CHAPTER SIX
THREE ROYAL WATS THROUGH THE TURMOIL OF NATIONALIST GOVERNMENTS AND DICTATOR REGIMES (1910-1957)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw how the royal wats lost their sources of direct state support, resulting in their dependence on rent revenues derived from their donated land and their abbots became responsible for their physical condition. Real estate properties of wats became the key for their survival, and the royal government also supported them to be independent entities in the market economy. In this chapter, we will see the increasing gap between the government and the Buddhist monastic order. This was especially the case after King Vajiravudh appointed his uncle and preceptor, Prince Wachirayan as the Supreme Patriarch, whose control of monastic affairs included urging wats to manage and invest in their land properties. Moreover, he also developed strategies to increase the Buddhist religious central assets, with the aim of making the Buddhist monastic order more independent from the state. He also created primary schools and Buddhist standard texts and promoted monastic practices which supported the unity of the nation in keeping with King Vajiravudh’s ultra-nationalist ideology. In this reign, the wats and monks were separated from the management of public education. Moreover, the king did not support any new construction or preservation of the royal wats as previous rulers had in the past. Therefore, royal wats lost their prominent role in society and state affairs, but at the same time they gained significant financial stability in terms of their private investment.

After the bloodless revolution in 1932, King Prachathipok (Rama VII) became a constitutional monarch and the People’s Party comprised of lower ranking officials took control of the kingdom. In contrast to the previous regime that had supported monastic affairs, the new government sought to exploit the revenue of Buddhist religious central
assets for its own secular purposes. Towards these ends, it asserted tighter control over the management of monastic properties and religious central assets through the Department of Religious Affairs\textsuperscript{508}. In addition to the new ideology of republicanism, the government employed the western concept of linear history in its preservation of monastic structures as national heritage. The meaning of the \textit{wats} changed from being the moral core of society and site for the king’s legitimation to being the symbol of the nation’s heritage, managed by the Department of Fine Arts. As I shall show, in this sense, the new government fostered contestation among the different state agencies over the function and meaning of monastic space. In addition, the government separated the management of its modern public schools established in \textit{wats} from the religious affairs, causing conflicts between the \textit{wat} and the Department of Formal Education over the monastic land where schools were located.

These political transformations also impacted the case studies of the three royal \textit{wats} in the reign of King Vajiravudh and Prachathipok directly. Instead of the king, Prince Wachirayan got involved in the management of Wat Pho’s monastic donated land. He supported the renovation of Wat Sraket and sent his former personal guard to assist the abbot of Wat Kor to reorganize the spatial arrangement of the monastery compound in order to maximize its lucrative high value monastic land. As a consequence of the road expansion and changing policies above, the physical conditions of all three royal \textit{wats}, especially their monastery compounds, were altered in this period. First, some areas at the edge were converted to shop-houses to benefit from the high value of roadside land. Second, the public schools were constructed and expanded within the monastery compound.

\textsuperscript{508} Its name in Thai is Krom Kan Satsana and it was formerly called Krom Thammakan which means Public Instruction.
The Wat and the Rise of Nationalism (1910-1957)

Political Context during King Vajiravudh’s Reign (r. 1910-1925)

King Chulalongkorn’s reign ended in 1910, about two years after his second visit to Europe. The abolition of the traditional position of the second king and the establishment of the Crown Prince’s position ensured succession to the throne for his son, King Vajiravudh. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the king’s brothers were educated in Bangkok by Western teachers, and their political world views were sharpened by several journeys to Europe, America and Western colonies in Asia. King Chulalongkorn’s sons, however, were even more fully immersed in the Western educational system, as they were sent to study abroad in Europe, mainly in England, France and Germany. Attending Oxford University and British Military Academy and graduating from Eton School, King Vajiravudh was the first king of Siam who was fully educated in the Western system. Moreover, because of his education in England, he was not ordained as a novice as was the tradition for Siamese princes. However, when he returned home as a crown prince, he was ordained as a monk by Prince Wachirayan. Therefore, his study of Buddhism in the monkshood began after his British-oriented education, and during this time, all religious policies were left to his uncle and preceptor, Prince Wachirayan.

King Vajiravudh is widely known as being the originator of Thai nationalism, particularly for his designation of the “three pillars” of nationhood: Nation, Religion and King (chaat satsana phramahakasat). In fact, this tripartite nationalistic slogan was similar to Britain’s own motto of God, Queen and Empire. Even though King Vajiravudh identified Buddhism as integral to the nation-building project, it is important to note that in contrast to the reign of King Chulalongkorn, who took the leading role in resolving monastic problem, King Vajiravudh let Prince Wachirayan, take the leading role in the monastic affairs.
Political Context in the Turbulent Period of People Party and Military Dictators (1932-1957)

During the economic depression in the 1930s which took place in King Prachathipok’s reign (r. 1925-1935), the Department of Fine Arts was dissolved and became a smaller department within the Royal Institute. Faced with the economic depression and the legacy of over-expenditures from King Vajiravudh’s government, King Prachathipok’s government, which was comprised largely of his princely uncles and older brothers, failed to solve the government’s financial problems. A political group calling themselves the “People’s Party” or “Kana Ratsadon,” comprised of lower ranking officials, staged the coup on June 23rd, 1932, and the king put up no resistance to the request of the People’s Party to establish a constitutional monarchy. Not surprisingly, this shift to a non-royal government had significant consequences for state policies toward the Buddhist religion and its historic structures.

The first major change was the control over financial support for royal wats and Buddhist religious assets. One year after the revolution, an armed conflict between the old royalist bureaucrats and the People’s Party broke out and the battle ended with the victory of the latter in October of 1933. After this victory, the People’s Party’s government confiscated most of the royal assets, including the king’s royal treasury bureau, and any Buddhist rituals or symbols connected to the king’s public reputation were prohibited. The financial support to restore royal wats, which after King Rama V’s reign came from the king private treasury, was basically in the hands of the new government, whose key cabinet members were commoners educated in France and England, and who had very little idea what to do with Buddhist monastic affairs. The symbolic functions of royal wats which had long been places to legitimize the royal rulers were no longer relevant for the new regime that endorsed a republic ideology. Following the rise to power of Field Marshal Phibunsongkram in 1934 and his ascension to the
premiership in 1938, the state cultural policies of Siam followed the models of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy509.

In 1933, the Department of Buddhist Religious Assets (Kalapana) was transferred back from the Ministry of the Treasury to the Department of Public Instruction within the Ministry of Education. On September 15 of that year, the new Prime Minister, Army Col. Phraya Phaholphonphayuhasena, asked the Minister of Public Instruction whether the government could use the revenue of the Buddhist central assets for the development of the nation’s education. He proposed that the revenue should be utilized to hire monks to teach in government formal schools510. The Minister of Public Instruction, Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri, who had long been in the ministry since King Rama VI’s reign, responded that the proposal was similar to plans he had already implemented, and he pointed out that monks had already helped to establish numerous public schools. The difference, however, was the issue of management. He argued that the revenue from Buddhist central assets could be utilized for education but the initiative to take this action had to come from the monastic order. He argued further that there was also an increasing need for financial support for Buddhist institutions, because previously the revenue for wats was from the king’s treasury designated for merit making511. Most of the increasing expenses of the ministry were related to the expansion of education. At the time, there was not enough funding to support religious affairs, and the Minister of Public Instruction hoped to use more revenue from the Buddhist central assets to help with the monastic expenditures. He also suggested that the revenue from the properties of Buddhist wats should be increased and that the government’s traditional budget for merit making donations had to be reduced. In this letter, Thammasakmontri also compared the Buddhist

510 National Archive, STh 0201.10/30, letters from Prime Minister Colonel Phraya Phaholponpayuhasena to the Minister of Thammakan, Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri, 15 September, 1933.
511 He called this portion of budget “Ngoen Job Prahat” or the donation when the king bestowed to the monastic complexes for merit making.
ecclesiastical order to a baby who could not walk and needed to be fed by the state so it could learn to grow and walk. From his point of view, the growing revenue from land rent of religious assets was the key for the Buddhist monastic order to be able to stand on its own without the state support. He complained that religious assets were not managed to their full capacity, and that the Department of Religious Affairs still lacked control of these monastic properties. If the government could gain control of all properties of wats in the entire nation, the accumulation of Buddhist central assets would grow faster than the present situation\(^\text{512}\).

In this letter, the Minister of Public Instruction and Education also showed that the sum of total reserve funds under the Central Religious Asset was about 2 million Baht and argued that some wats in Bangkok had land parcels that were equal to the value of diamonds were they to be used for business purposes. He suggested that these wats should be dissolved in order to maximize profits from rent, preserving only the historic ordination hall for some important Buddhist ceremonies as was the case with Christian churches in western countries.

This correspondence clearly reflects that the People’s Party had no experience in how the leader of the kingdom had to deal with monastic affairs, but rather had only the desire to exploit Buddhist central assets. Coincidently, a day after the respondent letter from Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri was sent, Luang Wichitwathakan, the People’s Party’s key promoter of nationalism, submitted his secret investigative report of the Ministry of Education, which accused the minister as being a major obstacle to the educational development of the country. In the report, he recommended that the Prime Minister get rid of Thammasakmontri\(^\text{513}\).

\(^{512}\) Ibid., letter from Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri to the premier, 23 September, 1933.

\(^{513}\) Scot Barmé, Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 49.
The Supreme Patriarch Prince Wachirayan: Rise of the first Buddhist Pope

During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the ecclesiastical government structure was established with the aim of assisting the development of modern education. Most religious affairs were still handled by the Ministry of Public Instruction under the supervision of the modern, secular ministerial cabinet led by the king, and with the consultation of the ecclesiastical government cabinet, led by Prince Patriarch Wachirayan. Even though there were several senior patriarchs in the monastic order at this time, because of Prince Wachirayan’s royal status and his government appointment to direct the nation’s educational development, he was still the most powerful monk in the entire monastic order. Moreover, the Religious Law of 1902 had also created the position of ecclesiastical governors, or Chao Khana Montthon. In these appointed positions, Bangkok’s senior monks were given the new role of supervising modern education and standardizing monastic activities to be compatible with monastic practices in central Bangkok. These senior monks were supported by the Ministry of Public Instruction in their investigations of provincial education, but they were nevertheless mostly under the supervision of Prince Patriarch Wachirayan.

After King Vajiravudh’s coronation, Prince Wachirayan was appointed by the new king to be the Supreme Patriarch, and in this position, Prince Wachirayan gained full control over the ecclesiastical government. In this influential position, Prince Wachirayan began to develop the standard texts and curriculum that would become the foundation of a new Buddhist education grounded in modern Enlightenment ideals. For instance, during King Chulalongkorn’s period, he wrote an interesting book called Anthropology or “Manusayawitthaya” which was used as a text in teacher preparatory schools, where both monks and commoners enrolled to study teaching methods514. This book explained that

knowledge was something that was acquired over time through deliberate study, and only human beings could accumulate the forms of knowledge that could lead to their collective development. Thus, the task for human beings was to strive to increase knowledge, with the aim of transferring this knowledge to future generations thereby generating well-being and prosperity. In terms of its philosophy, this book conveyed ideas similar to the Hegelian philosophy of the evolution of the “World Spirit,” which proposed the idea of the development and realization of human freedom within the modern nation-state. Prince Wachirayan also wrote the books which became standard textbooks for inculcating readers with nationalistic ideals, and these texts have been widely used for several generations of students.

Moreover, Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan also composed several text books which were used widely in the government supported, pre-elementary school or “Mullasueksa.” One book, which was called Benchasin-Benchatham, or “The Five Buddhist precepts and the Dharma,” was composed in 1902 to teach students basic Buddhist ideology using modern methods. Several of these texts were published and widely distributed in order to explain Buddhism from a rational perspective. One of the functions of these texts was to replace the traditional texts which contained animistic beliefs, magical formulas, and mythical stories. He also wrote a historical text called Phongsawadan Siam, which explained the history of the kingdom in relation to modern geographic knowledge. He and Prince Damrong, who has been called “the father of Thai history,” also recognized the urgent need to record the history of Siam, as it could disappear, and the Siamese people would lose all historical consciousness of their civilization. In his book, “About Education,” or Phue Kan Sueksa, he articulated his vision of using education through the Buddhist institutional system to imbue sense of patriotism and loyalty.


516 Phassana Kitthawon, “Botbat khong Khana Song nai ruang Kan Sueksa nai ratchasamai Phra Batsomdet Phra Chulachomklao Chaoyuhua (Role of Monastic Order in Education during King
For monks, he wrote the text Vinayamuk, which interpreted Lord Buddha’s teachings and outlined Buddhist discipline according to the traditional practice of monks in the region of Central Siam. This book was used to standardize the practice of monks all over the countryside. He also wrote the book called “Nawakowat” for newly ordained monks, but this text has also been used widely for other monks, and as a standard text for public schools, because of its clear explanation of Buddhist doctrines using simple Thai language and relatively little Pali. He also wrote Tamra Pali Waiyakorn, or Pali grammar, in which he explained most of the grammar rules and the structure of the Pali language. This book employed Thai language instead of Khmer which was commonly used in the past. All these books conveyed the core idea of building a uniform monastic practice and standardized Buddhist doctrine which originated from Bangkok.

Although during the reign of King Rama V, Prince Wachirayan had once said that the Minister of Public Instruction was the real Supreme Patriarch, it was clear that now during the reign of King Vajiravudh, Prince Wachirayan had taken full control of religious and educational affairs as Supreme Patriarch. As such, the power dynamic was strikingly different from the past. Prior to this period, it was the king who actually functioned as the real Supreme Patriarch. Even though he wasn’t given that title, the fact that he appointed all patriarchs, controlled the monastic order, and punished immoral monks meant that he was actually the highest authority within the Buddhist order. Within this system, the Supreme Patriarch was only a figurehead and icon of worship, whose actual power was subsumed to that of the king. By the reign of Rama VI, however, ecclesiastical decisions that once belonged to the king were now under Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan, and he basically pulled out all ecclesiastical activities from the hands of the Minister of Public Instruction. He also established the standard procedures to

Chulalongkorn’s reign)” (Master Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1981), citing Wachirayanwarorot, Prince, Pramuan Niphon Kan Sueksa (Compilation of Royal Writing in Education), 8.
517 Ibid., citing Wachirayanwarorot, Prince, Thalangkan Khana Song Lem 2 (Ecclesiastical Announcement Vol. 2), 1-36.
punish immoral monks and disrobe them. The decision to punish monks had historically been under the king’s sole power, but now, Prince Wachirayan shifted this duty to the hierarchical structure of ecclesiastical governors\(^{518}\). For instance, if a monk without any rank and honor committed a crime, the local police would consult with local ecclesiastical governor. If the impure monk possessed some honorary rank and royal title, the regional governors would consult the regional ecclesiastical governors. If a high ranking monk asked for a petition, it would be sent to the king. So, the power to punish immoral monks was no longer within the king’s absolute power. The court case would have to go through the hierarchical structure of both the ecclesiastical and secular governments before it would be brought before the king.

Therefore, in contrast to previous reigns, Prince Wachirayan was the first Supreme Patriarch who had real power in managing the ecclesiastical government, Buddhist education and religious properties. Besides his previous significant work of incorporating patriotic doctrines into the secular education in the previous reign, Prince Wachirayan also standardized the Buddhist monks and religious activities by using the Central Thai Buddhist as standard practice. From 1912 to 1917, he traveled with five monks and fourteen laymen throughout the kingdom to investigate religious practices, activities, monastic architecture, financial management and the school organization of wats. From his travels, he came to realize the great variation of practice of Buddhists in the Siamese Kingdom, and subsequently decided to launch a program to standardize the practice of all Buddhist monks.

Whereas during King Rama V reign, he worked more on helping the king to integrate a formal education structure into provincial areas, during the reign of King Vajiravudh, the Prince Supreme Patriarch focused on monastic standardization. He

\(^{518}\) Siriwat Khamwansa, *Song Thai 200 Pi* (Thai Buddhist 200 year) (Bangkok: Mahachulabannakan, 1982), 4-5 describing the royal regulation about disrobing monks announced by Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot on 22 September, 1912 and 7 June, 1913.
inaugurated this process by reforming the Buddhist Dharma study and the Royal Examination for Pali language interpretation. In addition, he developed a standard written examination to replace the traditional oral examination and also developed a Thai language transcription system for Pali instead of Khmer. Moreover, the compilation of reports from his provincial trip inspection and his decisions regarding the disputes over religious practices became a key reference, setting precedents for the ecclesiastical government in their rulings over monastic conflicts. His record of reports and decisions, called Phra Maha Samanawinitchai, provides a detailed description and explanation of monastic standards, ranging from matters such as the standardization of monastic robes, everyday-life behaviors, customary communication with commoners, ordination rituals, and details of preaching, to the larger scale issues of the organizational structure, such as the selection of abbots, appointment of preceptors, ranking of patriarchs, history of different religious sects in the Siamese kingdom, the religious justice system, the command line in the ecclesiastical structure, regulations for accepting person to ordain, symbols of different sects, the regalia of different monastic ranks, regulations for creating classification of royal wats, the standardization monastic architecture, procedures for consecrating holy space, customs for accepting royal Kathin support, the definition of sima holy space, and the legal status of the monastery.

**From Mahasima to Wisungamasima: Sacred Space to Temporary Concession**

Following the Religious Law of 1902, to acquire the official status of a wat, a monastic complex was required to seek the consent of the state authority in Bangkok to withdraw secular power over its sima holy space, or wisungamasima. Thereafter, a monastic complex without consent from the secular ruler was considered only a “samnak song.” Generally speaking, the wisungamasima comprised the area of the ordination hall, which is marked by holy markers or nimit and bai sema. As stated previously, before the
reign of King Mongkut, the consent to establish *wisungamasima* used to be given by the local lords or provincial governors\(^{519}\). By the reign of King Mongkut, however, the *sima* holy space had to be granted by him, but this authorization was enforced only in the capital and vicinity of Bangkok\(^{520}\). Beginning with Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan, this requirement gradually extended throughout Siam. For instance, in the case of a *wat* in Lampang province\(^{521}\), old monastic complexes that desired to expand their ordination halls questioned whether or not their *sima* boundary markers were considered valid, since Burmese rulers had been the ones to grant *sima* to them. In these cases, they had to apply for the new *wisungamasima* through the Siamese centralized system. Another example was the case of monastic complexes in Battambang Province (located in Cambodia) that received *wisungamasima* from the local governor. Prince Wachirayan conceded that those *wats* with *sima* holy space granted by previous lords were still valid, but if those *wats* desired to expand their *sima* holy space, they would have to apply for a new *wisungamasima*. One of the consequences of the implementation of the 1902 law requiring *wisungamasima* was a great deal of administrative confusion following the increase in applications\(^{522}\). In his effort to resolve these problems, on August 25, 1918, Prince Patriarch Wachirayan announced a change in the regulations for granting *wisungamasima*, and decreed that the *wisungamasima* space no longer covered only the area of *sima* holy space or ordination hall but the entire *wat*’s precinct, so that monastic complexes would not need to apply for a new *wisungamasima* every time they altered

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simā holy space within the monastic precinct. In this sense, Prince Wachirayan’s new idea of granting *wisungamasima* was not different from King Mongkut’s system of granting *mahasima* to the royal monastic complexes belonging to his Reform Order. In the latter cases, the outer *simā* or *mahasima* was constructed to cover the entire monastic complex and thus was automatically a *wisungamasima*. However, the Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan also redefined the meaning of *wisungamasima*, in that it would no longer designate an area entirely outside the kingdom as was the case since King Mongkut’s reign. Rather, in his view, *wisungamasima* designated a space that was granted temporary autonomy from the state. For instance, he argued that the *wisungamasima* should be seen as similar to the land that the Siamese government had granted to western companies for mining or logging businesses. These businesses were granted short-term concessions to do as they wished with the land, but they also were ultimately required to return that land to the government. However, the *wisungamasima* was still different from the land concession in that it does not have the limit time of concession until the state authority needs the holy land for public related purposes and needs to use eminent domain.

**Baeb Nawakram: The Standardization of Thai Monastic Architecture**

In 1919, Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan published the standard blueprint of monastic architecture in a handbook called “Baeb Nawakram”. In the Introduction, the author and illustrator, Phra Nawakramkowit, indicated clearly that the impetus to develop the handbook came from Prince Wachirayan’s provincial inspections in 1916, and his observations that many *wats* throughout the country lacked “Thai” architectural skills while local craftsmen were mostly Chinese. For instance, the traditional Thai

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ornaments of *chofa* (Thai style Garuda) and *bai raka* (Thai style Naga) had been replaced by Chinese dragons. Without any action, he feared that Thai architectural heritage would face extinction. With his position in the ecclesiastical government, he believed that preserving monastic architecture was the only way to stop the degeneration of Thai Buddhist architecture. He ordered the Ministry of Public Instruction to conduct measure drawings of several architectural elements of the royal *wats* in Bangkok to use as models for monastic construction in provincial towns. He also selected only the small and less elaborate details which would be suitable for provincial supporters who had less financial power.

This blueprint of Thai monastic architecture can be seen as a visual discourse conveying both Thai nationalistic propaganda and an idea of authentic Thai Buddhist architectural preservation in opposition to Chinese craftsmanship. But why was the influence of Chinese architectural craftsmanship targeted as a sign of impurity and cultural decline in this period? In fact, as we saw in previous chapters, Thai architecture has always been a melting pot of several cultural influences, including Indian, Khmer, Chinese, and even Italian Baroque motifs. For example, Wat Pho, the first class royal monastery, represents an amalgamation of Thai and Chinese architectural elaboration. Moreover, Chinese laborers, skilled artisans and craftsmen were in Bangkok and other parts of the kingdom since the beginning of the Bangkok period. Most of King Mongkut’s royal *wats* which are built in a Sukhothai-Sinhalese architectural style were constructed by Chinese laborers and skilled artisans.

