 6:1, and also stated that any three-storey (or nine meters high) buildings had to be set back from the historic site and the waterfront by at least three meters, or by six meters for taller buildings.

Currently, those involved in Wat Kor’s planning program include the Plan for Samphantawong Historic Area produced by the Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut Institute of Technology Ladkrabang. The plan was submitted to the Planning Department of the Bangkok Municipal Authority. The plan emphasized the development of the waterfront area of Songwat warehouses, and proposed to reorganize the traffic flow of Songwat, Phatsai and Yaowarat Roads by separating a route for heavy traffic and a route for light traffic with a pedestrian walk. Moreover, it focused on preserving the historic shop-houses in the local area and creating urban design guidelines for the façades of the new buildings. The plan endeavored to include local stakeholders by holding several workshops with local communities and district offices, but again excluded communities of all religious institutions in the district (see Figure 2.13-2.16).

Recent Conflicts/Problems

The major conflict of Wat Kor occurred in 1969 when Wat Kor demolished its sacred historic precinct to build an enormous three-storey ordination hall complex. The one hundred and fifty year old elaborated sacred quadrangle was comprised of a shrine, an ordination hall in mixed Chinese Rococo architecture and a pagoda in the Sri Lankan style on the platform with four small L-shaped pavilions at four corners. The protest, which was led by the Association of Siamese Architects and the Department of Fine Arts,
Figure 2.13. Plan for development and preservation of Samphantawong District.

Figure 2.14. Specific plan for Songwat Road and waterfront area.

Figure 2.15. Perspective of Songwat Waterfront from the south.

Figure 2.16. Perspective of Songwat Road.

From Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Rasing Khan Sombun Krongkan Wangphang Chaphohang noi Phuenthi Samkhan thang Prawattisat Yan Chumchon khet Samphantawong (Final Report: Specific Plan for Historic Area of Samphantawong Community).
occurred when the shrine and other minor structures were totally demolished and a new ordination hall was almost completed, and Wat Kor was about to demolish the old ordination hall which was in the way of the completion of the new one. This conflict became a nation-wide story. The DFA maintained that the ordination hall was a historic site belonging to the national heritage and the Director General of Fine Arts thus had the prerogative to protect it. The Department of Religious Affairs and Wat Kor defended their actions claiming that the historic ordination hall was too small and too old. The plan for the new ordination hall had been approved by the Committee for Wat Development and the DRA. Furthermore, according to Religious Law, the royal wat claimed that it had a right to manage its property as it saw fit because these properties were Buddhist religious assets. In spite of the protests, they bulldozed the historic structure. The DFA asked permission from the Minister of Education to prosecute the abbot for violating the Historic Preservation Law, but the minister referred the decision to the ecclesiastical cabinet. The cabinet of eight senior patriarchs refused to prosecute the abbot on the grounds that he did nothing wrong. Today, the new ordination hall is complete, but it does not open to the public very often. It opens to the public only for special Buddhist merit making events.

Other minor conflicts that have occurred over Wat Kor stem from the criticisms of the local community and scholars who regard Wat Kor as a commercial and corporate space for rich business, not a sacred place and site of wealth redistribution. For instance, Wat Kor has rented shop-houses and parking located inside the monastic precinct to one of the richest companies in Asia, and it has also done a brisk business selling amulets of a famous magic monk. In spite of these criticisms, Wat Kor does still provide primary schooling for children of the local poor, who are primarily laborers at nearby warehouses and export companies and street venders in this vicinity. Moreover, Wat Kor provides space for famous nuns to live and teach meditation within an enclosed compound. Wat
Kor also had a very good Buddhist study program and a project to support poorer wats in provincial towns.

The landscape elements and public facilities, such as public restrooms and pavement around the sacred precinct of Wat Kor, are simple and somewhat rundown. By contrast, in the residential area of the senior patriarch and the abbot, these same elements are new and clean. The physical condition of Wat Kor signifies that the monastic complex serves specific patrons who regularly visit the key administrative staff of Wat Kor rather than serving the public.

Conclusion

From the case studies of these three royal wats, we can see that it is possible to separate the major conflicts and problems related to the monastic complexes into two categories. The first category includes more general problems related to government laws, regulations and policies. The second category pertains to the specific level of conflicts and problems related to the royal wats’ particular geographical location, sizes of land, structures, urban vicinity, and monastic and local community.