What Prince Wachirayan’s blueprint for a standardized Buddhist architecture reflected, therefore, was the broader political context in Siam at the time, and the growing nationalist propaganda colored by anti-Chinese sentiment of King Vajiravudh’s reign. The distribution of this blueprint reified royal *wats* in Bangkok as the being the prototypical and authentic national icons of Thai architectural heritage. One effect of this nationalistic movement was that it curtailed architectural creativity and the syncretistic
amalgamation that had been the paragon of Thai architecture in the past. By promoting royal monastic architecture as the model for provincial wats, a centralized, standardized image of national heritage gradually began to overshadow the distinctive characteristics of local wats. This blueprint was also a visual discourse in that it was intended to be a means of connecting the image of royal monastic complexes in Bangkok to rural communities. However, it must be noted that this standard blueprint produced by ecclesiastical personnel was printed in a limited number of 1,000 copies, and there is no historical record regarding the implementation of this standard blueprint either in the Department of Public Instruction or Ecclesiastical Government. Therefore, in this case, we can not determine what effect this blueprint really had on wat’s architecture in the provinces (see Plate 6.1).

Figure 6.1. Baab Nawakram (1919) showing the first attempt of Prince Wachirayan in creating the nation’s blueprint of monastic architecture by copying the minor architecture of several royal wats in Bangkok.
Monastic Complex Classification and Revision

Another example of Prince Wachirayan’s intervention in monastic architecture was his revision of the classification system for royal *wats*, which was originally devised by King Chulalongkorn’s cabinet ministry with the aim of rationalizing royal maintenance support for the royal *wats*. According to Prince Wachirayan’s new criteria, several royal monastic complexes in Bangkok were dropped from their previous statuses. In the previous reign, the criteria for classifying royal *wats* were only their historical association with the royal family, the installation of Lord Buddha Relics, the landmark quality, and the details of architectural elaboration. In King Vajiravudh’s reign, the determination of status was no longer a decision made by the royal cabinet meeting but was solely the Supreme Patriarch’s decision. Prince Wachirayan connected the ranking of these royal *wats* to two factors: the monastic rankings of the abbots in the new ecclesiastical structure; and the ability of each *wat* to maintain its major structures. From his report in the Announcement of Monastic Order (Thalangkan Khana Song)\(^\text{525}\), Wat Prathumkhongkha was supposed to be only a third class monastery, but he classified it as second class because this *wat* always had abbots at high levels in the ecclesiastical structure. Moreover, it had significant monastic donated land in Chinatown which generated high income from renting shop-houses. Wat Anongkaram was another example. It was supposed to be in the third class, but Prince Wachirayan classified it as second class because its abbot at the time was very energetic in developing both monastic and modern secular education. We now can see that by this time, apart from the physical condition of monastic architecture, the criteria for classifying the status of royal *wats* included the ranking of the abbots and the abbots’ performance in developing education and managing revenue from monastic properties.

\(^{525}\) Wachirayanwarorot, Prince, *Thalangkan Khana Song lem 3* (Ecclesiastical Announcement Vol.3) (Bangkok: Privately Printed, 1915), 245-257
The Breaking Point: the End of Buddhist Monastic Complexes in the Development of Modern Education

As we have seen, another key role of wats was its involvement with modern education. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the implementation of modern, formal education in wats of provincial towns had expanded steadily in the first five years after 1900. However, most wats could not develop fast enough to cope with the increasing number of students. The space designated for instruction and the number of monks who could teach modern education increased slowly, and not fast enough to keep up with the rising demand. The senior monks who were appointed as regional ecclesiastical governors and educational supervisors complained of work overload and a deterioration of their health due to the long distance travel. Therefore, by 1903, the senior monks who had worked as educational advisors asked their lay accountants (waiyawatchakon) and regional officers from the Ministry of Public Instruction to help them produce a report to the king. Regional education officials who were the lay persons became the one who managed and advised the public education instead of senior monks from Bangkok. This movement increased the influence of the officials from the Ministry of Public Instruction and reduced the reputation of senior monks and ecclesiastical governors in developing modern education. By 1909, the Ministry of the Interior and Public Instruction decided to share the task for developing education. The Ministry of the Interior took over the job of creating fundamental education with the support of the Public Instruction, senior monks, and regional ecclesiastical governors. The regional moral education officers (khaluang thammakan) also worked under the regent from the Ministry of the Interior (khaluang thesapiban). In addition, by September 23, 1910, the

526 Phassana Kitthawon, “Botbat khong Khana Song nai Ruang Kan Sueksa nai Ratchasamai Phrabat Somdet Phra Chulachomklao Chao Yuhao (Role of Monastic Order in Education during the reign of King Chulalongkorn)” (Master Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1981), 179.
Ministry of Public Instruction held a meeting for the regional management of education. The meeting resulted in the creation of a sub-district (tambon) board in every sub-district area, to facilitate the formal education with senior monks\textsuperscript{528}.

The duties of senior monks were replaced by the officials from the Ministry of Public Instruction and the Interior Ministry in local areas. Moreover, the development of teaching colleges under the Formal Education Department was in progress and had started to produce more and more teachers in teaching secular subjects. At the same time, Mahamakut Ratchawitthayalai, the Thammayut Buddhist College and the only religious institution that produced monks with modern teaching knowledge, was limited in resources, and it was hard to find monks who would enter this high level of study to acquire both secular and Buddhist knowledge. Moreover, most of the monks thought that the study of modern subjects was not the way to nirvana. The more they studied and taught these subjects the further they detoured from the path of enlightenment\textsuperscript{529}. In addition, most of the Thammayutika monks who studied at Mahamakut Ratchawitthayalai were appointed to ecclesiastical positions and were responsible for modern education because they were familiar with modern subjects. This created resentment among the Commoner Order (Maha Nikai) monks.

Finally, in 1916, the work of the Ministry of Public Instruction was divided into two major departments, the Department of Formal Education and the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs. The work of provincial education was separated from the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs and moved to be with the Department of Formal Education. By 1919, the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs finally separated from the Ministry of Public Instruction to become part of the Ministry of Palace (Wang). The Ministry of Public Instruction was also renamed to be the Ministry of Education (Kan

\textsuperscript{528} National Archive, R 5 S 12/8 Rai-ngan kan Prachum Thesapiban fai Thammakan (Report of Regent Public Instruction Section) 23 September, 1910.

Sueksa). This represented a major turning point, inasmuch as the Buddhist religion was isolated from making public contributions to Thai society. The monks in the *wats* finally stopped teaching formal education and handed over the teaching jobs to secular teachers from the Ministry of Education, but at the time, most of these formal public schools did yet not move out of monastic lands. Intense contestation between the Department of Formal Education and the *wats* backed by the Department of Public Instruction and the ecclesiastical government occurred over the ownership of monastic lands where public schools were located.

**Defending Holy Real Estate Property Revisited**

In 1924, three years after Prince Wachirayan passed away, the dispute between the *wat* and educational officers over the monastic land arose. The case was between Wat Srisuriyawongs and a Regional Educational Officer of Ratchaburi province\(^{530}\). It was claimed by the abbot that the Somdet Chao Phraya Borommahasuriyawongs, Regent of King Chulalongkorn, founded this monastic complex and donated the adjacent land to the monastery. The disputed land was used as a school under the direction of regional educational officials since 1915. The conflict arose because a survey of land title was implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture. A regional educational official registered the land under the public school’s name, which still bore the name of the monastery, but was no longer really part of the monastery. The land title was sent to the Ministry of Education instead of the abbot. The abbot petitioned and the local government of Ratchaburi region ruled that the land belong to the royal property under the Ministry of Education.

The abbot did not accept the decision of the local government, and asked the Department of Public Instruction to petition the Supreme Patriarch Chinawon Siriwat,

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\(^{530}\) National Archive, R 7 S 20/1, 26 January, 1924-5 August, 1927.
who asked the committee to reconsider the case again. The Ministry of the Interior passed their decision to the Ministry of Education, and they also passed it to the local government of Ratchaburi, which firmly stood by its previous decision. The Supreme Patriarch turned to the king and asked to establish a committee to reconsider the monastic land dispute case. In the report of the royal attorney to the king, the Minister of the Palace, who also had authority over the Department of Public Instruction, proposed that the case ought to be considered as a precedent for preventing the future conflict. The Minister of Education also agreed to reconsider the case on the grounds that the king, along with the government, was the upholders of the Buddhist religion, and therefore must respond to the requests of Buddhist ecclesiastical institutions.

This report about Wat Srisuriyawong also referred to a previous conflict of the rights over monastic land in 1917, when Wat Ratchasitharam received land from a commoner. At that time, Prince Ratchaburi noticed that wats could own their monastic donated land forever. If supporters continued to give monastic complexes land which could not be transferred, the wats would be the only major land owners and he gave an example of England that had a law to limit the monastic land called “Mortmain.” Prince Wachirayan had opposed the idea of instituting such a law and indicated that the land held by monastic complexes was unlikely to be as dangerous as the land in the hands of “capitalists.” He argued that if the land under monastic complexes became too great and unbearable by the government, there were many other methods to solve the problem, such as passing a new law prohibiting wats to hold land indefinitely or limiting gifts to only benefits of the land not the titles. In the worst case scenario, the government could confiscate the land from the monastic complexes which had happened in several

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531 National Archive, R 7 S 20/1, report from Phraya Jakpaneesreesilwisut, Samutnitisart (the royal attorney) to King Prachathipok on 5 March, 1924.
532 His full title at the time was Prince Krommaluang Ratchaburi Direkrit.
533 National Archive, R 7 S 20/1 “Thi Thoranee Song Wat Srisuriyawong Jangwat Ratchaburi (Land of Wat Sri Suriyawong Ratchabury Province),” 26 January, 1924- 5 August, 1927, 25.
countries. Based on this letter of 1917, the Supreme Patriarch Chinnawon Siriwat defended the *wat*’s ownership of the land in the 1924 Wat Srisuriyawong case, claiming that he had made his decision based on the similar situation of other religious institutions in other countries, presumably in Europe.

After receiving the report, King Vajiravudh appointed his secretary as the chair of this special committee, which included representatives from the Legal Drafting Department (Krom Rang Kotmai). After several investigations and meetings, the committee finished the report in February of 1926, which established several legal definitions of monastic land. The investigation took over two years went through several changes, such as the end of King Rama VI’s reign in 1925. The report also included several court cases covering past disputes which addressed issues such as whether or not monks could hold land as their personal assets or pass it to their successors. Moreover, the report also addressed the issue pertaining to inheritance in the case where supporters gave the land to the abbot and the abbot passed away without a will, in which case the land must belong to the *wat* and not the relatives of the abbot. The report also discussed the policy of whether or not the donation of land to *wats* should be allowed. There was a suggestion that the donated land had to be sold and that the monastic complex could receive only the revenue from selling the land rather than from ownership of land parcels. This concept was to prevent any *wat* from expanding their land by accepting land grants as donations. It was believed that if the monastic complex became a big landlord, it could block the development of the secular sector because monastic land cannot be sold or exchanged unless it received the consent from the king. On the other hand, no one could claim the ownership of the monastic land although a *wat* had abandoned it for more than ten years. The suggestion to limit the donation of land was also considered, once again citing the reference to Britain’s “Mortmain” law. Moreover, in the report citing the

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534Ibid., 25.
discussion of several Prince-Ministers, the princes considered the regulation No. 7 in the Religious Law of 1902, which stated that the religious land belonged to the realm of Buddhist Assets, which was protected by the king who upheld the Buddhist faith. No one in the kingdom could undermine the power of the king as the upholder of the Buddhist faith.

There was also an important incident that reconciled modern education with Buddhist religion. In 1925, King Prachathipok announced that the education of the nation could not be separated from religion. The Department of Public Instruction and the Department of Education were reunited in 1926 and the Ministry of Education became the Ministry of Public Instruction again. The final decision was made in the cabinet meeting of 1928, and the committee also rendered the union of these two departments within the same ministry as the solution for to the problem of land rights, but actually ruled in favor of the monastery. The committee recognized that the contestation was now between the Religious Affairs Department and the Formal Education Department. Both were once under the same umbrella of the Ministry of Public Instruction and had collaborated to establish the modern education. By allowing modern schools to establish themselves on monastic complex land, the monastery’s ownership and power over the land was open to contestation by the Department of Formal Education, based on the claim that the school had occupied the area of this wat for a long time. However, the Religious Law of 1902 indicated that religious land belonged to the Buddhist realm under the protection of the king. Land occupancy for a particular duration, as in the case of the school, could not overrule the law protecting the monastic complex and the royal righteous power of the king. It was clear that the Supreme Patriarch in this period (Prince Patriarch Chinnawon Siritwat) used his reputation to ask the king to reconsider the decision of the district court of Ratchaburi and finally turned the case over in favor of the monastic complex.
Since King Chulalongkorn’s reign, Prince Wachirayan had informally managed the real estate properties of royal wats in order to increase the wealth of the Buddhist religion. As Craig Reynolds discussed, Prince Wachirayan once stressed that Thai Buddhist wat traditionally relied on support of the lay community and did not own any central assets to maintain itself as in the case of European religious institutions\textsuperscript{535}. The Prince Patriarch then maintained that if the support from the lay community became weak, Buddhist religion would have declined. By his successful manipulation of rent contracts of the monastic donated land and his great knowledge of both Buddhist and Western religion, the real estate properties of wats became one of the key systems of survival for the Buddhist realm from Prince Patriarch Wachirayan’s perspective. The Minister of Public Instruction obeyed the Prince Patriarch Wachirayan’s orders. By 1919, the king had dissolved the Ministry of Public Instruction and transferred the Department of Public Instruction to the Ministry of Palace. Because of this move, the Prince Supreme Patriarch increased his power to manage monastic property, and finally, he reorganized Department of Public Instruction’s structure. The works in this department were split into two major smaller departments called Sangkhakari (Monastic Personal) and Phra Aram (Monastic structure). The Department of Sangkhakari’s primary responsibility related to the religious matters of monks under royal patronage, while the Department of Phra Aram was about the physical condition of the wats, such as maintaining and renovating monastic structures. By 1909, most of the work of Department of Phra Aram turned to be more about managing revenue from wats’ donated land and constructing shop-houses on these lands. The revenue of royal wats in Bangkok and major wats associated with Bangkok court had to be reported and sent to this department by lay accountants (waiyawatchakon) and lay managers (makkhanayok) who were under close attention of

the Prince Supreme Patriarch. The Department of Sangkhakari was also assigned the new job of issuing consent to withdraw the royal power from requested holy land, or wisungkamasima. Occasionally, it was difficult to distinguish the respective jobs of these two departments, since the officials who assisted the monks were also sometimes the guilds who renovated wats. In 1919, the Prince Patriarch Wachirayan finally renamed the Department of Phra Aram (Monastic structure) to Kalapana (Monastic revenue and donation). His reason was to separate the duties of the Sangkhakari (assisting monks, and issuing land title for holy space) from the duties of the Kalapana (constructing structure on monastic donated land and collecting revenue from rent). He also put the royal guilds from both departments, who maintained the royal monastic structures and constructed shop-houses on monastic land (Thoranisong), together under the central command of the Department of Public Instruction (see Appendix 1).

When King Prachathipok (Rama VII) ordered to reunite the Department of Public Instruction and the Ministry of Education in 1926, Prince Chanthaburi, the Minister of the Treasury, reported to the king regarding the history and responsibilities of the department. From correspondence letters between him and King Prachathipok (Rama VII) and other prince-ministers revealing how Prince Wachirayan ordered the Department of Public Instruction to manage monastic properties, Prince Chanthaburi described retrospectively how he had served the Prince Wachirayan in organizing the Department of Kalapana (Monastic Revenue and Donation). He described the Prince Supreme Patriarch’s establishment of a system for managing the monastery’s land and showed that the prosperity of Buddhist assets was the Prince Supreme Patriarch’s main goal. He mentioned that the revenue of wats had to be collected and sent to the Ministry.

536 National Archive ST 7/20, 17 June, 1919 letter from Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot to Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri, the Minister of Public Instruction
537 His full title at the time was Prince Krommaphra Chanthaburi Naruenat.
538 National Archive R 7 S 2/3, Moving Department of Public Instruction to Ministry of Education and moving Department of Kalapana to Ministry of Treasury, 3 January, 1925 letter from Prince Krom Phra Chanthaburi Naruenat to King Prachathipok.
of Public Instruction’s office. However, as described previously, there was an incident during King Chulalongkorn’s reign when the Director of Accounting in Religious Affairs misappropriated this revenue. Following this case, most of the revenue from every ministry had to be reported and deposited to the Ministry of Finance, or put in commercial banks to earn high interest. Through this system, the Ministry of Finance took care of the religious assets. For this reason, during the reign of King Prachathipok (Rama VII, r. 1925-1932 as an absolute monarch; 1932-1935 as constitutional monarch), the Department of Monastic Revenue (Kalapana) was relocated in the Ministry of the Treasury, while the rest of the work related to monastic affairs were grouped together in the Ministry of Public Instruction.

From March 23, 1927 until 1932, there was an ongoing debate in the royal cabinet meetings regarding the determination of ownership of the deserted monastic land, centering on the issue of whether such lands belonged to the royal government or to the Buddhist religious realm. If it was determined to be a royal possession, it would belong to the Department of Royal Assets (Ratchaphatsadu). However, if it was designated as an asset of the Buddhist religion, it would be taken care of by the Department of Monastic Revenue and Donation (Kalapana). Prince Damrong, the former Minister of Interior, argued that the land that had been deserted by monks had to be returned to the king and royal government, because if left in the hands of the Buddhist Sangha, these monastic lands might have expanded and obstructed urban development. He provided further details that if there was any ruin of a temple sanctuary on the land, it should be taken care of by the Royal Pundit Department, which included the former Department of Fine Arts, in order to be sure that it received the proper treatment using historic preservation methods. If the land was vacant without any significant architectural structures, it had to be taken by the government and placed under the Department of

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539 National Archive R 7 S 20/14 “Thi Wat Rang lae Kan Chot Thabien thi khong Satsanasombat (deserted monastic land and registration of Religious Asset).”
Royal Assets. There were many voices that disagreed with Prince Damrong’s proposal. Some ministers argued that if the present government confiscated the deserted monastic land and reclaimed it, it meant that the present ruler did not respect the will of the past kings or rulers whose intention was to uphold the Buddhist religion.

In 1928, the royal cabinet meeting decided to give the control of the land of deserted wats in the kingdom to the ecclesiastical government, and they called these properties “religious central assets” (Satsana Sombat Klang). The profit from renting deserted monastic land was collected by the Department of Religious Assets (Krom Kalapana) in the Ministry of the Treasury, and could be used only for religious activities such as the renovation of poor royal wats, but the budget first had to be approved by the Supreme Patriarch. Before this period, the king or Minister of Public Instruction had full authority to control this portion of benefits from the monastic land. This was the first time in Thai history that the ecclesiastical government (Sangha) and Supreme Patriarch (Prince Krommaluang Chinnawon Siriwat) had formal control over the property management of deserted monastic land—a legal decision which brought the power to senior monks who were the ecclesiastical governors and cabinet members, also called the members of the Council of Elders (Mahathera Samakhom).

**The End of Royal Commissions for New Monastic complexes**

Because of this critical turning point in educational management, the tradition of constructing royal monastic complexes to honor the king’s reign came to the end. King Vajiravudh announced that there were enough wats in Bangkok and the maintenance and renovation of these Buddhist structures were already a serious burden for the government. Instead of Buddhist structures, the focus shifted to the construction of schools. King Vajiravudh claimed that schools would serve a similar role in society as

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Buddhist wats, which had historically functioned as centers for religious affairs and education in the pre-modern period\textsuperscript{541}. He stressed that in the past, people went to wats for education but in the present day, the situation of Siamese society had changed, and thus people needed secular teachers not monks.

The king’s speech implied that the Buddhist wats had become obsolete, and was incompatible with modern education and society. Thai children now needed leaders and mentors who were lay persons not members of a monastic community\textsuperscript{542}. In his letter to the Minister of Public Instruction\textsuperscript{543}, he encouraged people to build schools as a means of making merit and showing favor to the crown. In contrast, building new wats was no longer looked upon favorably. Although the king claimed that he wished to build schools to serve similar purposes that the royal wats served in the past, his Vajiravudh Witthayalai School was constructed following the British model of Eton School, which has long been an institution for only the elite. Moreover, it was a boarding school and its admission was limited to particular groups who had connections with the ruling class. Therefore, from the perspective of public facilities and contribution to society, this school was far different from royal wats which had served their local communities in the past.

Even though the royal wats was occasionally used exclusively by the royal elite who had constructed it for some special events, in everyday life, local people could still make merit with residential monks, offer alms in the morning, and use the monastery’s grounds. In contrast, the private boarding school modeled after the Eton School was secluded from its surrounding community and did not provide any public space. The fact that King Vajiravudh constructed the Vajiravudh Witthayalai boarding school instead of a royal wat to celebrate his reign reflected a major turning point in the concept of urban

\textsuperscript{541} Wachirawut Witthayalai, (Bangkok: Thai Khasem, 1971).
\textsuperscript{542} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{543} Kanphirom Suwannanon, “Phrabat Somdet Phra mongkutklao Chaoyoohao Kab Kan Sang Chat Thai (King Vajiravudh and his Nation Building Programs)” (Master Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1981), 155, citing Letter from King Vajiravudh to Phraya Wisutsuriyasak on 7 July, 1911.
community, in that it signaled the exclusion of the Buddhist wats from its major historical role in society and also segregated the space for higher education from other public facilities. Moreover, this shift meant that building a Buddhist wat was no longer the key symbol of the king’s righteousness. Constructing facilities for modern education became new symbols to demonstrate the ability of the rulers to manage and govern the modern nation-state.

The Creation of the Department of Fine Arts

On March 27, 1911, King Vajiravudh ordered the establishment of the Department of Fine Arts. This new department was comprised of the former units of royal dance, artisans and guilds which produced crafts, architectural structures and embellishments located in various departments of the government. However, the biggest proportion of skilled craftsmen were from the Department of Public Instruction (Thammakan), which was responsible for the renovation of royal wats, and the Department of Public Construction in the Ministry of Public Construction (Yothathikan), which was the key authority for constructing royal architecture during King Rama V period. The Department of Museums, which developed from the Society of Antiquities, was established in 1907 after King Rama V’s second trip to Europe. From these trips, Rama V adopted the European ideology of preserving ruins and antiquities as the nation’s symbols of civilization. This Department was also moved from the Ministry of Public Instruction to join the new Department of Fine Arts.

The establishment of the Department of Fine Arts represented the central government’s endorsement and adoption of European ideas about the preservation of antiquities. This department was not under any ministry and was controlled directly by the king. The king appointed his uncle, Prince Naretworrarit, who had made several trips to Europe and America, and was the former Minister of the Bangkok Municipality in the reign of King Rama V, as the Department’s first director. This separation of royal arts
and traditional craftsmanship from the Department of Public Construction and the Department of Public Instruction also signaled another important turning point. No longer were the symbols and motifs of traditional Buddhist cosmological architecture seen as representations of the divine royal power; now they were seen as icons of nationhood whose presence embellished the rational, urban infrastructure of the modern, civilized Metropolis. Architecture of the royal wat was now considered by the government to be a symbol of the nation’s heritage and past glory that needed to be preserved rather than a center of everyday life.

**Democratic Religious Law of 1941**

By 1941, the government under Field Marshal Phibunsongkram revoked the old 1902 Religious Law and implemented a new one with more democratic structures for the ecclesiastical administration. In Article 43 of this law, the Minister of Education gained full authority to manage and maintain the properties of deserted wats and Buddhist central assets. Regarding the property of these wats, the management had to follow the guideline decisions of the cabinet ministry. This law reversed Article 7 in the Religious Law of 1902 which stated that the religious assets were under the monarch’s protection and no one else could challenge this power. By the law of 1902, the king exercised his power through the administration of the Minister of Public Instruction, who could not oppose either the king or Prince Wachirayan. In contrast, the law of 1941 shifted the direct power to manage religious properties from the king to the democratic-like cabinet and the Minister of Education, who ideologically represented the power of the whole nation-state not the divine ruler. The law of 1941 also appointed the Department of Religious Affairs to be the secretary office of the ecclesiastical administration.

The structure of the ecclesiastical administration also changed from having only eight senior governors, a Supreme Patriarch, and the council of the elders (Mahathera Samakhom) to a democratic body. This body was comprised of an ecclesiastical congress
(Sangha Sapha), an ecclesiastical cabinet (Sanghamontri) and an ecclesiastical court. The real power now was in the hands of the new position of the Ecclesiastical Prime Minister (Sanghanayok) not the Supreme Patriarch. As described previously, during the reign of King Prachathipok (Rama VII), the monarch and his cabinet decided to turn the control over Buddhist central assets to the Supreme Patriarch. In contrast, now the power to control Buddhist central assets was located in the ecclesiastical realm, and was divided among the new ecclesiastical democratic agencies, while the power of the Minister of Education was consolidated. This meant that any monastic regulation that the Supreme Patriarch refused to approve within seven days could be passed if the Minister of Education agreed with the ecclesiastical congress. Given this power of veto, we can say that the Minister of Education was the “real” Supreme Patriarch again.

Ironically, with these administrative changes, the Supreme Patriarch and the monarch essentially lost all control of religious affairs and management of religious assets, even though the Buddhist institution had historically derived from the divine powers of both. The law also added that the management of wat’s property was the responsibility of the abbot, while the previous law only indicated in general terms that the abbot should strive to maintain his wat in good condition. In addition, according to Article 57 of the 1941 Religious Law, a monk with a position given by the power of this law was also considered an official according to the Criminal Law of 1939, and would be tried as an official in the case of wrongdoing. Moreover, in Article 56, if a lay accountant (waiyawatchakon) committed wrongdoing, he or she was subjected to the same punishment as an official who committed wrongdoing according to the Criminal Law. So, the abbot was now obligated by law to handle the monastic properties under the supervision of the government. Moreover, if someone resisted the abbot’s orders, they

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544 Even though this has been stipulated in the 1941 Religious Law, it is still not entirely clear under what circumstances the monks are considered or tried as officials.
545 Nikhom Musikama, Naw Thang Patibat nai Kan Sa-nguan Raksaboransathan tham Phraratchabanyat Boransathan Boranwatthu Silpawatthu lae Phiphithaphanhasathan hang Chat Pho. So. 2504 kaekhai
could be punished under the Criminal Law Code\textsuperscript{546}. This appointment meant that the duties of the lay manager (\textit{makkhanayok}), who was appointed by the king according to the Law of 1902 to check on the abbot’s performance, was significantly reduced, because he or she did not have any legal protection to oppose the orders of an abbot, who effectively acted as an owner of a \textit{wat}. Later on, this position of lay manager gradually vanished, because \textit{wats} did not appoint anyone after the old lay managers retired. Although the Department of Religious Affairs increased its role and involvement with monastic assets, with his new legal status, the abbot could ask the ecclesiastical government for permission to withdraw his \textit{wat} from the management control of the Department of Religious Affairs\textsuperscript{547}. During the first decade of the People’s Party government, the historical importance of Buddhist institutions was largely disregarded. The new government essentially eliminated the connection to the monarch, tried to gain control over the revenue of the Buddhist central assets, and finally acquired some of this revenue for developing modern education.

\textbf{The Emergence of the Nation’s Heritage and Preservation Law 1935}

A second major transformation during this period was the new concept of national history and culture, and the corollary practice of historic preservation. The People’s Party government revived the Department of Fine Arts in 1933 and moved it to the Ministry of

\textsuperscript{546} The law was not clear about the legal status of the abbot but by the Matra or Article 57 it indicated that monks with positions according to this law were the officials according to Criminal Law Code. According to Matra or Article 37, the position involving with appointing preceptors, administration of ecclesiastical government was defined by ecclesiastical congress. Thus, the position of abbots was varied depended on the appointment and decision of Ecclesiastical Congress. However, according to Supreme Court Decision 2003-5/2500, the Supreme Court defined the position of abbot as a government official committing corruption and subjected to be fined according to Criminal Law code. Moreover, all abbots of royal monastic complexes in Bangkok must be patriarchs and thus were also officials according to Criminal Law.

\textsuperscript{547} For example, Wat Noranatsunthikaram asked ecclesiastical cabinet in 1958 to take its own revenue management out of the hand of the Department of Religious Affairs. The ecclesiastical cabinet deferred the case to hear from the Department of Religious Affairs. From \textit{Rai-ngarn Kan Prachum Sanghamontri Pho. So. 2501} (Report of Ecclesiastical Cabinet), 13/2501 20 August, 1958, No. 12, p 9.
Moral Instruction again. In 1935, the king abdicated from the throne, and the government dissolved the Ministry of Palace (Wang) into a small department. Various cultural units including dancers, craftsmen, artists and art equipment were transferred to the Department of Fine Arts, and with all these royal cultural treasures in its hands, the government passed the first historic preservation law in 1935 with the aim of preserving national heritage.

At this juncture, it is important to clarify the meaning of the word “history” as it came to be defined in Thai during this period. According to Barmé, the Thai word *prawattisat* was first introduced by Luang Wichitwathakan, the propagandist of this new government, to fit the meaning of the English word “history” connoting the linear historiography of the nation-state. Prior to this period, the old Thai words for history were *Tamnan* and *Phongsawadan*. *Tamnan* refers to the Buddhist legends that focused on the Lord Buddha’s life and connected his life and teachings to the history of the kingdom by describing the righteous acts of the monarchs who promoted Buddhist religion. *Phongsawadan* referred to the royal chronicles which focused on the history and deeds of the royal rulers. Prawattisat, in contrast, was history focusing on nations and races. This concept of nationalist history was utilized more when Luang Wichitwathakan became the Director General of the Department of Fine Art in 1934.

Although Luang Wichit’s most popular works were mainly in literature, plays and songs broadcasted by the Radio of Thailand, historic preservation and religious affairs were nevertheless influenced by his nationalist ideology. This situation was different from the previous nationalist policies of King Vajiravudh, who promoted the concept of the nationalism but under the leadership of the monarch, and whose narratives still preserved the monarch’s status as a supreme Buddhist benevolent leader.

By contrast, because of Luang Wichitwatthakan’s nationalist focus on the heritage and culture of the Thai race, the meaning of the royal *wats* as places where kings demonstrated their merit and benevolent support of Buddhism was called into question. Now, rather than symbolizing the glory and righteousness of the king, the royal *wats* became symbols of the Thai nation under the supervision and management of the Department of Fine Arts.

However, one of the consequences of this paradigm shift was that the royal monastic complex was no longer regarded as a living community, but rather as a historical artifact. By 1936, the first historic structure was listed, and the central area comprising the wall of the former inner city was classified as being under the historic district. According to Nikom Musikama\(^{550}\), when the government announced the preservation guidelines, the Department of Fine Arts followed the international concept and philosophy that focused on preserving the original construction and materials in keeping with a romantic approach.

### Bangkok’s Urban Structure in Nationalism Period

#### Royal Expansion in Rama VI-VII

During King Vajiravudh’s reign, the road was expanded using materials from old buildings. Most of the new streets were constructed in the south of Bangkok’s old city while Chinatown expanded inland\(^{551}\). Further southeast of the area of Chinatown, the Western stores, hotels and houses were built on the green thoroughfares of Chareonkrung, Suriwongs and Silom Road. From 1900 to 1936, the developed area of

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\(^{551}\) Ibid., 282.
Bangkok expanded from 13 to 43 square kilometers\textsuperscript{552}. Moreover, from 1906 to 1911, the number of registered automobiles increased from 251 to 622 cars, 2,698 rickshaws, and 347 pedi-cabs\textsuperscript{553}. Unlike his predecessor, King Vajiravudh never built any canals or maintained them to celebrate his reign. In addition, in 1916, the floating houses on major canals of Bangkok’s inner city were outlawed, resulting in the limitation and reduction of a traditional aquatic community\textsuperscript{554} (see Map 6.1). Now the center of royal activities was located at the Dusit Villa in the northern suburban area, while the inner city space was transformed to house government offices, adding to those structures that were built during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Fewer palaces were constructed than in previous reigns, and most of them were located in the eastern and northeastern areas outside the city’s ring canal. These were extensions of the old royal villas, such as the Dusit villa in the north, Phrayathai in the northeast, and Prathumwan in the east. The king also built a new villa called Chitlada near the Dusit area. New military camps were located near the villa area\textsuperscript{555}. Bangkok became more equipped with Western public facilities. Chulalongkorn University was founded in 1917, followed by the construction of a modern hospital and the establishment of Lumpini Park, which was intended to be a site for international expositions and the Baroque-style railway station. By the end of King Vajiravudh’s reign in 1925, all eight fortresses of the outer ring canal were demolished.

\textsuperscript{552} Marc Askew, \textit{Bangkok: Place. Practice and Representation}, 41.
\textsuperscript{553} Naengnoi Saksi, \textit{Ong Prakob Thang Kayaphap Krung Rattanakosin} (Physical composition of Rattanakosin City), 282.
\textsuperscript{555} Chaloeylakana Wongtrangan, Thai elite strucggle in the 1932 revolution” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Jonh Hopkins University, 1988), 160-161.
Map 6.1. The series of maps of Bangkok showing the transformation of canal, road network and urban blocks from the reign of King Rama IV to the end of WWII.

Based on Naengnoi Saksi, Ongprakop thang kaiyaphap Krung Rattanakosin (Physical composition of Rattanakosin City).
and only five fortresses in the inner ring canal were spared. By the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, only two fortresses in the inner ring canal remained\(^{556}\) (see Map 6.2).

**Erasing the Royal Past during the People Party and Dictator Period**

Before WWII, new, Western-style urban monuments were constructed in Bangkok to honor the nationalist regime and to create national heroes. Some of these structures include the Democracy Monument at the center of Ratchadamnoen Klang Avenue, the royal boulevard of King Chulalongkorn, and the Victory Monument for celebrating the triumph over French Indochina on Phaholyothin Road. Moreover, the new government also ordered the construction of modernist buildings along Ratchadamnoen Klang Avenue, creating a strong urban edge along this boulevard. Before the revolution, some western-style royal monuments were already constructed by the royal rulers to beautify Bangkok’s public space, such as the equestrian statue of King Chulalongkorn at the Dusit villa and the statue of King Rama I at the entrance of the first bridge across the Chao Phraya River. At this time, the monuments were used to establish the new public space of the new nationalist regime. The western style palaces of the king and key ministerial princes were confiscated and turned into the government offices, while the area inside the city wall was listed as a historic district. For instance, several throne halls in the Dusit Royal villa were used as a parliament buildings and military offices. Two universities were established within the city wall. In 1935, Thammasat University was established at the Viceroy Palace, and in 1947, the University of Fine Arts or Silpakorn University was founded at the palace of Prince Narit, the chief architect of King Chulalongkorn. These functional transformations reflected the political change from an absolute monarchy to the new nationalist regime, but in fact had only an insignificant impact on the physical form of historic Bangkok. Moreover, Bangkok also expanded

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Map 6.2. The series of maps of Bangkok showing the growing number of government office buildings and the decreasing number of the palaces from the reign of King Rama V to the end of WWII.

Based on ibid.
following the construction of a new highway to the northern region, Phaholyothin Road, and the construction of a southeastern highway, Sukhumvit Road. During the military regime of Field Marshal Phibun, from 1938 to 1944, there were few changes in the urban pattern of Bangkok, even though the population of Bangkok had grown faster than the nation’s population rate.

After World War II, in the context of Cold War politics, financial support from the USA, World Bank and the United Nations increased significantly. However, the government expenditure programs were uncoordinated, resulting in more accumulation and spending in the capital’s economic activities and a resultant consolidation of Bangkok’s urban dominance. From 1947 to 1957, the period of Field Marshal Phibun’s second military regime, the number of private cars increased by over 650 percent, and Bangkok’s number of cars was 87 percent of all cars in Thailand. Without any policy for using Bangkok’s watercourses, the canal system in Bangkok became shallow, stagnant, and unsanitary. The government solved the canal problem by filling many of them up to pave new roads instead. Between 1952 to 1957, more government buildings were constructed, mixing the Thai traditional and modern style along the outer main boulevard or Ratchadamnoen Nok Avenue and the outer ring canal of Bangkok’s historic district. In terms of the expansion of Bangkok, in 1954, the government completed the construction project of the new port at Klong Toey, located south of Bangkok’s Eastern communities, and this new facility greatly increased Bangkok’s international export-import capacity. The demand of cheap labor for the new port and the government’s

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557 His full title was Phibunsongkhram.
558 Marc Askew, Bangkok: place, practice and representation, 47; and Larry Sternstein, Portrait of Bangkok (Bangkok: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 1982), 94.
policies to charge premiums on rice exports exacerbated the rural-urban income disparity and increased the number of immigrants from rural areas. This also increased the investment in industries in Bangkok’s urban areas, and between 1936 and 1958, which was the year of Sarit’s coup d’état, the built-up area of Bangkok expanded from 43 to 96 square kilometers (see Map 6.3 and 6.4).

Monastic Structures in the Nationalist Period

Blueprint of the National Monastic Complex

By 1940, the idea of promoting a typical monastic blueprint which had been initiated by Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan was revived. However this time, the plan was implemented widely by the nationalistic government under the leadership of Field Marshall Phibun. He ordered the Artisan Division in the Department of Fine Arts (Kong Hatthasin Silpakram) under Phra Phromphichit (U Lapanont) to delineate the standard drawings for ordination halls. The standard plans were the modern and simplified versions of the Central-Thai Bangkok style, meaning that they had less detailed colored-glass elaboration for the top roof and window frames and used more concrete-sculpted details. The standard blueprints were divided into three classifications. These were small, intermediate and large-scale, depending on the different financial situation of the rural monastic complexes rather than the differences in local character or social context. In the same year, the standard blueprints were sent to the Ministry of Public Instruction, and the ecclesiastical government was instructed to distribute the plans to the ecclesiastical officers and abbots in every province. The letter from the Director of Public Instruction (Krom Thammakan) explained that most of the ordination halls of regional wats were not beautiful or well-proportioned, and thus were unsuitable to represent the national culture (wattanatham khong chat). Thus, the Prime Minister
ordered the Department of Fine Arts to delineate these three typical designs, which the ecclesiastical cabinet already agreed to distribute.\textsuperscript{563}

Within the newly centralized structure of the ecclesiastical administration, the rural \textit{wats} had to submit their construction plans to their district, provincial, and regional governors before entering the ecclesiastical government at Bangkok. The construction of a monastic structure also needed the consent of district directors, educational officials, and provincial governors. These officials had to coordinate with ecclesiastical officers, and the standard blueprint was implemented through the parallel hierarchical structure of both the governments. Because of these various state-led initiatives to promote the standard blueprints, abbots were strongly inclined to renovate their \textit{wats} by replicating royal monastic complexes in Bangkok rather than by using local architectural characteristics. As several scholars have argued, the promotion of a standard monastic blueprint during this period destroyed the local character of Buddhist structures, leading to homogenous construction throughout the nation. Moreover, this initiative transformed the royal monastic complexes in Bangkok into the icons of Thai Buddhist architecture representative of the entire nation, therefore also changing the historical meaning and community function of the royal monastic complexes inasmuch as these edifices now were seen to belong to the entire nation-at-large (see Plate 6.2).

\textbf{The Continuity of Chulalongkorn’s Legacy in Syncretistic Architecture of Royal Monastic Complex of Democracy}

In 1940, the same year that Phibun ordered to produce a standard blueprint of the monastery, he also ordered Phra Promphichit to construct “Wat Prachathipatai” or the

\textsuperscript{563} Krom Thammakan (Department of Religious Affairs), \textit{Thalangkan Khanasong lem thi 28 Phutthasakarat 2483} (Announcement of Ecclesiastical Government Vol.28, 1940), 1080. Letter from Director of Department of Religious Affairs to Ecclesiastical Government.
Map 6.3. Map of Bangkok in 1921-1922 (Rama VI’s reign) originally delineated in 10 separated pieces and recomposed by the author.

Unpublished Survey Map of Bangkok in 1921-1922 from the archive of the Royal Survey Department.
Map 6.4. Map of Bangkok in 1945 showing the growing urban blocks at the southeastern part of Bangkok.

Figure 6.2. Standard Plan for ordination hall (1940) ordered by Prime Minister Phibun.
Monastic Complex of Democracy. This monastic complex was constructed to commemorate the transformation to democracy and it was initiated one year after the government announced the name change of Siam to Thailand. Phra Phromphichit had also worked under Prince Narit during the period of King Vajiravudh. Therefore, the arrangement of the monastic complex space is similar to the famous Wat Benchamabophit, the royal marble *wat* of King Chulalongkorn. The main building is the ordination hall designed in a crucible plan with a corridor embracing a rectangular space. The architectural details of the ordination hall were in reinforced concrete instead of elaborated wood carving for lower material cost. However, the difference is the position of the main pagoda. In the Monastic complex of Democracy, the gigantic pagoda was placed in front of the main building which is unique and different from the traditional practice of placing the pagoda at the center with either a shrine or ordination hall at the front. The monastic complex was initially assigned to house monks from both the Royal Reform Sect (Thammayutika Nikay) and the Commoner Sect (Maha Nikay) but later on, only the Reform Sect monks stayed. The construction of this monastic complex can be seen as the government’s effort to legitimize the authority of the military dictator, Phibun, and as a manifestation of the emergent nationalist ideology that only the military could protect the nation, religion and monarchy. This royal *wat* also represented the government’s attempt to resolve the conflicts between the Commoner Order and the Royal Order. If Wat Benchamabophit of King Chulalongkorn was a manifestation of the contestation between these two Siamese Buddhist orders, Wat Prachathipatai (later, rename Wat Phra Sri Mahathat) of the People’s Party was the endeavor to reconcile this monastic cleavage.

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564 Somkhit Chirathatsanakul, *Kati Sanyalak lae Khwammai khong Soom Pratoo Nathang Thai* (Ideology, Symbol and Meaning of Thai Door and Window) (Bangkok: Silpakorn University, 2004), 363.
Political Contestation in Monastic Architecture

Discursive Shift: From Limiting Monastic Properties to Expanding Holy Space for Increasing Revenue

During the early period of the new People’s Party government, the letters of correspondence between Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri and the Prime Minister Army Col. Phraya Phaholphonphayuhasena indicated the government’s shifting discourse vis-à-vis the monastic complexes, from limiting the growth of monastic properties (Thi Thoranisong) in the previous regime to supporting the expansion of monastic land in hope of exploiting its revenue. For instance, the recommendation of Thammasakmontri to dissolve the urban monastic complex and convert its residential quarters to shop-houses for rent signified the shifting the significance of the monastery, with its social value giving way to its economic value of land speculation. At the end of King Vajiravudh’s reign (Rama VI) and the beginning of King Prachathipok’s reign (Rama VII), the monastic properties of both vacant and living monastic complexes were under the control of the Supreme Patriarch, with the understanding of the king and his princely cabinet ministers that revenue from renting the lands would be used only for religious purposes. In contrast, the People’s Party’s regime tried to gain control of the monastic complex in order to benefit from the prosperity of the monastic land properties. The archival documents also indicate that the revolutionary government borrowed money from the ecclesiastical government. Therefore, the policies regarding the use of monastic revenue had completely shifted from the purposes of maintaining Buddhist religion to secular government’s expenditure.

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The Monastic Ruined Caught between a Civilian and Military Government

However, within the People’s Party that formed the government in 1933, there were growing conflicts among the civilian and military factions which had developed and broke out after World War II. The political turmoil that resulted as a consequence of these political rivalries within the government produced confusing and inconsistent practices in both the Fine Arts and Religious Affairs departments. For instance, when the civilian faction led by Pridi Phanomyong, the regent and figure head of Free Thai Movement, gained control of the government in 1943, he encouraged resettlement within the city wall of Ayutthaya, his hometown and the historic capital city of the ancient Siamese kingdom566, which King Chulalongkorn had already designated as a preservation site as his first act of following the Western concept of historic preservation. In this year, the government also revoked several articles of the 1935 Historic Preservation Law. For instance, in 1947, the government allowed the sale of old brick and materials from historic sites. The result was the destruction of several hundred historic ruins567, mostly pagodas within Ayutthaya’s city island, even though the previous revolutionary government had ordered the registration of the historic structures of this town as well as Sukhothai in 1935. However, when Field Marshal Phibun returned to the premiership in 1948, the Ministry of Culture revoked the government permit for selling old bricks.