In terms of the first category, all of the three royal wats have similar problems in terms of how they deal with their official status as “national heritage,” as designated by the Department of Fine Arts. In all three cases, state agencies have attempted to intervene in the monastic community’s decision-making process about the management of their assets, both in the sacred precinct and on the monastic donated land. Wat Pho and Wat Kor have had more conflicts in terms of their use of the sacred precinct, while Wat Sraket has had more problems with the use of its monastic donated lands. The Department of Fine Arts’ conflicts with these three wats over their respective violations of Historic Preservation Law received national media attention, and yet in all three cases, the monastic communities were able to elude the DFA’s mandate. The Department of Religious Affairs, which has also been involved with the management of these three
wats’ monastic donated lands, asserted that the wats have a right to manage their monastic structures and lands as these are their religious assets. Interestingly, both the DFA and DRA are in the Ministry of Education but they have strongly conflicting views about the management of the wats. Yet another level of conflict has to do with the local Thai pilgrims who regularly visit these three royal wats, and who insisted that Buddhist holy space should have a calm, tranquil and serene ambiance. Based on interviews with local communities of the three royal wats, these local residents maintained an image of the wat as a sanctuary for all Buddhists, not a commercial space that connotes greed, serving only the rich and fueling desire. Most of them complained that wats had lost their original meaning.

As a planner who seeks to incorporate detailed and specific knowledge about the wat into urban planning, I have found it crucial to seek to understand how and why these conflicts and overlapping meanings of royal wats came about. It is also important to discuss how the state authority’s perspective toward the royal wat, including its monumental structure and its monastic donated land, has changed through history. Furthermore, because each of these three royal wats were impacted by the changing urban environment—especially the new construction and expansion that had some adverse visual impacts on their historic landmarks—the history of state policies regarding Bangkok’s urban development must also be discussed. Whether or not these state policies and the forces of urbanization have transformed the Buddhist holy space from a site of religious sanctuary to a more commercialized space is a major question that will be discussed in the next chapters.

Regarding the second category of problems and conflicts pertaining to the wat’s specific history, location, and patronage networks, we have seen in this chapter that the consequences of the changes in government policies do not have uniform effects. The different size of the monastic precincts, donated lands, structures, architectural elaborations and geographical locations are factors that produce different problems even
when these monasteries are governed by the same policies. For instance, Wat Pho has a large-scale sacred precinct with highly refined architecture, but very minimal donated land. This imbalance has led to Wat Pho’s financial difficulties in maintaining its historic structures. In addition, because it is a monastery with sophisticated and detailed architecture which has had a close history with royal rulers, it has long been regarded as national heritage. This designation has brought Wat Pho into conflict with the Department of Fine Arts on many occasions, for ostensible violations of the codes pertaining to national heritage.

By contrast, Wat Sraket is a slightly smaller precinct, but has much less elaborate architecture and a larger area of donated land, which has meant that it has been financially capable of maintaining its structures and thus avoiding conflicts with the DFA. However, it could not control the expansion of shanty structures on its donated land, which created a state of visual chaos. In the case of Wat Kor, which has a tiny precinct but highly valued monastic donated land, the historic sacred precinct was destroyed in order to maximize space for rent. The location and community around these historic sites is also very important, in that it profoundly affects the scale of the activities inside. For instance, Wat Pho, which is centrally located in the area of royal residences, organizes several national events, while Wat Sraket, which was originally located in the forest, organized more festivals at the local level. And Wat Kor, which is located in Chinatown, organized more rituals specifically for supporters who were in its personal social network.

From analyzing the literature of the planning, preservation and development programs thus far involved with these three royal wats, I have found that they all share a common problem of approach. All the planning bodies had an implicit aim to preserve historic places, but ironically they failed to include the role of the monks, their communities of major patrons and local supporters who inhabit and manage these historic royal wats in their plans. They also avoided discussions over the problems relating to
religious property, focusing instead on secular space and offering only solutions for producing a cleaner view of historic Buddhist landmarks. However, without discussing and understanding the complexity of the shifting social meanings and physical conditions of these royal wats, it is questionable that such a plan could succeed. Moreover, it is important to note that these royal wats were criticized for losing their true meaning of religious space. This was another issue that the planning bodies tended to avoid.

The aim of the next three chapters is to redress this oversight in current planning schemes, by analyzing the historical role of the royal wats within Bangkok’s social structure, how state policies toward the royal wats changed from the pre-modern feudal period until the modern period, and how these transformations impacted the three different royal wats respectively.