The Monastic complex Caught between the Modern Nation’s Heritage and Traditional Legitimacy

When the military faction led by Army Col. Phibunsongkram took power in 1938, the propaganda of nationalism and militarism became stronger with the promotion of the

567 Ibid.
nation’s constitutionalism. The interpretation of Thai history by Luang Wichitwathakan came to focus on the glory of the pure Thai race, and in one of his writings about Thai music and architecture, the image of the royal monastic complex of Wat Pho was glorified as the being the “Jewel of Asia and the best example of Thai art.”\(^{568}\) In fact, it is interesting to note that most of the architectural elaboration found at Wat Pho was in the Chinese motifs dating to the third reign. Moreover, in 1942, the Department of Fine Arts was moved under the direct command of the Office of Prime Minister.

In addition, when the military faction staged the coup 1948, Field Marshal Phibun was invited to take the premier post again, and in this position he created the Council of Culture which he later upgraded to the Ministry of Culture as a larger umbrella for the department. He also took a post as its first commander and used it as his instrument to promote nationalistic policies. It is important to note that the word \textit{watthanatham} was newly coined to convey the English meaning of “culture” around the period of the revolution\(^{569}\). Literally, the word \textit{wattanatham} derives from the word “\textit{watthana}” which literally means acts of development and “\textit{tham},” which comes from “\textit{dharma}” meaning morality and righteousness. Therefore, the word “\textit{watthanatham}” not only connotes the meaning of culture but also implies the Western idea of development and the progress act of the nation. By initiating the standard blueprint of monastic architecture, in its hyper nationalistic propaganda, the government now portrayed the royal monastic complex as a physical manifestation of national culture instead of its previous image as a symbol of monarch’s legitimacy and righteousness.

Moreover, the People’s Party government at first prohibited any public ritual associated with the monarch, but when the army faction took power again in 1948, its


\(^{569}\) From Scott Barmé in \textit{Luang Wichitwathakan and the Creation of National Identity}, 160; he found that the word Wattanatham was not in dictionary of 1929 but was used widely in 1934.
leader, Field Marshal Phibun sought to imitate the role of the monarch by patronizing Buddhist wats publicly. For instance, he ordered the restoration of numerous Buddhist wats while the standard nationalist blueprint was being implemented, and in 1951 and 1956, he restored 1,117 and 1,238 wats respectively. The expenditures for restoration also had risen in response to the growing power of his political competitors. He also promoted the grand-scale celebration for the 2500 year anniversary of the Buddhist religion. When he took office in 1948, his policies dealing with Buddhist institutions were very different from his first premiership beginning in 1938. In the context of Cold War politics, increasing American military support, and the growing power of his key military generals, Field Marshal Phibun distinguished himself from his younger military strongmen by attempting to transform his political role from a nationalist/fascist leader to be a more democratic head of state. Therefore, to win legitimacy from people, he endeavored to imitate the role of the monarchy in supporting the Buddhist religion, while still retaining his reputation as a national leader competing with the traditional aura of the king.

Discursive Contestation: Department of Fine Arts and Religious Affairs

During this period, the place of the monastic complex shifted from being part of the kingdom or the holy realm to being part of a new discursive regime centered on the nation. Within this new regime, the monastic complex was deployed on the one hand by the Department of Fine Arts to promote the ideology of the national heritage, while on the other hand, the Department of Religious Affairs sought to control the Buddhist central assets. The first Historic Preservation Law of 1934 provided the Director of Fine Arts Department immense authority of both eminent domain to takeover historic properties

571 Ibid., 127-139.
from private owners, and police power to enforce the preservation law. With this new power, several old and big royal monastic complexes with large-scale structures and architectural elaboration became a contested space between the Department of Fine Arts, the Department of Religious Affairs, and resident monks. As mentioned previously, the Department of Fine Art officials employed a Romantic approach based on Ruskin’s British preservationist model to restore and sustain the originality of historic structures. However for living royal wats, this approach created tensions with the resident monks and local communities, who renovated monastic complexes following traditional approaches that altered historic structures incrementally.

In terms of vacant monastic space, if there was any ruin on site, the Department of Fine Arts had the legal sanction to list these historic structures under its protection, and had the right to use police power to punish any violators. At the same time, the Department of Religious Affairs could also assert its authority to take care of Buddhist central assets. Both departments had different laws backing their standing points. Following the Religious Law of 1902, an abbot with the support of the Ministry of Public Instruction had the full authority to manage his religious property, and as such, he could not allow his monastic complex to degrade. In addition, with the new Religious Law of 1941, an abbot’s status was also considered that of a government official according to civil law. Consequently, if an abbot failed to protect his monastic property, as a government official, he could be subjected to punishment. As we saw above, religious asset management was also modernized by Prince Wachirayan in order to be more independent from secular or royal patrons and competitive with other world religions.

Moreover, the People’s Party government became interested in using and converting urban monastic space into rentable properties. The new religious law of 1941 indicated that the Department of Religious Affairs was a secretary of the Ecclesiastical Congress. This meant that the government took control of the religious assets from the ecclesiastical government through the Department of Religious Affairs. On the other
hand, with preservation law, the Director of Department of Fine Arts also had full
authority to stop any construction by resident monks that might have been considered a
significant alteration of the nation’s heritage. Although the law empowered the Director
General of the Department of Fine Arts, it did not provide any financial support or
incentive to owners of historic properties. Within the same ministry, the Department of
Religious Affairs and Department of Fine Arts deployed totally different policies and
discourses in their management of Buddhist holy space.

Preserving and Museumizing the Nation’s Heritage vs. Saving Buddhist
Assets

By this time, the monastic space and structure had become a contested field
categorized by intensive battle between the Department of Fine Arts, which deployed
the discourse of saving the nation’s heritage, and the Department of Religious Affairs,
which deployed the discourse of using Buddhist religious assets to generate revenue to
maintain Buddhist institutions. The discourse of saving the nation’s heritage derived from
the European idea of preserving traces of the “Lost Past.” Within this concept, the
traditional architecture of the monastic complex was treated as belonging to the nation’s
past and therefore totally separate from modern society. Moreover, along with the
promotion of national identity and the three pillars of Nation-Religion-King since King
Vajiravudh’s period, the image of Buddhist monastic complexes had become the symbol
of the nation’s cultural identity. This was exacerbated by the fact that since the period of
King Prachathipok, the government had merged the national museum (the British-
influenced museum originally inaugurated by King Chulalongkorn to house the nation’s
cultural heritage) into the Department of Fine Arts. This merger meant that the
implementation of heritage preservation of monastic complexes was influenced by
museum policies, and as such, the space of royal monastic complexes also became a part
of the nation’s museum, exhibiting the nation’s cultural heritage.
On the other hand, the discourse of generating and managing Buddhist religious assets was based on a more traditional relationship between the Buddhist supreme ruler and the Buddhist religious realm. Since Prince Wachirayan redefined the practice of granting sima in Rama VI’s reign, the space inside the boundary of the monastic complex was considered “wisungkhamasima,” meaning that it belonged to the Buddhist religious realm and was separated from the secular world. This connoted the merit of the ruler as a great “world renouncer,” and also reflected not linear time but rather the concept of cyclical history that past, present and future were integrated, inasmuch as in traditional Buddhist conceptions of time and action, one’s past store of merit could affect the present and future. The government also accepted that Buddhist monastic structures beyond the boundary of the monastic complex belonged to the holy realm and also sought to control the management of these monastic properties through the Department of Religious Affairs, in order to make sure that these assets would not deteriorate.

National Symbol and Buddhist Holy Space

In 1942, Prime Minister Major General Phibun sent a request to the ecclesiastical government to install a Thai national flag in every Buddhist monastic complex as in other government public buildings, in order to persuade the populace to worship the nation’s flag. The ecclesiastical cabinet (Sanghamontri) decided to defer the premier’s demand. Prime Minister Phibun’s request could be seen as the effort to integrate nationalist symbols into the monastic complex’s space. In the past, the symbols in royal monastic complexes were Hindu mythical icons or royal regalia representing the aura of the kings and Buddhist mythology. Thus, these symbols within the monastic complex portrayed the unification of religious belief and state ideology.

While the Sanghamontri may have had various intentions in rejecting Phibun’s proposal to install flags in every wat, I wish to suggest that he was rejected the introduction of the flag because it was different from these previous symbolic practices. The nation’s flag is the symbol of the modern nation-state stemming from the enlightenment ideology which had already rejected the power of religious institutions in Europe. It represents the nation as an entity without a god or royal ruler above the people. The installation of the nation’s flag signified the state’s attempt to subsume the Buddhist religion of the old kingdom within the new ideology of nationalism. The response of the ecclesiastical government deferring the premier’s request reflected a contestation in the meaning of the monastic space.

**Wat Pho in the Context of Nationalism**

**Wat Pho’s Vicinity: Arrival of Government Offices and Shop-houses**

During the reign of King Rama VI, the four palaces at the south of Wat Pho were demolished and combined to be the headquarters of the Ministry of Commerce\(^{573}\) which was called the Department of Commercial Promotion. The palace at the southern end in this group was turned into the police station of the Grand Palace District. The area north of the factory for making cement construction materials was the Department of Treasury of the Ministry of Palace Affairs, and north of this department building was the Office of Steamship Regiment No. 4\(^ {574}\). The area south of Phra Phiphit Road facing Rachini Road was transformed into the Ministry of Agriculture. The area next to Ministry of Agriculture facing Sanamchai Road was the army factory\(^ {575}\). The groups of small palaces along Sanamchai Road and Suan Chaochet Park were purchased from the king and in

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573 Ibid., 188 citing in the Department of Fine Arts, *Chotmaihet kan anurak Krung Rattanakosin* (Chronicle of Preservation of Rattanakosin City) (Bangkok: SahaprachaPhanit, 1982), 487.
574 Royal Survey Department, Survey Map of Bangkok 1922, started on 28 February, 1922 and finished on 10 June, 1922.
575 Ibid.
1924, he ordered to construct the Rathchawallop army regiment building for the whole compound and in 1956, it became the headquarters of Army Reserve Office. The area south of the Ministry of Defense on Bamrung Mueang Road was the Middle School for Cadets.

From the time of King Mongkut to King Vajiravudh, the vicinity of Wat Pho was completely transformed. At the end of King Rama III’s reign, Wat Pho was a monastic complex surrounded by royal princes’ palaces and the Grand Palace, with its royal warehouses along the waterfront. By the reign of King Mongkut, a new typology of permanent built structures was introduced, exemplified by the mixed European style of the courthouse and Sino-Portuguese style shop-houses constructed in the vicinity of Wat Pho to house the westerners who served the king. Wat Pho became the first place that foreigners were exposed to Siamese culture. By the end of the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Wat Pho was located in the middle of a busy community comprised of the Tha Tien market, and the Chinese community began to dominate the area by gradually replacing the old community of bureaucrats, noblemen and royal service laborers. Although more palaces were constructed to the south, these were big manors built on isolated European-style grounds, not the sub-centers of feudal administration. Thus, there was no longer any need for the smaller residential communities of noblemen, servants and conscript laborers for serving the princes. In addition, the old city wall and fortress were demolished by these new palaces and shop-houses. The community around Wat Pho changed to be comprised of more Chinese and laborers involved with commercial activities. Moreover, by the reign of King Vajiravudh, the palaces of these princes were replaced with the new government offices, shop-houses and schools resulting in the dissolution of the old local community. The construction of shop-houses

576 Department of Fine Arts, Nam Chom Krung Rattanakosin (Guide to see Rattanakosin) (Bangkok: Amarin Printing, 1982), 305.
577 Royal Survey Department, Survey Map of Bangkok 1922, started on 28 February, 1922 and finished on 10 June, 1922.
also increased and brought in new communities, while the construction of government offices brought more civic officers to the area, but these latter populations were only involved in the day light working hours and not everyday life activities (see Map 6.5).

**Wat Pho’s History: Wat Pho at Dark**

**Wat Pho during King Vajiravudh**

When King Vajiravudh ascended to the throne in 1910, a royal visit to Wat Pho became a part of the royal circumnavigation for his coronation. At this time, Wat Pho’s physical appearance became a major consideration. In 1911, the Ministry of Public Construction finished the Reclining Buddha Shrine and asked the king for an auspicious time for the installation ceremony. The Minister of Public Construction, Prince Naretworrarit, sent the follow-up report of renovation confirming the finishing date as 1919 and asked for more financial support to speed up the process of renovation for celebrating the king’s coronation ceremony. Although this event seemed to fortify the monarch’s reputation in traditional practice, it could be seen as the modern spectacle to demonstrate the power of the leader in a modern nation-state.

This year, the king ordered the creation of the Department of Fine Arts. Along with the Department of Museums in the Ministry of Public Instruction, the construction guilds dealing with traditional architectural elaboration in the Ministry of Public Construction were transferred to the Department of Fine Arts. Therefore, the

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578 National Archive, R 6 S 9.1/72, Patisangkhon Wat Phrachetuphon Krungthep (Reconstruction of Wat Phrachetuphon), letter on 13 July, 1911, from Prince Krommamuen Naretworrarit to King Wachirawut via Prince Krommakun Supprasitprasong.
579 Ibid., letter on 31 July, 1911, from Prince Naretworrarit to King Vajiravudh. Prince Naretworrarit reported that the original proposal was to spend 648,936 baht in 17 years for the renovation of Wat Pho. From 1902 to 1911, the Ministry of Public Construction already spent 364,693 baht and still had 284,242 baht left for the rest of renovation. He asked for 39200 baht to accelerate the renovation to finish at the time of the king’s coronation.
Map 6.5. Wat Pho’s vicinity from Rama V’s reign to the end of WWII.

Unpublished Survey Map of Bangkok in 1921-1922 and the Plan of Bangkok B.E. 2439 (A.D. 1896) from the archive of the Royal Survey Department; Map of Bangkok in 1945 compiled and drawn by A.C. I. U. and War Office; Map of Bangkok in 1908 by the Department of Land.
responsibility for the renovation of Wat Pho was transferred to the hands of the Department of Fine Arts. The Department of Fine Arts took over the renovation of three grand pagodas, architectural details of the ordination hall and minor shrines.

In 1912, the lay manager, Luang Chamniyotha renovated the dilapidated area of the waterfront to be shop-houses for rent⁵⁸¹. Since 1894, the waterfront area of Wat Pho had become dilapidated and several local people occupied the plot without paying rent⁵⁸². The lay manager proposed to build forty five units of one-storey shop-houses, eleven units of two-storey shop-houses, and another forty mixed row houses. His construction project was accepted by the crown. Its construction cost of 58,000 baht was financed by the loan from Mahamakut Ratchawitthayalai, a university of the Reform Order, and from funding of Wat Thepsirin, a major monastic complex of the reform order which was in control of the Privy Purse Office (Krom Phra Khlang khang thi). Wat Pho had to pay interest of 5 percent per year. The revenue from the rent would help expenditure and pay back the loan⁵⁸³.

**Wat Pho under Prince Wachirayan: Wat Pho the Enterprise**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Prince Wachirayan became more influential during the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) and intervened in the management of the monastic properties. He also paid more attention to Wat Pho. In 1916, Luang Chamniyotha was released from his position and the Privy Purse Office took over the management of Wat Pho’s revenue⁵⁸⁴. As a reason for Luang Chamniyotha’s dismissal, the Ministry of Public Instruction cited Prince Wachirayan’s report to King

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⁵⁸¹ National Archive, R 6 S 9.2/8, Thi Thorani Song Wat Phrachetuphon Krungthep (Donation Land of Wat Phrachetuphon), letter on 14 May, 1912, from Chao Phraya Wisutsuriyasak, the Minister of Public Instruction, to the king.
⁵⁸² National Archive, R 5 N18.4/1, Sobsuan thi Wat Pho (Investigation of Wat Pho’s land).
⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 50.
Vajiravudh, which complained that Luang Chamniyotha did not perform his duties adequately as a lay manager\textsuperscript{585}. In the same year, Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan that it would take too long for Wat Pho to pay all the debts because the rent revenue of Wat Pho was portioned to pay back the interest and loan from the Privy Purse Office. He proposed to transform a portion of the loan to a partnership, sharing the benefits from the rent revenue. So, most of the rent benefits went to a saving’s account in the bank. If Wat Pho needed to pay expenditures, Wat Pho could withdraw some of the interest. If Wat Pho did not have any expenditure, the revenue would grow and Wat Pho could buy more shares from other partners and Wat Pho’s financial stability would recover faster\textsuperscript{586}. Finally, in 1935, Wat Pho paid most of the debt that it owed to the Privy Purse Office.

In 1917, Prince Wachirayan received royal permission to take control of the renovation of Wat Pho’s ordination hall and appointed four senior patriarchs including the abbot as the committee responsible for the ordination hall\textsuperscript{587}. In 1920, the ordination hall and its four cardinal shrines were replaced with concrete structures\textsuperscript{588}. The ornament and details of the roof of the ordination hall were also renovated in this period.

Since the reign of King Chulalongkorn, organizing festivities and Buddhist events to attract donors became Wat Pho’s major fund raising method. From 1917 to 1922, the abbot gave permission to private persons to organize the Thai New Year Festival and the revenue from the festival was used for the renovation of Wat Pho\textsuperscript{589}. From 1925 to 1931, the minor renovations still were conducted by the renovation committee. In 1931, the Supreme Patriarch decided to appoint the new committee members of Wat Pho’s management because the old ones had retired and passed away, and also during this

\textsuperscript{585} National Archive, R 6 S 25.2/107, Wat Phrachetuphon Phranakon, letter from Phraya Thammasakmontri to the king via Prince Krommaluang Prachinkitibodi, the king’s secretary.
\textsuperscript{587} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{588} Ibid., 38-39.
\textsuperscript{589} Ibid., 46.
period the government’s annual financial support of 40,000 baht was cut due to the limited budget during the economic recession period\textsuperscript{590}. Monks of Wat Pho relied heavily on their personal connections to fund the renovations. From approximately 1925\textsuperscript{591} to 1948, the resident monks of Wat Pho had to use their own financial support networks for renovating this first class royal monastic complex.

In 1931, in the reign of King Prachathipok, the Department of Religious Affairs created the Division of Religious Assets to replace the Department of Religious Donation Revenue. This division took over the management of Wat Pho’s rent revenue from the Privy Purse Office. Furthermore, the division took care of the construction of concrete protection walls at the waterfront area and the pier, replaced the old one-storey shop-houses with eighteen units of two-storey shops, and added eleven two-storey shop-houses to the vacant area in the south. The one-storey shop-houses along the city wall area were replaced by the new two-storey shop-houses and the Division of Religious Assets asked the permission to demolish the city wall to make the shop-houses face the new Maharat Road\textsuperscript{592}.

**Wat Pho and Modern Education: Wat Pho the Primary School**

Another important role of Wat Pho was its development of education. In 1875, King Chulalongkorn announced that there would be Thai and Mathematics classes in every royal monastic complex. In response to his new policy, the senior patriarch, Phra Udonkhanarak hired Nai Klom and Nai Prom to teach in Wat Pho. In 1901, Wat Pho

\textsuperscript{590} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{591} From the History of Wat Phrachetuphonwimonmangklararam, the author indicates that the new committee facing the financial support cut back after the appointment in 1931 but from the National Archive SR 201.10.2/23, the request letter of Mr. Cha-On Amphon, Congressman of Samutsongkram indicates that this 40,000 baht support was cut in 1925-1926 (2469). Therefore, I used the earliest year that was indicated in the National Archive.
\textsuperscript{592} Ibid., 50.
constructed a school and launched a donation campaign\textsuperscript{593}. On May 1, the school was inaugurated in the residential quarter of senior monk, Phra Udonkhanarak. In 1910, Wat Pho constructed a new Buddhist canon school with the financial support from minor princes and princesses\textsuperscript{594}. The government initiated the sanitary clean up of Wat Pho since many monks had contracted some unknown diseases and the cost of cleaning up was put up by several princes, lower ranking officials and inner palace women\textsuperscript{595}.

It was clear that Wat Pho monks tried to follow the change in policies of promoting modern education. The area of the residential quarter was altered to reflect the requirements of the modern school. Monks and their local supporters or royal patrons donated money to help establish the modern school, which actually was the duty of the royal government. In 1927 or 1928, another building was constructed next to the Buddhist Canon School and the two buildings were connected\textsuperscript{596}. In this year, Queen Aunt Sukhumal Marasri, King Chulalongkorn’s prominent consort, also constructed a school for studying Pali language and Buddhist moral teachings at the southeastern corner of the residential quarter, which was the residence of the meditation lineage of monks\textsuperscript{597}.

\textbf{Wat Pho in an Era of Turmoil: People’s Party and Dictators}

Without enough royal support, Wat Pho continued to organize festivals and Buddhist merit-making events to pay for its renovation costs, but these funds were insufficient, and by this time, the Central Religious Assets generated from rent revenue from deserted monasteries was burgeoning. Between 1932 and 1936, Wat Pho renovated the ordination hall and its top-roof architectural details (Chor-Fah and Bai Raka) by

\textsuperscript{593} National Archive, R 5 S 5/65 (W), Ruang Riarai Sang Rongrien thi Wat Phrachetuphon (Fund Raising for building public school in the monastic complex of Wat Phrachetuphon).
\textsuperscript{594} Ibid., letter on June 21, 1910, from Phra Palad Lieb to Chao Phraya Wichitwongwutthikrai.
\textsuperscript{595} Ibid., 43-49.
\textsuperscript{596} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{597} Ibid., 47.
getting loans from the Central Religious Assets\(^{598}\). Phra Ubali Khunupamachan (Puean Titsaro) became the abbot in 1941 and on August 19, 1946, he was elevated to the title of Somdet Phra Wannarat. He passed away in 1947, and most of the renovations during this period were from his private funds and from his own network of supporters. In 1942, Wat Pho renovated the corridor around the ordination hall using the revenue that the Division of Religious Assets managed. The corridor had deteriorated because it was used as a temporary camp for the Army Regiment \(^{599}\) during World War II in 1941\(^{600}\). In 1943, the grand Pagoda Sri Sanphetdayan was hit by lightning and the Reclining Buddha crumbled because of the vibration of the bombs at the Royal Navy Yard nearby\(^{601}\). The fundraising methods of Wat Pho became more elaborate. It revived an old sand pagoda building competition for the Thai New Year festival for renovation fundraising. In 1944, Phra Amonmoli (Pun Punnasiri) organized thirteen Mahachat\(^{602}\) chanting events during the out of lent period in order to collect money for necessities\(^{603}\). Several senior patriarchs expressed anxiety about the high responsibility of renovating the elaborate structures in Wat Pho and the burden of being a patriarch of this monastic complex\(^{604}\).

By this time, Wat Pho’ senior patriarchs’ social networks expanded to include their former temple boys, the Chinese community of Tha Tien, and minor royal princes and princesses. In 1945, during World War II, the renovation of the Reclining Buddha started with the initial funds from an unknown supporter and the owners of the Bai Pho pharmacy store, which occupied the shop-house on the land of the Privy Purse Office\(^{605}\).

\(^{598}\) Ibid., 43.
\(^{599}\) The army regiment’s title was Ro Phan 5.
\(^{600}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{601}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{602}\) It is the famous Jataka story of Vessantara, the last life of Bothisattava before reborn as Lord Buddha.
\(^{604}\) Ibid., 86.
\(^{605}\) Ibid., 78-79. The fundraising activities and several ceremonies began on 13 October, 1945 and ended on October 15, 1945 in order to raise funds for the renovation of the Reclining Buddha.
In 1946, Luang Norasetsanit and his wife, the owners of Sapphanit Store who used to live near Wat Pho, donated land and a shop-houses to Wat Pho for funding the maintenance of the monastery\textsuperscript{606}. From 1943 to 1948, Wat Pho’s revenue from donation increased significantly\textsuperscript{607}.

In 1947, Phra Thepwethi (Pun Punnasiri) became a new abbot. In 1948, the abbot of Wat Pho also asked for financial support of around 200,000 baht from the Prime Minister, Field Marshal Phibunsongkram, because he had heard that the government had earmarked funding for supporting the Buddhist Religion\textsuperscript{608}. As described in at the beginning of this chapter, by the second government, the Prime Minister Phibun tried to support Buddhist monastic complexes in order to gain legitimacy from the masses by representing himself as the traditional leader. Through these actions, he distinguished himself from his fellow military strongmen. He ordered the renovation of numerous Buddhist wats and Wat Pho also received some financial support during this time.

In 1948, the three residential buildings\textsuperscript{609} and the Klomphitthaya School, which was the first public school of Wat Pho, were demolished for constructing the new Somdet Wor Phor Tor Library. At the same time, the congressman, Cha-On Amphon, also solicited financial support from Phibunsongkram’s government. In his letter, he mentioned that several important wats such as Wat Phananchoeng in Ayutthaya and Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai received 100,000 baht for their renovation projects. He stated that Wat Pho was the best example of Thai arts and architecture, and it had received 40,000 baht per year in government support since the reign of King Chulalongkorn. However, the financial support for Wat Pho’s renovation was cut in

\textsuperscript{606} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{607} Ibid., 80-85. From 1943 to January of 1946, the funds for the Reclining Buddha had grown to 100,128 baht. From 1946 to 1948, the donations increased to 210,000 baht and the major supporter was the owner of Bai Pho Pharmacy store.
\textsuperscript{608} National Archive SR 201.10.2/23, letter on 9 August, 1948, from the abbot, Phra Thepwethi to Prime Minister Field Marshal Phibunsongkram.
\textsuperscript{609} The residential unit in the northern quarter No.12.
1926, during the reign of King Prachathipok. He mentioned that it had been twenty two years since Wat Pho had received financial support for renovations. If Wat Pho considered the accumulation of this loss, it meant that the government owed Wat Pho a total of 880,000 baht.

Moreover, he also claimed that the Ministry of Palace Affairs had taken the waterfront area of Wat Pho and was supposed to pay Wat Pho the renovation support of 40,000 baht. He also asked to receive the same amount of 100,000 baht for renovation and 50,000 baht yearly for general maintenance. He argued that the dilapidated condition of Wat Pho was the shame of the nation and degraded the reputation of the Thai nation in the eyes of the world because Wat Pho was the important place foreigners who paid a visit to the country. It is important to note that Congressman Cha-On Amphon was Wat Pho’s temple boy who had lived with and served the abbot Somdet Phra Wannarat (Puen) before he became the newspaper editor and congressman.

The Prime Minister replied to Mr. Cha-On Amphon by urging the Minister of Education to contact the abbot of Wat Pho. From Wat Pho’s documents, Wat Pho received 200,000 baht in 1948-1949, and between 1950 and 1953, it received a total of 500,000 baht from the government. On November 22, 1949, six years after Field Marshal Phibun passed the new Historic Preservation Law, Wat Pho’s sacred precinct was registered as a National Historic Place.
In 1950, Wat Pho also reported to the Ministry of Education asking to demolish its residential quarters for meditation lineage monks (Khana Kuti) in order to build a new public school since the number of monks in meditation practice had reduced significantly and Wat Pho had difficulty maintaining its structures. The construction of the new school was supported financially by Mr. Prayong Tanhtrongchit, the owner of Bai Pho Pharmacy store for 700,000 baht\(^6\). The Minister of Education sent the request to the Prime Minister in order to ask the regent of the king, and finally, the regent allowed the demolition of the meditation lineage residence\(^7\) which, as we remember, was added by King Rama III. In 1953 and 1954, the revenue of Wat Pho from the donation was up to around 260,000 baht\(^8\). Half of this amount came from the worshiping celebration of the Reclining Buddha and some minor amounts came from the Chinese New Year Festival\(^9\). Wat Pho’s space in this period shifted from being the cosmic space of royal rulers and noblemen to the community ground of the Chinese at Tha Tien.

The demolition of Wat Pho’s residential quarter of the meditation lineage monks to make the way for other functions that were more economically sound was not unusual. Since during the tenure of Prince Wachirayan, many residential quarters of royal wats were altered following the orders of Prince Supreme Patriarch to cut new roads and consequently gain revenue from renting new shop-houses. Wat Pho, from that period of time, also followed the policies of the Prince Patriarch to make the most of its small portion of monastic donated land outside the monastic precinct. However, unlike many royal monastic complexes especially the new ones from the Reform Order, the revenue

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\(^6\) National Archive SR 201.10.2/23, letter on 2 November, 1950, from Deputy Minister of Education, Khun Khongrit Sueksakon, to the Secretary of the Ministry Cabinet, Luang Chamnan Akson.

\(^7\) Ibid., letter on November 24, 1950, from Luang Chamnan Akson, the Secretary of Cabinet to Prime Minister, Field Marshal Phibunsongkram; letter on 28 November, 1950, from Prince Momchao Nikonthewan Thewakul, to the Secretary of the Ministry Cabinet allowing the demolition; letter on 30 November, 1950, from the secretary to the Minister of Education.


\(^9\) Ibid., 85.
from Wat Pho’s original monastic donation land was infinitesimal when compared to the cost of maintaining the grandeur of the sacred precinct and highly elaborated details of its architectural features. Wat Pho, in contrast to other royal wats, needed to generate revenue from its sacred precinct and residential quarter. For sacred precinct, the revenue rose successfully from festivals at the Reclining Buddha Shrine in special Buddhist holidays with the help from the Tha Tien Chinese community, especially its temple boys and the Bai Pho Pharmacy owners. We also saw that Wat Pho’s major patrons in this time were from the social network of temple boys including Congressman Cha-On Amphon, local bureaucrats and merchants who had once lived in the vicinity of Wat Pho, such as the owner of Supphanit store and Bai Pho Pharmacy. For the residential quarter, the demolition of the residential section for meditation monks connoted the new symbiotic relationship between Wat Pho and the owner of Bai Pho Pharmacy, who was a Chinese patron. Wat Pho gained some revenue from the owner of Bai Pho Pharmacy. Reciprocally, this gave the owner of the pharmacy the opportunity to establish a new educational business in the area (see Plate 6.1).

Wat Sraket in the Context of Nationalism

Wat Sraket’s Vicinity: from Vacant Land to Shop-houses

The archival documents depict several changes in the area of Wat Sraket’s funeral complex. In 1923, the area around the funeral complex was comprised of shops selling

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Ibid., 80, 85. For instance, from 1943 to January of 1946, the donations for the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha had grown to 100,128 baht and most of the money was from the festival of the shrine. From 1946 to 1948, the donations increased to 210,000 baht and the major supporter was again the owner of Bai Pho Pharmacy store. The festival for fundraising for the renovation of the Reclining Buddha became the permanent annual event of Wat Pho and, in 1948, the date was moved from April 3rd to Thai New Year on April 13th which became one of the major Thai New Year events in Bangkok.
Plate 6.1. Wat Pho before the current renovation.

From Niyada Laosunthon, *Prachum Charuek Wat Phrachetuphon* (Compilation of Inscription of Wat Phrachetuphon).
liquor, curry rice, used products, steel and a Chinese’s ceramic pottery factory\textsuperscript{621}. In 1934, the vacant land and small pavilions next to the funeral complex along Bamrung Mueang Road was converted to shop-houses with the help of the Department of Fine Arts\textsuperscript{622}. Next to these shop-houses, the Department of City Water Supply was constructed at the intersection of Bamrung Mueang Road and Chakkraphatdiphong Road in a Baroque style, but further inland there was still vacant land and orchards. By the end of King Chulalongkorn’s reign, the music hall of Prince Narathip at the north of the Golden Mountain Pagoda was burned down and the site became a slum-like place with dilapidated wood structures next to several sawmills (see Map 6.6).

\textbf{Wat Sraket’s History: Wat Sraket the Independent}

At the beginning of King Vachiravudh’s reign, Wat Sraket still performed well in maintaining its financial balance. The rent revenue of Wat Sraket had grown significantly although it was still less than half of the amount from donations\textsuperscript{623}. Moreover, Wat Sraket had also raised enough revenue to conduct its renovation projects without any state financial support. Indeed, Wat Sraket was so successful in generating funds that Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan complimented the abbot for his ability to conduct renovations quickly, and at a low cost without royal support\textsuperscript{624}. Most of Wat Sraket’s patrons who helped with the renovation of the corridor cloister of the ordination hall in

\textsuperscript{621} National Archive, Ph R 6 N 264 (R 6, N 15.1 Kh/141 lem 13), Thi Din Wang Plao Khang Meru Wat Sraket (Vacant Land near Funeral Incinerator Complex of Wat Sraket), the site map depicting several buildings and their functions. It was drawn for Si Kim Ha Company on 8 August, 1923.

\textsuperscript{622} National Archive, Ph KSK 2/53, Wat Sraket Sadaeng Bariwen Thi Sang Tuk thael 27 Hong Plan Phuen, Rub Dan Na, Rub Tat (the Delineation of Wat Sraket’s 27 shop-houses including site plan, floor plan, Elevation ands Section). The plan has signature of Khun Thanakitkoson as auditor and the drawing was completed on April 5, 1934.

\textsuperscript{623} National Archive, R 6 S25.1/47, Rai-ngan Makkhanayok Way Sraket Krungthep (Report from lay manager of Wat Sraket), letter on 31 January, 1913, from Chao Phraya Wisutsuriyasak to King Vajiravudh.

\textsuperscript{624} National Archive, R 6 S 9.1/124, Patisangkhon Wat Sraket (Restoration of Wat Sraket), letter on 3 September, 1913, from Phraya Wisutsuriyasak to the king citing the compliment of Prince Supreme Patriarch that the abbot of Wat Sraket was an able manager who could raise enough financial support locally and finish the renovation of the monastic structures in short time and low cost.
Map 6.6. Wat Sraket’s vicinity from Rama V’s reign to the end of WWII.

Unpublished Survey Map of Bangkok in 1921-1922 and the Plan of Bangkok B.E. 2439 (A.D. 1896) from the archive of the Royal Survey Department; Map of Bangkok in 1945 compiled and drawn by A.C. I. U. and War Office; Map of Bangkok in 1908 by the Department of Land.
1910 were a mixed group of high ranking noblemen, royal princes and local Chinese\textsuperscript{625}. This contrasted to Wat Pho, whose of renovations in the sacred precinct were carried out by the Ministry of Public Instruction and the Department of Fine Arts after King Chulalongkorn’s reign.

As was the case with Wat Pho, during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Wat Sraket also established formal schools at the same time that the king launched the modern education system in the kingdom. From the documents of the monastic complex\textsuperscript{626}, the Wat Sraket School was established in 1898 using the learning hall of Wat Sraket as the classroom and taught by the monks of the monastic complex. The first school was a one-storey building built in 1910 and six years later, the two-storey building was constructed from the donations of a female individual. Around 1923, Wat Sraket’s lay manager also conducted the restoration of Lord Buddha statues using his personal funds\textsuperscript{627}. In 1933, another building was constructed from the donations of another female individual. The school buildings were all in wood construction with hip roofs. The mural painting in the ordination hall of Wat Sraket was partly repainted during the period of King Rama VII and was completed in 1958 with the budget of two million baht\textsuperscript{628}. The project was executed by the order of the abbot who in 1963 became the Supreme Patriarch on the grounds that the original painting was executed by an unskilled painter.

\textsuperscript{625} Four names on the list of major donors were women. One was the wife of the lay manager (Makkhanayok) Phraya Siharatrongmueang and other two were the wives of Chinese; Prince Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot also renovated the Hor Trai Library hall as well, in National Archive, R 5 S 25.1/47, Rueang Rai ngan Makkhanayok Wat Sraket (Report of the Lay Manager of Wat Sraket), letter on 16 December, 1911, from Chao Phraya Wisutsuriyasak to King Rama VI via Prince Krommaluang Prachinkitibodi, the king’s secretary.

\textsuperscript{626} Phra Phromkhunakon (Kiaw Uppaseno), 100 Pi Sraket (100 years Wat Sraket) (Bangkok: Karun Kanphim, 1998), 31-34.

\textsuperscript{627} National Archive, R 6 S 8 and R 6 9.1/125, Pitthong Phra Prathan Wat Sraket (Gold Cladding at Wat Sraket’ Buddha statues), letter from Chao Phraya Thammathikanbodi, Minister of Public Instruction to Chao Phraya Mahison, the king’s secretary.

\textsuperscript{628} Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Kiaw Uppaseno), Prawat Wat Sraket Ratchaworamahawihan (History of Wat Sraket Ratchaworamahawihan) (Bangkok: Chuanphim, 2000), 23.
After World War II ended, Wat Sraket found that the wall supporting the base of the Grand Mountain broke apart on all sides and the pagoda was also tilted. Evidence depicted a serious problem of structural failure. The local story was that the machine gun had been installed at the top of the Grand Mountain Pagoda by the Japanese Army to fight the ally airplanes and the vibrations from the machine gun operation caused the damage. The abbot contacted the Director General of the Department of Irrigation to investigate the problem and provide the proper procedure to sustain the structure. The reinforced concrete piles were injected into the original brick and teak timber foundation while the soil inside was drained out to reduce the pressure. The concrete stepping terraces and beams were constructed to fortify the base of the mountain. The restoration of this grand artificial mountain started in 1950 and it took five years to finish (see Plate 6.2).

Wat Kor in the Context of Nationalism

Wat Kor’s History: from the Island Wat to the Holy Landlord

By 1916, Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan sent his personal secretary, Phrakroo Phutthamonpricha (Thet Nithesako), to be the assistant abbot of Wat Kor and, in 1917, he became the new abbot after the ailing abbot passed away. As a new abbot, he started a school to teach English within this royal wat. Coincidently, Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan ordered to discharge the lay manager of Wat Kor on the grounds that the Ministry of Public Instruction had created the new division to take care of monastic assets and Wat Kor should be under the ministry due to its high income. In the letter of appointment, Prince Supreme Patriarch informed Phrakhru Phutthamonpricha

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629 National Archive R 6 S 25.2/137, Wat Samphanthawong Phranakhon, letter on 9 August, 1916, from Phraya Thammasakmontri to King Vajiravudh via Prince Krommaluang Prachinkittibodi, the royal secretary.
Plate 6.2. Wat Sraket’s vicinity before WWII

that, “I would supervise this wat directly and I asked you to be my eyes and ears." It is important to note that before he ordained, Phrakhru Phutthamonpricha was the Prince Supreme Patriarch’s personal guardian (Mahatlek) who followed the prince throughout the northern provinces of the kingdom for his nation-wide religious investigation, and took notes for the Supreme Patriarch’s correspondence letters to royal elites. When he became the abbot of Wat Samphanthawong, he inherited the knowledge of Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan for the management of the monastic donation land and the way to persuade royal elites to make merit.

During his abbotship, in 1921, this wat was demarcated and the permanent wall was constructed. Upon the construction of the new wall, nine old wooden residential buildings were removed. The five new wood houses were constructed along the new wall by using the old wood materials. The school building which was at the south side of the monastic precinct was dilapidated and was removed to be on the north side along the new wall. In this year, Wat Kor managed to pay all of its debts that Phra Palad Chuen had with the Privy Purse Office and Mahamakut Ratchawitthayalai Foundation.

Moreover, in the same year, Wat Kor also applied for a land title for the new land created by filling up the canals around the monastery. It is worth noting that this marked a shift in thinking about preserving the canals. In 1907, when Songwat road was proposed to cut through Wat Kor, the cabinet ministers elected to preserve the canals. When the engineer of the Department of Sanitation, L.R. de la Mohotiere, submitted the

630 Phra Thammabandit (Manit Thawaro), Roi Pi Phra Maharatchamangklachan (100 years anniversary of Phra Maharatchamangklachan) (Bangkok;1986), letter on June 1916, from Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot to Phrakroo Phutthamonpricha.
631 Ibid., letter on October, 1921, from Phrakhru Wibunsinkan to Prince Supreme Patriarch Krommaluang Chinnawonsiriwat.
632 Wat Samphanthawong’s private document describing the biography of the abbot, Phra Maharatchamangkhlan, 4.
633 Ibid., letter on 31 October, 1921, from Phraya Phinitnaiyanithet, Director of Division of Monastic Revenue (Krom Kalapana) to Phrakhru Wibunsinkan; letter on 21 November, 1921, from Phraya Phinitnaiyanithet, Director of Division of Monastic Revenue (Krom Kalapana) to Phrakhru Wibunsinkan suggesting that the monastic complex should combine the land titles of 6 pieces of land to be one land title.
four choices for building the new road across the canal in the Wat Kor area, the cabinet ministers decided to build the road with permanent bridges instead of filling up the canal which would have been cheaper. However, by the 1920s, the canal of Wat Kor were filled up. This archive document depicted that the royal cabinet ministers preferred the co-existence of both road network and the canal together. Apparently Wat Kor’s administrative monks did not share this interest in preserving the canals, however, and there is not documentation showing whether or not the monks considered this alternative.

Because of the New Songwat Road and the new land created by the filling of the old canal, the shape of Wat Kor’s compound was totally changed. The road cut the monastic residential quarter island in half which made it difficult for monks to manage the entire area, and the canal was filled up which made the monastic precinct unbounded space. The abbot at this time was concerned that Wat Kor needed a new planning arrangement to be compatible with the new road and to secure the monastic land. In 1922, Wat Kor with the Department of Monastic Assets demolished the dilapidated wooden shop-houses along Songsawat Road in order to construct eleven new units of 2-storey concrete shop-houses and 2 units of wooden shop-houses. Apart from developing its tenement houses, from 1921 to 1924, this wat under this abbot also renovated the shrine and ordination hall and constructed six smaller residential buildings in a wooden construction. Most of the residential buildings were constructed with the support from local patrons and it was Wat Kor’s tradition to name its residential buildings after the names of patrons (see Map 6.7 and Plate 6.3)

634 National Archive R5 YT 9/104, Tat Thanon Nai Thi Phoengmai Thi Tambon Wat Samphanthawong (Wat Kor lae Tat Thanon Chueam Thang Rawang Thanon Chakrawat lae Thanon Ratchawong (Cut the road in the land of Wat Samphanthawong District and the road connecting Chakrawat Road and Ratchwong Road), letter on 17 May, 1907, from Prince Krommaluang Naretworrarit to Crown Prince Vajiravudh, the regent of the king describing the choices of construction and indicated the cost of road construction using full bridges for 166,000 baht and filling up some canals for 154,577 baht; letter on 24 May, 1907 from Prince Krommaluang Naretworrarit to Phraya Suriyanuwat for providing payment for the road construction and indicated the amount of 166,000 baht which was the cost for the full bridges.
Map 6.7. Wat Kor's vicinity from Rama V's reign to the end of WWII.

Unpublished Survey Map of Bangkok in 1921-1922 and the Plan of Bangkok B.E. 2439 (A.D. 1896) from the archive of the Royal Survey Department; Map of Bangkok in 1945 compiled and drawn by A.C. I. U. and War Office; Map of Bangkok in 1908 by the Department of Land.
From 1925 to 1929, the monastic administrators still continued to build more residential buildings and some subsidiary facilities such as a learning hall, chanting pavilion and public restroom\(^{635}\). In 1931, the abbot ordered to create a land use plan for Wat Kor which separated the monastic donation land from the monastic precinct and asked the Department of Fine Arts to design five concrete residential buildings. He also asked the Department of Monastic Assets to design the three groups of three-storey shop-houses in the Monastic Donation Land but only one group was built\(^{636}\). In 1936, the wooden residential structures were removed and the monastic administrators built four three-storey buildings and a four-storey concrete building. From 1936 to 1957, Wat Kor

\[^{635}\text{From Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, Biography of Phra Maharatchamangkhlan, in 1925, the new 2-storey learning hall was constructed with small pavilion and in 1926, 4 small teak wood residential buildings were constructed. In this year, the ordination hall was also renovated. In the following year, another two wood buildings were constructed and two old wood buildings were demolished.}\]\n
\[^{636}\text{From Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, Biography of Phra Maharatchamangkhlan, in the 3 groups of shop-houses, two were 20 units each and the last group had only 12 units. In this document, Wat Kor indicated that the Division of Monastic Asset disagreed.}\]
removed and renovated several residential buildings and other facilities including the major renovation of the ordination hall in 1957 to celebrate the 2,500 year anniversary of Buddhism.

Conclusion

The period from the beginning of King Vajiravudh’s reign to the end of Phibun’s dictatorial regime saw tremendous changes in the governments’ religious policies. These changes contributed to the growing contestation over the use of monastic space both inside the monastic precinct and on monastic donated land. Contributing to this problem, the state policies dealing with Buddhist religious properties were also inconsistent and ambiguous in terms of separating monastic properties and controlling monastic complexes. First, King Chulalongkorn withdrew the state’s responsibility for maintaining royal wats by separating the state and Buddhist religious properties. This meant that wats became more independent financially and were the responsibility of abbots instead. However, the king maintained tight control over all wats through the reports of makkhanayoks and the Ministry of Public Instruction. Additionally, wats were asked to host the modern schools in their precincts. By King Vajiravudh’s period, the balance of control changed since the king let the Supreme Patriarch, Prince Wachirayan, control most of the management of wats’ revenue and properties.

From 1910 to 1932, the Buddhist wats and ecclesiastical institutions enjoyed full control over their monastic assets. When the civilian government took over the kingdom, the religious policies were revised to curtail the power of the Supreme Patriarch and the crown’s reputation. The royal wats were treated as the nation’s heritage while they also belonged to religious assets. More street networks were built and roadside shops were constructed, shaping strong edges and creating new nodes of Bangkok, while at the same time, its indigenous canal routes deteriorated since both royal and civilian governments failed to maintain them. Moreover, both governments aspired to create more public
secular monuments to serve as Bangkok’s urban landmarks, which meant that the big royal *wats* were no longer regarded as important elements in urban beautification as they had been in Rama V’s cabinet. Bangkok started to lose its previous character of being a blend of western and indigenous urban elements during this period.

The three royal *wats* were affected by these changing policies. Most of their sacred precincts deteriorated without help from the government. For instance, Wat Pho had a hard time getting enough support to maintain its monuments in the sacred precinct, while its monastery compound was also affected. Several modern buildings with classical details were built inside the compound to serve the need of modern secular and Buddhist schools. Its donated land of boating facilities for monks’ alms offerings was converted to Art Deco shop-houses, but they generated inadequate revenue. The area of Prince Chanphat’s palace nearby was turned into three clusters of shop-houses in a modern style.

Wat Sraket was also altered during this period in similar way to Wat Pho. As in the latter case, Wat Sraket saw the growing popularity of shop-houses along its edges. However, Wat Sraket had a larger area for converting to shop-houses along the road and the revenue seemed to be sufficient. Since the Bamrung Mueang Road cut between its monastery compound and the funeral area, these unpleasant activities became incompatible with the commercial character of roadside shops along the edge of the urban street. In this period, the area around the edge of Wat Sraket and the new road deteriorated, and was vacant for a period waiting for new development. Wat Sraket’s monastery compound also faced similar changes, in that the public school buildings got constructed inside the compound. Wat Sraket faced the problem of Golden Mountain Pagoda’s structural failure, but solved the problem faster and more independently than Wat Pho.

In contrast to the former two cases, Wat Kor was controlled directly by Prince Wachirayanan for its lucrative land rents in Chinatown. Its monastic precinct was altered significantly by the new road that cut the island of monastery compound in half. Its
monastery buildings were relocated to maximize the rent space. Its rent revenue rose significantly. In contrast to Wat Sraket where some of the land along the road was still vacant, Wat Kor increased its shop-houses vigorously. These new shop-houses created the strong edge and urban block along the new road while the area behind Wat Kor was still in a messy condition with light wood residential structure.

In the next chapter, I will discuss another transformation of these wats during the paternalistic period of Field Marshal Sarit who imposed the new policies which reversed the republicanism trend of the previous regime by promoting the monarchy in public again, adhering to American’s development ideology and introducing tourism. His policies in fact enhanced conflict and contestation in using the space and structure of royal wats.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THREE ROYAL WATS AND AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT IDEOLOGY IN SARIT PATERNALISTIC ERA AND BEYOND (1958-1993)

Introduction

After the Second World War, the Cold War politics in Southeast Asia also had significant consequences in the Southeast Asia, and the political mechanisms of the People Party and old concepts of fascism and republicanism were replaced by a new generation of military dictators who received support from America, but never experienced western education. The political ideology shifted to more American model of development which also affected the monastic space. The most important change of Sarit is that he revered the king and supported the monarch to be the spiritual identity of Thailand against the rise of Communist in the region. The development discourse of road expansion impacted the urban fabric of Bangkok with more road networks, and the state promoted wats as loci of development, particularly to demonstrate the virtues of public cleanliness and health. With the presence of military personnel, the tourism business was also introduced to Thailand and later flourished, leading to the commodification of the space of historic royal monastic complexes for tourist-related business. The government also introduced modern planning that focused on replicating the American automobile city in Bangkok, without any recognition of the historical roles of Buddhist monastic complexes.

As we shall see, Sarit increased the intense contestation between the Department of Fine Arts and the Department of Religious Affairs over the meaning of the wat. In addition, the wats had to face a complex relationship with the modern schools in their monastery compound and with the new Tourist Authority of Thailand. Sarit’s policies gave rise to contradictions and conflicts in terms of the meaning and management of the wat. On the one hand, he revised the religious laws to be more centralized and he
promoted the Exemplary *Wat* of Development program, and simultaneously supported the idea that monastic complexes were autonomous within the realm of religious assets. On the other hand, he established the tourism authority and revised the preservation law. These latter two policies contradicted the idea of the *wat*’s autonomy, in that the historic structures of royal *wats* were now regarded as part of the nation’s heritage under the authority and protection of the Department of Fine Arts.

Wat Pho, Wat Sraket and Wat Kor were indeed impacted by these policies that contradicted one another. In the case of Wat Pho, this royal *wat* was renovated successfully but it occasionally had serious conflicts between preservationists and local supporters. In the case of Wat Sraket, the contestation was over the monastic donated land and the visual impact of the landmark pagoda. In contrast to Wat Pho, where conflicts were rife, Wat Sraket and the preservation authority tended to avoid conflict over the historic structures since they were not as highly elaborated or as highly valued as national heritage. In case of Wat Kor, the contestation was significant since the historic sacred precinct was totally demolished for maximizing the profit of high value monastic donated land.


The nationalistic regime of Field Marshal Phibun ended in 1957 with a coup led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who was a major force behind the installation of Phibun in 1948, and who had suppressed several coups in order to save Phibun’s government. One year after he expelled the Phibun regime, Sarit returned to Thailand from his medical retreat at a military hospital in Virginia, USA. He staged the coup again, but this time in order to get rid of the parliament and the constitution which were remnants of the former Phibun regime fraud elections. Sarit’s rule through the revolutionary council and paternalistic dictatorial government impacted monastic complex land and structure in
three major ways. Firstly, in keeping with the increasing American influence in Thailand, his government introduced the discourse of “phattana” or development into the role of the monastic complex and Buddhist religion. Secondly, Sarit revived the reverence of the monarchy, reversing the trend of previous republicanism regime. And thirdly, Sarit launched the Tourism Organization of Thailand to promote the tourist business that became the largest source of national revenue in the 1980s.

After Field Marshal Sarit passed away in 1963, the military group that inherited his legacy continued to control the country until it was overthrown by a student uprising in 1973. During this period, Thailand experienced two years of political struggle between the liberal movement led by students and more conservative factions within Thai society. The political turmoil ended with the student massacres in 1976 and the return of a military regime, and most of liberal students fled to join the Communist party. To combat the rising communist threat, the right wing military group invested largely in the promotion of the three pillars of national identity, comprised of Nation, Religion and Monarchy (chaat, satsana, phramahakasat). By the end of the 1970s, military regime became more moderate and allowed for a parliamentary system with elections, which led to the formation of a government comprised of key military leaders and a coalition of parties from elections. This form of military-led, civilian government was able to continue for approximately a decade, and it served to support a stable economy which resulted in successful economic growth over the long term. Moreover, its less aggressive policies towards national reconciliation with former student leaders finally led to the dissolution of the communist party. Most of the cultural policies in this period still followed the legacy of Field Marshal Sarit’s mandate to strengthen Thai national identity.

However, when the Cold War ended and a full civilian government took control in 1989 on the cusp of the economic boom, the vigorous promotion of nationalist cultural policies lost its relevance, and finally faded from the public arena.

After the student massacre in 1976 that triggered the rise of a communist insurgency, the government started promoting Thai national identity through government publications. In addition, cultural policies geared toward heritage preservation were one of the government’s apparatus for strengthening Thai identity against the communist party. During the period of the Fourth National Economic Development Plan (1977-1981), the Department of Fine Arts incorporated the Arts and Cultural Conservation planning, including projects for a historic preservation plan for Rattanakosin Island (Bangkok’s inner city historic district), Ayutthaya, and Sukhothai. These heritage preservation projects targeting former capital cities and the historic district of Bangkok further reified the national linear historiography centered on Sukhothai–Ayutthaya–Bangkok. By the fifth Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986), more heritage sites were added. Most ruins in these historic parks except the Khmer shrines in the Northeastern region were historic structures of Buddhist monastic complexes and pagodas. In addition, the historic area within old Bangkok’s ring canal, called Rattanakosin Island, also housed approximately forty one royal and local wats, with a large number of communities of monks and their lay supporters was promoted as a nation heritage along other ruins. According to the Religious Law, these sites were considered Buddhist central assets and monastic properties (Sombat khong Phutthasatsana) under the control of the Department of Religious Affairs, while the Department of Fine Arts called them the nation’s heritage (Sombat khong chaat).

638 Office of Prime Minister published journal called Thai Identity in 1977 and the National Culture Commission was established and in 1981 its National Identity Board published Thai Magazine issuing definition of the Thai nation.
639 Maurizio Paleggi, The Politics of Ruins and Business of Nostalgia, 22.
640 Naengnoi Saksi, Ong Prakob Tang Kaiyaphap Krung Rattanakosin, 171.
National Development Plan

First, Sarit employed the concept of “phattana” or “development” in conjunction with a system of paternalistic rule in order to improve cleanliness, neatness and material wealth of public life while still preserving the indigenous structure of society. The concept of phattana was also a key component of his propaganda intended to bring Thailand to a level of advanced modernization and to unify the country against the menace of communism in Southeast Asia. In keeping with this agenda, in 1959, Sarit dissolved the Ministry of Culture, establishing the Ministry of Phattana or Development instead. In addition, the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) was established and the first national economic development plan was launched in 1961 in response to the World Bank Mission report of 1958. The development plan, which aimed to significantly improve road networks, to provide better water resources, and to lay the foundation for a nation-wide social infrastructure met the interest of the American policies aimed at stopping the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. When the political situation in Indochina turned toward communism, American financial aid, along with military and technical support to Thailand increased significantly. The government also withdrew its direct control over commercial activities and industrialization and allowed the private sector to grow with more foreign direct investment. Therefore, the government’s concept of “phatthana” was also compatible with the American model of capitalist-driven development.

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643 Pasuk and Baker 1995: 276-7
The First Master Plan for Bangkok

In fact, the first development plan for Bangkok was developed by the Boston-based firm, Litchfield and Associates. The Greater Bangkok Plan for 2533 B.E. (A.D.1990) was submitted in 1960 after three years of study and development of a data base, but the plan was never implemented. The plan aimed to provide facilities to accommodate Bangkok in 1990 which would have housed four and a half million people with a growing industrialization and the metropolitan area of 732 square kilometers.

Bangkok was divided into the mosaic blocks according to major land-use activities and different levels of density. Thus the plan provided the pattern of land use zoning with a network of access which was the typical modern Western planning approach employed for dealing with the growth of industrialization within an urban area. The plan recognized the existence of the canal network but regarded it as a storm water drainage system, fire protection and waste disposal644. Although this plan was never implemented, it reflected the extent to which the government’s policies followed an American model in dealing with urban growth. This was different from the previous regimes of both royal governments and the People’s Party that still based their concepts on the European model of colonial cities.

By the time of the first National Development Plan (Phaen Phattana Setthakit haeng Chaat), the government expenditures were geared toward developing infrastructure for energy and transportation which would reinforce Bangkok’s position as the hub of a road-based network for distributing economic aid and materials for development to the rest of the country645. By letting the private sector grow, the city was quickly filled up with urban settlement. Before 1960, the canal network was still in place, but the road network was also built along side, creating the coexistence of road and canal transportation modes, except in some areas where the road was constructed over the

644 Marc Askew, Bangkok, Place, Practice and Representation, 54.
645 Ibid., 55; and Pasuk Phongpaichit, Economics and Social Transformation in Thailand 1957-1973, 64.
canals. Unfortunately, with the rapid economic and population growth during this period, traffic became congested and major roads were expanded646. During the 1960s, canals were filled up or reduced to be drainage lines along the roads647.

The Exemplary Monastic Complex for Development

In 1960, the government also launched the “Monastic Complex of Development” as a nation-wide project. The project was designed to incorporate the government policies focused on development into the monastic complexes, by promoting public cleanliness and neatness in monastic complex grounds648. Several old monastic complexes with dilapidated structures were considered dirty and inappropriate for public health. Monastic complexes were expected to keep their sanitation at the highest standards, maintain public order, preserve green space, renovate dilapidated structures, and control residents. By 1961, a committee was formed for supervising the development of monastic complexes. The Minister of Education was the chairman of the committee, comprised of the Ministry Undersecretary, and Directors from several departments within the Ministry and the Department of Religious Affairs. In 1962, the government also revoked the Religious Law of 1941 and reorganized the ecclesiastical government in a less democratic manner. Thus the project committee was dissolved because the new law created new job descriptions for each official position. The new committee to direct the development of monastic complexes was appointed on December 3rd, 1963 with the Undersecretary of the Ministry as its chairman. This committee was assigned the task of creating the monastic complex development program for the national level, setting up the goal of development and selecting monastic complexes that fit the program. The goal for

646 Marc Askew, *Bangkok, Place, Practice and Representation*, 56.
developing the monastic complex was separated into three major parts: first, healthy and clean space; secondly, good governance of the monastic order; and thirdly, useful activities with the local community. The monastic complexes in the program were expected to have creative abbots who were willing to collaborate with the government and their supporters. After the abbot and The Department of Religious Affairs agreed, the Department would support these monastic complexes by sending staff to survey, draft the development plan, and finally to provide sufficient funding.

In 1963, twenty eight monastic complexes were selected to participate following the survey done by the Department of Religious Affairs and the National Research Council. They aimed to have the model of developed monastic complexes in every district of Thailand within twelve years. These monastic complexes would be the role models of clean and healthy space with well-defined boundaries between the holy shrine precinct and a monastery’s profitable land\textsuperscript{649}. The monastic complex should provide a good administration in terms of both managing monastic property and providing Buddhist education. The program encouraged monastic complexes to renovate their historic structures and construct public facilities (\textit{satharanuprakan}) by promoting competition for the title of best development monastic complex. Moreover, within the centralized ecclesiastical government, monks were awarded higher ranking and bestowed an honorary fan if they showed good progress in monastic complex development\textsuperscript{650}.

\textbf{The Return of the King}

Secondly, Sarit rejected what he regarded as the Western democratic approaches to governance employed by the previous regime. The coup group of Sarit was different from the People’s Party that was comprised of officials who had been educated in France

\textsuperscript{649} Ibid., 143.
and other major European countries which were dominated by the ideology of republicanism. By contrast, most of the military officers who were in Sarit’s government, including Sarit himself, were educated in Thailand. Sarit had experienced several post-1932 governments which came into power via fraud elections and corruption, and he had tried to distance himself from those politicians. In order to distance himself from what he saw as overly Westernized politicians, his government employed the traditional paternalistic leadership of pho khun, restored the monarchy as the spiritual leader of the nation, and reversed the trend of the previous pro-republican regime with its anti-monarchist drive.

After Field Marshal Sarit dissolved the Ministry of Culture, the center for Phibun’s nationalistic propaganda, both the Department of Fine Arts and Religious Affairs were returned to the Ministry of Education. The National Council of Culture was reduced to a small unit within this ministry. When Sarit took office as Prime Minister, he revived the public rituals of the monarch. The ritual of the Kathin ceremony when the king participated in the royal barge procession to visit royal monastic complexes for offering robes and necessities were revived (Thak, 411-413).

The New Religious Law of 1963

In 1963, the government revoked the Religious Law of 1941 and the democratic ecclesiastical government that comprised the ecclesiastical congress, court, and cabinet was dismantled. The revolutionary government installed the new law that was similar to the royal version of the Religious Law of 1902 which stipulated that the ecclesiastical

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651 Phorkhun means the head of the state in Thai traditional paternalistic authority of Sukhothai period. Sarit tried to use this analogy between father-family and Premier-nation. Also see more detail in Thak, “The Sarit Regime, 1957-1963: The Formative Years of Modern Thai Politics” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1974), 235-283.

652 In fact, certain royal rituals had also been revived since Phibun’s second regime in 1947. However, during Phibun’s period, the king was only allowed to conduct some special Buddhist rituals at the royal monastic complexes and he was not allowed to conduct the Brahman ceremonies in public.
government constituted only senior governor monks and the Supreme Patriarch. However, some articles in this new law reflected the government’s increasing control over the management of religious properties. For instance, in Article 40 of this law, the Department of Religious Affairs was not only appointed as the sole agent to manage the central religious assets but was also designated as the owner of the central religious assets. Similar to the Law of 1941, Article 7 of this new law appointed abbots to take care of and manage monastic complexes and their assets. Moreover, in Article 45, the new religious law designated not only administrative official monks in ecclesiastical government but also waiyawatchakons or lay accountants of wats as officials according to the Criminal Law Code. According to this Article, the makkannayok, whose role was to supervise the abbot and waiyawatchakon in the fifth reign, investigate any irregular financial transaction, and report the revenue of the monastic complex to the king, was now useless and irrelevant. Moreover, according to the ministry regulation issue No. 2 in the Religious Law of 1963, in order to demarcate the monastic land for making a profit, a wat had to receive consent from the Department of Religious Affairs and the ecclesiastical government or the Council of Elders. In addition, any rent contract that was longer than three years also needed consent from the Department. The Department of Religious Affairs now became the sole agent controlling both the wat’s assets and Buddhist central assets. The abbot and waiyawatchakon were also empowered to manage monastic properties alone if they decided to withdraw from the management of the Department of Religious Affairs and the ecclesiastical government allowed them to do so. If the monastic complexes had too much difficulty with managing their monastic assets, the Department of Religious Affairs could report to the ecclesiastical government to withdraw the department’s management on the grounds that it might damage the state’s reputation.

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Tourism Prosperity

Third, development (phatthana) was not the only idea Sarit brought to Thailand from America. During his medical treatment at Walter Reed Army Hospital in 1958, Sarit became fascinated with the American enthusiasm for travel and the success of the tourism sector in the country. Seeking to emulate this model, Sarit established a tourist promotion section of the government, which was initially only a small section in the Railway Authority of Siam led by Prince Khamphaengphet. It was subsequently moved to several ministries and finally was upgraded to an office within the Department of Publicity under the Prime Minister’s Office. After Sarit became the Prime Minister in 1959, he dissolved the office of Tourism Promotion in the Prime Minister’s Office and established the Tourism Organization of Thailand as a quasi-government authority. In this year, the first national airliner was also established with the cooperation of the Scandinavian Airline System and launched its first flight in the following year.

Moreover, on the inauguration day, Sarit announced that tourism was a part of his revolution or “patiwat” and development “phattana” plan that would bring economic prosperity to the Thai nation. In fact, the tourism business came largely from his alliance with the American military operations in Indochina which brought American troops to Thailand with financial aid to improve public transportation. In addition, the government’s withdrawal of its direct control over commerce and industry allowed private entertainment sectors to expand to serve the needs of American military persons that flew to the northeastern region. During the Vietnam War era, hotels, massage parlor clubs, and other nightlife entertainment venues grew widely around the towns of

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654 His full title was Krommaphra Kamphaengphet Arkkharayothin.
655 30 pi Thothotho: Kanthongthieo haeng Prathet Thai (30 years TAT: Tourism Authority of Thailand) (Bangkok : Kanthongthieo haeng Prathet Thai, 1990), 20-23.
American military bases. Half of all these nightlife and sex–related businesses were located in Bangkok\(^{657}\). Bangkok became the hub of the entertainment business for American soldiers in the Southeast Asian region who stopped for “recreation and retreat”\(^{658}\).”

After the American military left Thailand in 1969, the number of tourists still rose steadily due to the increase in Japanese investors in Thailand replacing American military-related businesses\(^{659}\). In 1979, the Tourism Organization of Thailand was empowered and renamed the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and given more autonomous control over tourism related business to respond to the increasing number of tourists and accompanying responsibility. During the 1980s, a major portion of tourists to Thailand were still male tourists who came for the sex tourism industry, which later on became a serious social and public health problem particularly with the spread of the AIDS disease\(^{660}\). In an effort to counteract the image of Thailand as a hub of sex tourism, in the 1980s the Tourism Authority endeavored to improve the image of Thailand by emphasizing the nation’s historic sites, royal-related events, and rich cultural heritage\(^{661}\).

In 1980, the Tourism Authority of Thailand also conducted a comprehensive National Tourism Development plan for every province in Thailand, in order to improve facilities and increase revenue from the tourism industry. By the late 1980s, direct financial support was given to TAT for developing plans for heritage sites in collaboration with the Department of Fine Art and several universities. Several royal monastic complexes in

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\(^{661}\) In this period there were several royal events such as the Bangkok Bicentennial 1982, the King’s 60th Birthday year 1887, the year of the longest reign 1889 and etc see more detail in Palleggi, Maurizio, *The Politics of Ruins and the Business of Nostalgia* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2002), 63.
Bangkok received funding from TAT for their renovation projects and TAT also helped organize monastic complexes’ cultural events. In 1983, the “Handbook for Developing Monastic Tourism Attraction” was published to improve thirty two monastic complexes of both royal and commoner status in the Bangkok Historic District and Thonburi Canal District. The plan aimed to provide a clean and orderly monastic space and facilities for tourists, in part by getting rid of unorganized structures and events which were for local everyday-life activities.

The New Historic Preservation Law of 1961

Parallel to the development of tourism, in 1961, the government passed a new Historic Preservation Law following the request of the Department of Fine Arts. The new law enhanced the power of the Director General of the Department of Fine Arts again, similar to the previous preservation law of 1943. According to Section One, Articles 7 through 10 of this new law, the Director General had the power to demarcate the boundary of historic sites, to list them in the national register, and to punish any violators who destroyed or significantly impacted the historic structure in a negative way. Owners of historic structures needed the consent from the Director General of the Department of Fine Arts for any alteration of historic properties. According to Article 27, the trust fund for archeology would be established using the collection of revenue from visitor’s fees to historic sites and museums. This trust fund would be used for preserving historic sites. However, the new law did not empower the Director General with the use of eminent domain as had the original 1935 historic preservation law. This article that allowed the director to collect visiting fees signified the new policy gearing to capture revenue from tourists.

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662 Phra Srisriwatiswiwongs, interview by author, 26 April, 2003.
663 School of Architecture, Silpakorn University, Wat nai khet Ko Rattanakosin lae rim khlong fang Thon Buri Lem thi 1 (Monastic Complexes in Bangkok Historic District and along Thonburi Canal) (Bangkok: Silpakorn University, 1983).
Historic Preservation and Development Plans for Rattanakosin City

After it was included in the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Ministry of Education established the Historic Preservation and Restoration of Rattanakosin Island Committee, and the Bangkok Municipality later formed a similar committee to take care of historic sites and structures for all of the Bangkok metropolis area. In 1979, by the cabinet’s order, both committees were merged to be the Rattanakosin City Project Committee. The committee was comprised of various authorities providing facilities in the development of Bangkok’s historic district, such as the Fine Arts Department, Tourist Authority of Thailand (TAT), and the Bangkok Municipality with the Office of Environmental Planning and Policies as its secretary, but the Committee excluded the Department of Religious Affairs664. In 1982, Bangkok celebrated its bicentennial, and renovation projects of the Emerald Buddha Temple and the Grand Palace were carried out by the Department of Fine Arts on a grand scale. Along with other grand schemes of celebration, the Office of Environmental Planning and Policies launched the design and planning competition for preserving and developing the central historic area of Bangkok, or Rattanakosin Island, which became the core agenda of the Rattanakosin Historic Preservation and Development Plan under the Rattanakosin City Project Committee. In 1984, the Rattanakosin City Project Committee also established four sub-committees to oversee implementation of proper land-use planning, building codes, cultural heritage preservation and publicity for this area. None of them had the representatives from the Department of Religious Affairs or the

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664 The committee comprised of Deputy Minister as a committee chairman, Minister of Education, Undersecretary of Finance, Undersecretary of Defense, Director General of Department of Fine Arts, Director of of Public Construction, Secretary of the Palace Office, Rector of Thammasat University, Rector of Silpakorn University, Director of Tourism Authority of Thailand, President of Environmental and Art Conservation Association, Director of Planning Office, Secretary of National Economic and Social Development Council and Governor of Bangkok.
ecclesiastical government on board except for the Committee for Cultural Heritage preservation\textsuperscript{665}.

Moreover, in 1987, the Thai government signed the World Heritage Agreement and designated the Office of Environmental Planning and Policies in the Ministry of Science and Environment as the contact agency. In 1991, the historic parks of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya were put on the World Heritage list. In 1993, the Rattanakosin City Project Committee established another three sub-committees for implementing an action plan for the historic preservation and development of Rattanakosin City and for renovating two dilapidated historic sites in the area, and again, none of these committees included the Department of Religious Affairs or ecclesiastical government\textsuperscript{666}. In 1994, the first historic preservation and development plan of Rattanakosin City was finished. The plan was basically developed from a winning urban design scheme from a 1982 competition aimed at implementing thirty four urban design projects. The core areas around the Grand Palace including nine projects were carried out for the celebration of Bangkok’s 200\textsuperscript{th} Year Anniversary in 1982, and five other projects were under construction at the time of producing the plan. The plan contains twenty urban design projects over eighteen historic areas. These projects are in the vicinity of approximately eleven royal Buddhist \textit{wats} and two Buddhist palaces and shrines, but no opinions or interviews of local and monastic communities of these \textit{wats} were conducted in the planning process.

\textsuperscript{665} The sub-committees were appointed on 20 March, 1984 see more detail in Synchron Co, LTD., \textit{Phan Mae Bot Kan Anurak lae Phatthana Krung Rattanakosin} (Master Plan for Historic Preservation and Development of Rattanakosin City) (Bangkok: Phimphan Kan Phim, 1994), 10.

\textsuperscript{666} The two sites were the Canal Gateway Market or Pak Klhong Talad and the first Telegraph and Post Office building at the southern part of Inner ring canal of Rattanakosin City see more detail in Synchron Group Co, LTD, \textit{Phan Mae Bot Kan Anurak lae Phatthana Krung Rattanakosin}, 13.
Exemplary Monastic Complex of Development in the Post-Sarit Period

While the Department of Religious Affairs was ignored in the Rattanakosin City Project Committee, its project “Development Monastic Complex” (Wat Phatthana Tua Yang) project was developed separately and was also altered to fit the government’s main purpose of creating national identity and fostering community development. In 1970, the project was modified according to historic preservation considerations, and included the ecclesiastical government to participate in the committee. During this time, the quality of Development Monastic Complexes was gauged according to three major categories: the quality of religious materials (satsana wathu), religious persons (satsana bukhon) and religious doctrine (satsana tham). The Department of Religious Affairs also created a survey to measure the level of development in these wats. Finally, the committee created a reward for the successful monastic complexes, giving them the title of an Exemplary Monastic complex of Development (Wat Phatthana Tua Yang), and asked the Supreme Patriarch to deliver the honorary fan to these abbots. Between 1976 and 1981, the Department of Religious Affairs awarded the Exemplary Monastic complex prize and delivered financial support annually. In 1982, the Development Monastic Complex Project was included in the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986) and the project was renamed to “Developing the Monastic Complex as a Center of Community” (Phattana Wat Hai Pen Sun Klang Chumchon). The name of the project ironically indicated the state’s desire to restore the lost past, in that the monastic complex of this period had largely become isolated from its surrounding community. The Department of Religious Affairs conducted the ceremony annually in order to award prizes to the “Exemplary Monastic Complex of Development” (Wat Phattana Tua Yang) and selected some to receive a higher level award of the Exemplary Monastic Complex of

Best Development (Wat Phattana Dee Den). In 1995, the Ministry of Education launched the project to develop schools and monastic complexes under its aegis to be “Educational Parks” for conducting community service, studying and practicing meditation in a serene atmosphere. The project also established a prize for the “Monastic complex of Educational Park” (Wat Utthayan Kan Suksa) as a first level award for entering the Exemplary Monastic complex award competitions. With the financial awards and honorary fans delivered to the abbots or key administrative monks, the project transformed monastic complex spaces into avenues for monks’ social mobility in a monastic hierarchical bureaucracy.

**Urban Structure in the Sarit Period: Bangkok and Urban Development**

As mentioned above, before 1960, the canal network was still in place, and the road network was built along side the canals creating a dual system of road and water transportation modes. However, by the Sarit period, minor canal channels became largely impassable, stagnant and unsanitary, because they had been left without active maintenance policies since the end of King Chulalongkorn’s reign (1910). Thus, by the time of Sarit’s paternalistic regime, canals became a public eyesore for the dictator who viewed public cleanliness as a symbol and measure of the modern city. Sarit’s obsession with public cleanliness went along with America’s agenda of development and was parallel to the urban policies in America’s major cities. Similar programs were the Urban Renewal projects that became controversial in the United States. According to Jane Jacobs, during the 1960s, the state and federal government invested heavily in expanding highways, cutting through the old historic city neighborhoods across America, while the local government conducted urban renewal programs to demolish old communities and replaced them with mega scale structures of shopping mall, urban plazas and office buildings. As Jacobs argues, this road expansion destroyed interactions of residents in
the vital neighborhood community of New York City’s Greenwich Village\(^{668}\). The busy automobile traffic made public space unsafe and reduced the communication among the neighbors. However, in America, several communities protested and were able to preserve their historic community. In contrast, the constitution in Thailand was suspended and political activities were prohibited throughout this period. By establishing his charismatic persona as a benevolent, paternalistic dictator and the protector of the sacred monarch, Field Marshal Sarit made certain there would be no local resistance opposing his various development programs. Consequently, during the 1960s, canals were filled up or reduced to the drainage lines along the roads\(^{669}\). With the rapid economic and population growth during this period, traffic became congested and major roads were expanded\(^{670}\). From 1958 to 1980, the commercial area in Bangkok expanded 514 per cent\(^{671}\). Moreover, between 1958 and 1971, the built up area of Bangkok doubled from 96 to 184 square kilometers. The physical remnants of Bangkok as a conglomeration of traditional villages\(^{672}\) with canal networks were destroyed in this period when road networks became the major mode of transportation (see Map 7.1, 7.2 and Figure 7.1).

**Contestation**

**Religious Assets and Historic Preservation Discourses**

The new Religious Affairs law and Historic Preservation law enhanced the power of the Department of Fine Arts and Religious Affairs. Consequently, both laws also created a greater potential for conflict of interest between the Department of Fine Arts

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\(^{671}\) Naengnoi Saksri, *Ong Prakob Thang Kayaphap Krung Rattanakosin*, 366.

\(^{672}\) Richard O’Conner argues that Thai urban space was not fully constructed following cosmological order but more in organic pattern of topography.
Map 7.1. Plan of Bangkok B.E. 2439 (A.D. 1896) from the archive of the Royal Survey Department showing Wat Pho, Wat Sraket and Wat Kor in pre-modern urban context.
Map 7.2. Physical Map of Bangkok (JICA) 1987 showing Wat Pho, Wat Sraket and Wat Kor in post-Sarit Era context.
Figure 7.1. The FormZ Model of Bangkok in 1890, 1945 and 1987 showing the transformation of Bangkok’s urban structure from a constellation of small islands connected by canal network to urban blocks with road system.
and the Department of Religious Affairs over the properties of monastic complexes. With the support of the new Religious Law of 1963, the Department of Religious Affairs encouraged the reestablishment of deserted monastic complexes and allowed private entities to rent the deserted monastic land\textsuperscript{673}. Meanwhile, the Historic Preservation Law also empowered the Director General of the Department of Fine Arts to invest in the historic properties. The space of royal monastic complexes became intensely contested among different governmental agencies and local communities. On the one hand, the Department of Fine Arts sought to preserve national heritage while the Department of Religious Affairs sought to enrich Buddhist religious assets and promote Sarit’s agenda of cleanliness. Local communities were caught in between these two departments.

\textbf{The Discourses of Tourism and the Monastic Complex of Development}

In addition, the government sponsors of the growing tourism business began to bring a large number of tourists to several royal monastic complexes, requiring space for new facilities such as souvenir shops, food vendors, parking, rest areas and standard lavatories. The activities of tourists and their service requirements became problematic as they began to conflict with local activities of resident monks and lay supporters. The Tourist Organization increasingly created tension by facilitating tourism business activities which interfered with the local monks and their supporters who wished to continue with their everyday-life Buddhist practices and merit based activities. The Development Monastic complex program’s focus on cleanliness and modern monastic education, which was promoted by the Department of Religious Affairs, also encouraged monastic complexes to build new modern structures for libraries and monastic classrooms. In Bangkok, several multi-storey buildings that were constructed for modern

Buddhist schools or public schools located within the grounds of royal monastic complexes were taller than the historic ordination halls and pagodas. These buildings were designed according to a standard blueprint from the formal Education Department, creating visual effects that were largely incompatible with the existing historic structures, which were also valuable for tourist-related activities. Moreover, the government’s discourse promoting development monastic complexes was also used in some cases by monastic complexes themselves to destroy their historic residential structures and construct new modern buildings for collecting rent revenue. Finally, in the case of Wat Prathumkongka, the ecclesiastical cabinet ruled that the monastic complex had to stop the new construction and negotiated a compensation for the construction company. As we can see, the structures and space of royal monastic complexes became a site of contestation among social groups and government factions, particularly the Religious Affairs Department, the Tourist Authority and monastic communities.

**Discourse of Standard Plan and Development Plan**

In 1965, via the Department of Religious Affairs, the government also established a new Ministry Regulation (Kot Krasuang) in addition to the 1963 Religious Law, which stipulated that new monastic complexes had to follow a standardized monastic campus plan. The new standard plan included space for a monastic school building (Rongrian Phra Pariyatitham), a public school, a modern library and funeral facilities. In the new

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674 For instance, in 1960, Wat Prathumkhongkha demolished its residential quarters (Kana 10 and Kana 7) by claiming that the monastic complex followed the government’s Monastic Complex of Development program for cleanliness and public health. See more detail in Rai-engan Kan Prachum Kammakan Mahattheasamakhom 6/2512, 21 April, 1969, Article No. 18, in Rai-engan Kammakan Mahatherasamakhom Pho. So. 2512 (Report of Ecclesiastical Cabinet).


Ministry Regulation, the new monastic complex was required to have an area of at least 6 rai (86,400 Sq. ft) and its location had to be at least 2 kilometers away from other monastic complexes with a population (including monastic and lay) of 1,000 people. The standard plans of this regulation had been adapted from famous royal monastic complexes of King Mongkut’s and King Chulalongkorn’s reigns. The standard plan B (Baeb Khor) was a copy of Wat Makutkasat, the famous monastic complex of King Mongkut, and the standard plan C (Baeb Khor) was a replica of Wat Benchamabophit, the famous marble monastic complex of King Chulalongkorn. Both of them were monastic complexes that provided a large area for the establishment of Buddhist monastic schools and public schools (see Figure 7.2).

Here again, we see that the spatial arrangement of royal monastic complexes in Bangkok were used as the government’s national standard. The spatial arrangement in the standard plan was also an attempt of the government to integrate public facilities into the holy space. However, these public facilities such as public schools were also under the control of other government agencies, introducing yet more contestation to monastic complex space. For instance, according to the records from an ecclesiastical meeting in 1970, conflicts between monastic complexes and government agencies increased and numerous reports were sent to the ecclesiastical government, stating that several state agencies had not consulted with monastic complexes when they expanded their buildings. The Department of Religious Affairs reported that several buildings were built too tall and too close to ordination halls, and thus incompatible with Buddhist monastic structures. As such, these government buildings had adverse visual effects on the image of the monastic complexes. The Department of Religious Affairs suggested that these

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Figure 7.2. Standard Site Plan for constructing new wat.

monastic complexes should stick to the development plan that each monastic complex had established with the Department and asked the ecclesiastical government to resolve the problems with the state government.

**Discourse of the Monastic complex as a Juristic Entity against the Control of the State**

The Supreme Court’s decision also established the legal definition that a *wat* is an entity with its own jurisdiction (Nitibukkhon) and full rights to own property according to Article 72 of the Commercial Law Code\(^{678}\). As a result, a *wat* was considered a private entity, and started to refuse to the control of the Department of Religious Affairs. In 1971, Wat Bowonniwet, the first class royal monastery, refused the new agreement between the Department of Religious Affairs and Bangkok Municipal Office that a monastic complex needed a consent letter from the department before it could apply for a building permit. The department maintained that the new building had to comply with the development board\(^{679}\).

**Discourse of the Abbot as an Official according to Criminal Law Code**

As stipulated in Article 44 of the 1941 Religious Law and Article 38 of the 1963 Religious Law, an abbot has full rights to expel resident monks or commoners from the monastic complex where he serves. Moreover, according to Article 57 of the 1941 Religious Law, monks who were appointed to their positions were also considered as officials according to Criminal Law Code Article 334 (2). By this determination, if an abbot was appointed after the law was implemented or the ecclesiastical congress passed a bill to appoint him to the position, the abbot was thus considered an official and

\(^{678}\) Supreme Court Decision 721/2504
empowered in a similar capacity as a state official. On the flip side, if an abbot committed a crime or failed to perform his duty, he would also be punished according to the same rules that applied to other government officials who committed crimes\textsuperscript{680}.

However, in a number of Supreme Court cases, the status of abbots as officials as stipulated in the 1941 Law was challenged. In several cases\textsuperscript{681}, the abbots who were appointed before the establishment of this law were not considered as officials. The 1902 Religious Law had no indication that abbots or patriarchs were officials according to the Criminal Law Code. The patriarch or abbot only had the right to punish or jail commoners who resisted his orders, but there was no rule for punishing resident monks in the state law. The abbot could only expel them out of his monastic complex.

As stipulated in Articles 38 (2) ands 45 of the 1963 Religious Law, monks who were appointed to positions of governance in the ecclesiastical order were also officials according to the Criminal Law Code. Herein, the meaning of governing within the ecclesiastical order became a crucial point. The Department of Religious Affairs interpreted the position of an abbot as a governing position,\textsuperscript{682} while several lawyers disagreed on the grounds that there was no article in the law indicating the position of abbots as officials according to the Criminal Law Code\textsuperscript{683}. They argued that the lowest governing position was the sub-district Patriarch (Chao Khana Tambon); thus, an abbot was not a governing position. However, by the Supreme Court Decision of 1971\textsuperscript{684}, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the abbot to fine the monks who resisted the orders of the abbot. Consequently, this case was used by the Department of Religious Affairs as the

\textsuperscript{680} Supreme Court Decision 2003-5/2500.
\textsuperscript{681} Supreme Court Decision 692/2485.
\textsuperscript{682} Phoemsak Phoemphun, \textit{Chao Awat Phen Chao Phanakngan Tam Kotmai} (Abbot is an official according to Law) (Bangkok: Department of Religious Affairs, 2001).
\textsuperscript{683} Samphan Soemchip, \textit{Khumue Phrasong Thai “Chao Awat phen Chao Phanakngan rue mai?”} (Handbook of Thai monks “Abbott is an official or not?”) (Bangkok: Soemmit Kanphim, 2000), 131.
\textsuperscript{684} Supreme Court Case No. 304/2517.
legal precedent that the abbot was indeed an official according to Criminal Law⁶⁸⁵. Moreover, the DRA went further to indicate that if an abbot mismanaged his monastic properties, he would be punished as an official who committed a crime⁶⁸⁶. It is clear that the DRA derived benefits from the interpretation of this law as it would afford better control of abbots and monastic assets. Another point is that abbots of royal monastic complexes in Bangkok had to be high ranking monks at least at the level of a patriarch. As such, they were government officials and obligated to fulfill the responsibilities they were assigned. The implications of this are that instead of practicing renunciation, monks with ecclesiastical positions were obliged to engage in the worldly realm to protect the revenue of their monastic property.

A central tenet of the modern nation-state is that the state government is supposed to be secular. In order to appear to be a secular and modern nation-state, beginning in the period of Rama V, the Thai government shifted the responsibility of managing, renovating, and maintaining monastic complexes to the ecclesiastical governing personnel. However, in spite of this apparent decentralization of control to individual monastic complexes, the state still effectively controlled the ecclesiastical government via the 1963 Religious Law. The Minister of Education and the director of the Department of Religious Affairs could control the monastic government easily because of his official position as the secretary of the ecclesiastical government and legal custodian of Buddhist religious assets. Therefore, the ecclesiastical government was more or less an instrument of the modern nation-state, controlling the religious assets and helping to unify the nation via modern education and the promotion of a homogenized form of Theravada Buddhism.

⁶⁸⁵ Phoemsak Phoemphun, *Chao Awat Phen Chao Phanakngan Tam Kotmai* (Abbot is official according to Law) (Bangkok: Department of Religious Affairs, 2001), 10-12. ⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 15-16.
Wat Pho in the Context of the Sarit Era and Beyond

Wat Pho’s Vicinity: Sarit’s Road Expansion and the Decline of Tha Tien Market

From the reign of King Prachathipok to the 1950s, Tha Tien and the composition of neighboring communities around Wat Pho experienced dramatic changes. The Tha Tien Port and market became a big market during this fifty year period. Although the market with a courtyard dating to King Chulalongkorn’s reign still exists, the palaces of several princes were demolished to make way for the modern government buildings. The palace of Prince Chanphat\(^{687}\) was transformed into modern style shop-houses.

During this period, Tha Tien became the center of river transportation for the Bangkok-Ayutthaya-Pratumthani-Suphanburi-Nakhonsawan region. Most of the fruits, herbal medicine and seafood were transported to Tha Tien and then distributed to other markets\(^{688}\). Wat Pho’s riverfront, which was the major facility port for monks’ boats, also served as a bath house, a toilet and a pavilion for distributing curry and coloring saffron robes, and it had been in a state of dilapidation since King Mongkut’s period. Under King Chulalongkorn’s government using the waterfront as a toilet for monks was prohibited because it was an unsanitary\(^ {689}\). The area became a slum. During the time of King Chulalongkorn, it was reported that people had constructed shelters in the area, creating slum conditions. Moreover, construction of the wooden shop houses around Tha Tien started around the year of 1909. The Religious Affairs Department took over the management of the property and constructed more modern shop-houses. The department began to collect the rent in 1929 and demolished the city wall in the area of what is now a pedestrian walk in front of the shop-houses\(^{690}\).

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\(^{687}\) His full title was Prince Krommamuen Phichaimahinthrarodom.
\(^{688}\) Huang Tangtrongchit, interview by author, 13 September, 2002.
\(^{689}\) Ibid.
\(^{690}\) Huang Tangtrongchit and Chun Darunwichitkasem, interview by author, 27 May, 2003.
Before the 1960s, the Tha Tien market was so big and crowded that there was no space inside and street vendors sat along the wall of Wat Pho. The street vendors around the temple were removed by another dictator, Police General Phao Sriyanon\textsuperscript{691}. This was the beginning of the Pak Khlong Talad market south of Tha Tien because Police General Phao moved them from Tha Tien to there\textsuperscript{692}. After 1957, Field Marshal Sarit took power and expanded the road network resulting in the decline of water transportation and ships delivering produces to Tha Tien\textsuperscript{693}. Since this time, the distribution center for goods in Bangkok went to the outskirts of the new Bangkok Metropolitan region instead. Once the node of economic activities shifted from the river port to the street system, Tha Tien was no longer a hub of distribution to other markets. Nevertheless, it still functions as special market for some dry seafood products.

Today, the total area from the north at Thaiwang Road to the south at Prince Chakkraphong’s palace is comprised of 490 units of shop-houses and an inner court market. From a recent report, the shop-houses that belong to Wat Pho and the Crown Property Bureau are of a high quality and in good condition, and most of them have limited height of two stories. The shop-houses of the Crown Property Bureau opposite the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha were constructed in a Sino-Portuguese style with hip roofs, while the ones under Wat Pho and the Department of Religious Affairs were in an Art-Deco style with flat roofs. These two are valuable architectural edifices and fine examples of Bangkok’s early generation of shop-houses (see Plate 7.1).

\textsuperscript{691} Huang Tangtrongchit, interview by author, 13 September, 2002.
\textsuperscript{692} Ibid., Police General Phao was one of the dictators who supported Phibun’s second regime. See more detail in Thak Chaloemtiarana, “The Sarit Regime, 1957-1963, The Formative Years of Modern Thai Politics” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1974).
\textsuperscript{693} Huang Tangtrongchit, interview by author, 13 September, 2002.
Plate 7.1. Bird’s eye view of Wat Pho showing the physical transformation in its monastery compound.

From Phra Thanammaphabodi (Thawon Titsanukaro), *Hor Samut Somdet Wo Pho To Wat Phra Chetuphon* (Library Somdet Wo Pho To at Wat Phra Chetuphon) (Bangkok: Ammarin Printing and Publishing, 2002.)
In contrast, shop-houses built by private owners were mostly constructed in a modern, simple structure, and most of them are three stories. Some shop-houses added more space to the tops of their buildings, raising them higher than 3-stories and thus creating adverse visual effects on the important structures of Wat Pho. These shop-houses and some with annexations were constructed on Prince Chanphat’s former palace around the 1950s-60s, before the building regulations limiting height in the historic district were enforced. In fact, it was not until 1985 that the regulations prohibiting buildings higher than sixteen meters tall in Rattanakosin City Historic District were proposed. According to the regulations, the shop-houses could not add more than 300 square meters to their structures and could not be higher that the official limit, but in fact, the Bangkok Municipality could not successfully enforce these regulations694.

**Wat Pho’s History: Wat Pho the Revival**

From 1958 to 1961, Wat Pho was still struggling to generate enough funding to pay the renovation expenditure which had increased significantly695. The senior monks, patriarchs and the abbot of Wat Pho from the reign of King Vajiravudh had been given more responsibility for maintaining and renovating the historic structures. The senior patriarchs and his disciples had to be inventive and creative to make merit making rituals more attractive to the pilgrims, in order to receive as many donations as possible. From


695 For instance, in 1958, the revenue of Wat Pho from donation was 36,490.40 baht and the expenditure was 185,804 baht but by 1960, the expenditure was 288,977.92 baht which was only for the sacred precinct. The renovation of residential quarter was also 81,155.45 baht which monks helped financing most of the renovation cost. Total was 370,133.37 baht. See more detail in Phra Khru Palat Samphiphatthanaphrommachariyachan (Bun), *Prawat Wat Phrachatuphon Wimonmongkhlaram* (History of Wat Phrachatuphonwimonmongkhlaram), cremation vol. Phra Ratchaprasitiwimon, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkon Ratchawittayalai, 1993), 88-90.
an interview with Wat Pho’s former temple boys⁶⁹⁶, during the abbotship of the Supreme Patriarch (Pun), the senior monks ordered them and other temple boys to collect several old alms bowls and lined them up along the gallery of Reclining Buddha Shrine. The next process was to get 25-satang coins in exchange for 10 baht, which is forty coins, and then let pilgrims or visitors put the little satang coins in seven alms offering bowls to make merit. This merit making ritual proved to be fun and successful for generating donations. Another merit making ritual that generated donations was the restoration of the roof structure of the shrine. The monks and temple boys arranged a display of roof section with several piles of roof tiles. As stated before, making a shelter for the Buddha was considered a great source of merit, and this ritual was also a very successful mechanism. In one of the festivals alone, the donations from this donation booth generate around 90,000 baht per day and about 300,000 baht for the entire festival period⁶⁹⁷.

The monastic complex’s sacred precinct was used efficiently for festivals and rituals. Wat Pho was not permitted to hold any funeral ceremonies since it was the tradition that within the city wall, there should not be any funeral ceremonies except for the royal members. The abbot also petitioned to the government and finally received permission to arrange funeral chanting which also generated revenue for the monastic complex⁶⁹⁸. Wat Pho in 1961 also earned revenue from the Chinese New Year festival which became a major event and from special chanting ceremonies (chanting Mahachat Jataka and normal chanting on regular Buddhist full moon and half moon days)⁶⁹⁹. In 1961, the same year that the government of Field Marshal Sarit passed the new Historic

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⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.
⁶⁹⁸ Joon Darunwichitkasem, interview by author, 23 December, 2002.
Preservation Law, the residential quarter of the former abbot and Supreme Patriarch, Prince Wasukri was registered as a national historic place\textsuperscript{700}.

In this year, the owner of Bai Pho Pharmacy store donated 160,000 baht to construct a shelter with a public restroom which could house an audience of three to four hundred for facilitating the chanting events and Buddhist Pali studies\textsuperscript{701}. From 1962 to 1972, the annual expenditures for the general renovations in Wat Pho had increased significantly\textsuperscript{702}. In this period, the government began to support Wat Pho again for the renovation of the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha signifying the government’s changing policies again\textsuperscript{703}.

In 1967, the abbot, Somdet Phra Wannarat (Pun Punnasiri), established the Phra Phutthayotfa Foundation with the initial endowment of 19,041,226.62 baht\textsuperscript{704} which mostly came from donations from high ranking army officers and merchants. The foundation aimed to consolidate the income of Wat Pho which by this time, came from various sources (including donations at the public spots in the sacred precinct, support through personal connections, rent revenue from vendor stalls at the festivals and donation at the chanting events, etc.) except for the rent revenue that was still under the Division of Religious Assets. The first endowment for the foundation was donated by the owner of the Bai Pho Pharmacy store, the Tangtrongchit family, in the amount of 5

\textsuperscript{700} Department of Fine Arts, \textit{Tabien Boransathan nai Khet Kor Tor Mor lae Parimonthon} (List of Historic Places in Bangkok and its metropolitan area) (Bangkok: O.S. Printing, 1992).
\textsuperscript{701} Phra Khru Palat Samphiphatthanaphrommachariyachan (Bun), \textit{Prawat Wat Phrachetuphon Wimonmongkhlaram} (History of Wat Phrachetuphonwimonmongkharam), cremation vol. Phra Rachaprasitthiwiwimon, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkon Ratchawittayalai, 1993), 91.
\textsuperscript{702} Ibid., 98. In 1962, the cost of renovation was 414,300 baht which mostly in the residential quarter, and the residential monks managed to put up this cost. However, by 1971, the cost of renovation soared up to a total of 1,048,807 baht. Moreover, in detail, the renovation cost of sacred precinct was 736,113.77 baht and 330,000 baht for the residential quarter.
\textsuperscript{703} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{704} Phra Thammaphanyabodi (Thawon Titsanukaro), \textit{Hor Samut Somdet Wo Pho To Wat Phrachetuphon} (Library Somdet Wo Pho To at Wat Phrachetuphon) (Bangkok: Ammarin Printing and Publishing, 2002), 268.
million baht\textsuperscript{705}. The fundraising program for the foundation was launched as a Tod Phapa ceremony—a tradition which originated from the donations of robes and other necessities by local people. Interestingly, in adapting this ritual to include a fundraising event, the financial support for renovations came to be considered a necessity for the monks of Wat Pho and most of big donors were the military strongmen.

From the mid-1960s to the 1970s, more middle-class individuals made bigger donations for Wat Pho reconstruction through the foundation and private connections. For instance, Wat Pho received donations amounting to 440,000 baht from the Krawi Wienrawi family to construct a new school building in the central section of the residential quarter, and the opening ceremony was conducted by the present king, King Bhumibol, in 1964\textsuperscript{706}. In 1970, the monastic complex received around 487,000 baht from private individuals for the reconstruction of the abbot’s residence. Moreover, in 1971, Phra Mongkonmuni, the senior patriarch of Wat Pho raised around two million baht through the Apithammunlanithi Foundation for the construction of a new building in the central section of Wat Pho’s residential quarter, and in the same year, Wat Pho started to use revenue from the foundation\textsuperscript{707}.

Another important development was that the government of Field Marshal Sarit reversed the People Party government’s anti-monarchical stance. Sarit went back to revere the monarch and resumed major royal rituals in public. His policy also helped Wat Pho directly. In the previous regime, only the regent delivered Kathin support to the monastic complex, so no one wanted to come to see the ritual. In contrast, from the time of Sarit to the mid-1990s, the king paid regular visits to Wat Pho for the annual Kathin ceremony. The event attracted the masses and thus Wat Pho gained significant financial

\textsuperscript{706} Phra Khru Palat Samphiphatthanaprommachariyachan (Bun), \textit{Prawat Wat Phrachetuphon Wimonmongkharam} (History of Wat Phrachetuphonwimonmongkharam), cremation vol. Phra Ratchaprasitthiwimon, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkon Ratchawittayalai, 1993), 96.
\textsuperscript{707} Ibid., 99.
support from the pilgrims who came to see the king\textsuperscript{708}. Moreover, the king also allowed the donors who contributed high amounts of financial support to Wat Pho to visit him every year. This special arrangement stopped only recently when he became ill\textsuperscript{709}. The resumption of the monarch’s involvement in Buddhist rituals became the turning point for Wat Pho to gain more revenue from several sources of public donation. In addition, the dictatorial government of Sarit also gained from this public image because the monarch’s presence in Buddhist space also help solidify the key motto of Thai national identity against the spread of communism.

Another important factor that made Wat Pho come back was the ability of the abbot. By this time, the abbot of Wat Pho, Somdet Phra Wannarat (Pun Punnasiri), had become the most senior patriarch in the Thai ecclesiastical order. He became the governor of the central region in 1965 and later became the Ecclesiastical Minister for the Buddhist Mission. In 1956, he participated in special Buddhist activities in Sri Lanka and India and, in 1968 he visited the Thai monastery in London, England and traveled further to France, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and Italy to observe western religious activities\textsuperscript{710}. On July 21, 1972, he was appointed as the Supreme Patriarch and visited the Vatican City and President Nixon in the same year. From his Europe visit, he recognized that many churches collected entrance fees from tourists\textsuperscript{711}. From his perspective, Wat Pho should collect an entrance fee and so Wat Pho started to collect fees from tourists to support its major renovations. The fee was 2 baht in 1972 and increased to 5 baht in 1982 and 20 baht in July 1995\textsuperscript{712}. The Supreme Patriarch (Pun Punnasiri) was

\textsuperscript{708} Joon Darunwichitkasem, interview by author, 6 December, 2003.
\textsuperscript{709} Phra Srisuthiwong, the assistant abbot of Wat Pho, interview by author, 25 December, 2003.
\textsuperscript{710} Phra Thammaphanyabodi (Thawon Titsanukaro), \textit{Hor Samut Somdet Wo Pho To Wat Phrachetuphon} (Library Somdet Wo Pho To at Wat Phrachetuphon) (Bangkok: Ammarin Printing and Publishing, 2002), 279.
\textsuperscript{711} Huang Tangtrongchit, the lay supporter at Tha Tien community, interview by author, 13 September, 2002.
very popular in the community of Tha Tien and the community members called him Somdet “Pa” or the holy father. He brought together all parties from the Department of Fine Arts, military generals, merchants and the Tha Tien Community to help Wat Pho and he also established the Phra Phutthayotfa Foundation. In 1973, only a year and a half after his Supreme Patriarch appointment, he passed away leaving Wat Pho the legacy of his fundraising mechanism of Phra Phutthayotfa Foundation, the innovative arrangement for vital festivities and the tourist fee collection system.

Wat Pho’s History: Wat Pho the Buddhisneyland

From the end of 1970s through the 1980s, Wat Pho began to stabilize its financial situation. It generated its revenue from the interest of the foundation, from tourist entrance fees, and from donations from pilgrims. At the same time, this period saw the rise of cultural tourism initially ignited by the presence of American military and boosted by the arrival of Japanese business in Thailand. As the 200th year anniversary celebration of the establishment of Bangkok approached, the government started to fund Wat Pho again. From 1971 to 2000, Wat Pho had spent 127,012,538.20 baht for its restorations. Of this total, the government spent 45,696,992 baht through the TAT and the Department of Fine Arts, while another 54,728,506.30 baht came from the Phra Phutthayotfa foundation and 24,077,040.17 baht was from the donations.

In 1985, the Tourist Authority of Thailand began to promote Wat Pho and funded major restorations of the four Grand Pagodas with the cooperation of the Department of Fine Arts, the Wat Pho Committee and the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA). This restoration received the support of 15 million baht from the Overseas Economic Co-

714 Ibid., 197.
operation Fund (OECF) from Japan\textsuperscript{715}. In 1987, during the restoration of the four great pagodas, archaeologists found artifacts in the pagodas. The government and Wat Pho reported to the king for the proper method to take care of the artifacts. The king advised Wat Pho and the Department of Fine Arts to establish a proper museum space for displaying historical artifacts in the pavilions next to the pagodas\textsuperscript{716}.

In 1995, the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) and TAT implemented the monument floodlight project at Wat Pho with a budget of 5.9 million baht. The floodlighting equipment was installed by the Metropolitan Electricity Authority\textsuperscript{717}. In 1997, the Organization Committee of the “Amazing Thailand 1998-1999” project launched the theme, “Cultural Heritage: Thai Wisdom,” for Wat Pho, and TAT’s Division of Conservation and Restoration suggested the principle of sustainable tourism development to Wat Pho’s administration committee\textsuperscript{718}. In December 27, 1997 and January 4, 1998, TAT employed architects to help improve the landscape elements and street furniture in Wat Pho\textsuperscript{719}. In 1998, TAT awarded its Outstanding Performance in Conservation/Preservation Project Tourism Award to Wat Pho’s Thai Traditional Medical Science School and Body Massage\textsuperscript{720}. This nationwide project and award made Wat Pho a national standard and model of operation for cultural tourism management.

\textbf{Wat Pho’s Contested Story No. 1: Wat Pho for Old Chinese or New Tourists}

With the support from the Tourist Authority of Thailand and financial endowments of the foundation, Wat Pho has developed its sacred precinct actively and


\textsuperscript{716} Phra Khru Palat Samphiphathanaphrommachariyachan (Bun), Prawat Wat Phrachetuphon Wimommongkharam (History of Wat Phrachetuphonwimonmongkharam), cremation vol. Phra Ratchaprasitthiwiwimon, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkon Ratchawitthayalai, 1993), 113.

\textsuperscript{717} Alisara Menakanit, “A Royal Temple in the Thai Urban Landscape: Wat Pho, Bangkok” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 1999), 162.

\textsuperscript{718} Ibid., 162.

\textsuperscript{719} Ibid., 163.

\textsuperscript{720} Ibid., 162.
largely for the tourist industry. Wat Pho demolished several contemporary structures that the key administrative monks thought unfit for the historic site. These structures, such as public toilets, were constructed and financially supported by the Tha Tien community. This incident created tension and resentment from the Tha Tien community and local people who had benefited from using the space of the monastic complex before the arrival of the TAT. The monastic complex also rearranged the shopping space inside the sacred precinct which resulted in the loss of many merchants who were from the local community in the vicinity.

Some members of the Tha Tien community have long been involved in the social network of Wat Pho, creating a strong symbiotic relationship. For instance, the owner of the Bai Pho Pharmacy donated large amounts to the monastic complex’s fundraising campaign, and in return, he also benefited from selling Thai herbal medicine which is associated with the reputation of Wat Pho’s herbal formulas. Moreover, after the Bai Pho Pharmacy ceased to operate, his brother who operated another pharmacy nearby (Phatprakit) also continued to support Wat Pho and his son became associated with the temple boys of Wat Pho. These key members of the Tha Tien community and temple boys helped Wat Pho with important construction projects during the difficult periods.

For instance, they helped Wat Pho rebuild the two pavilions and construct a new multi-purpose shelter, public toilets, a flood protection system and an underground utility line, which aided in reducing the chaotic visual scene of TV antennas and electric power lines in Wat Pho. When Wat Pho contacted the Department of Fine Arts and Tourist Authority of Thailand for financial support and to investigate for possible renovations, Tha Tien’s key members helped facilitate the visit of these government officials by organizing a warm reception. The Tha Tien community was also involved in the initiation of Wat Pho’s fundraising projects to support the renovation costs.

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The key temple boy who helped Wat Pho significantly in terms of management also resided in the shelter near the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha and used the space as his small engineering business for more than a decade. With the rise of cultural tourism, the massage therapy school became popular and known worldwide. This massage therapy school was founded around 1935 as a Thai Traditional Medicine Association and the massage therapy was added in 1962. A member of the local Tangtrongchit family, who has long been the strong supporter of Wat Pho, was asked by the abbot to take care of the school’s management. Thus, when it became successful, the Tangtrongchit family also benefited significantly from the long relationship with the senior patriarch.

The space of Wat Pho became more contested as those who belonged to the old social network in the vicinity of Wat Pho were overshadowed by those groups and individuals who followed the new TAT policies promoting tourist-related business. Minor local members such as temple boys and petty merchants who could not negotiate with Wat Pho had to leave, but the more influential member such as Tantrongchit family with the contract of Wat Pho Massage School that still benefited Wat Pho stayed on.

Wat Pho’s Contested Story No. 2: Buddhist Prosperity or Nation’s Heritage?

In 2003, Wat Pho had reconstructed two pavilions near the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha, raising public criticism in the newspaper. At the beginning of the project, the Department of Fine Arts also disagreed with the construction of these pavilions on the grounds that it might have an adverse visual impact on the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha. However, when Wat Pho showed the remnants of mural paintings along the wall where the old pavilions had been prior to their destruction, the Department

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agreed to the construction of the pavilions and helped Wat Pho with the architectural design. Opponents wrote an article in the newspaper and stressed that the new pavilions were blocking the best spot to take pictures of the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha, and thus might undermine the shrine’s importance as an icon of national heritage. To counteract this criticism, the monks used the old photographs from King Mongkut’s period showing that pavilions had once existed along the wall opposite to the grand palace. Based on the archival research, the letters of royal ministers, and the maps, it was clear that there used to be two pavilions on the site but they had been demolished by the Ministry of Public Construction due to their limited budget to repair these structures. These two were parts of what were originally sixteen pavilions along the wall of Wat Pho. The assistant abbot, Phra Srisutthiwong, using the document founded in the National Archive, claimed that during King Chulalongkorn’s reign, the government demolished eight pavilions because of the limited budget for full renovation. Now, it was Wat Pho’s righteous duty to reconstruct all pavilions to show respect to the prosperity of Buddhism as it was in the glorious time of King Rama III (see Plate 7.2).

Another major problem and point of contention is the preservation of the mural painting of the Shrine of the Reclining Buddha. The mural painting in the shrine represents the story of the victory of Sri Lankan Buddhism over the Hindu Tamils (Mahawong). The mural painting deteriorated because of moisture and water from the leaking roof. The monks asked to have the wall repainted but the preservationists who

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726 The document was collected for my field research and was used by Wat Pho as evidence to sustain its position.
727 Ibid., 211.
Plate 7.2. The controversial story about Wat Pho’s new pavilion in the newspaper Kaosod and the comparison of maps of Wat Pho.

adhere to Ruskin’s conception of preservation “in situ” wanted to keep only what was left. The department wanted only to re-touch the existing painting that was only 15-20% of the entire wall because they did not know how the original looked. Wat Pho and Tha Tien leaders explained that if they preserved only the good part and left the deteriorated section as it was, no one would understand the Mahawong story of Sri Lankan King who protected Buddhism. The assistant abbot told me that although we did not know the appearance of the original painting, we did know the story of Mahawong and also the Thai style of mural painting from what was still there. The key point was to convey the Buddhist story of Mahawong. Moreover, the wat’s major donors wanted to see the murals fully reconstructed. The administrative monks also asserted that they had funds from donors and they wished to apply these funds for the murals in order that the donors could see proof that their donation money had been put to good use. Although administrative monks and the Tha Tien Community leaders have had conflicts in the past, it is interesting to note that in this case, they banded together to argue against the preservationists.

In this case, the Department of Fine Arts’s preservationists echoed a strong British romantic approach that if they repainted the painting, they would be rewriting the history and thus misleading visitors who wanted to see the truth of the past. They argued that if they were to allow full restoration, the new repainted part would look different from the existing one. The conflict began in the mid-1990s and finally, Wat Pho started the full mural restoration in 2003. Today members of the local and the monastic

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728 John Ruskin was a famous English architectural critic and social reformer in 19th century. He opposed the idea of restoration as to raise the dead to live again and subscribed to the idea of “let-it-alone” which was widely accepted and became the school of thought in preservation in 20th century. See more in William J. Mutagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America*, (New York; John Wiley & Son, 1997), 17, 18; and Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Oxford: Butterworth - Heinemann, 1999).
community still blame the Department of Fine Arts for the damage during a decade of delay.

Another case of major contestation is the new public lavatory. The problem was that construction started without the consent from the Department of Fine Arts. The department preservationists complained that Wat Pho now had a significant amount of money and monks constructed the new project as they saw fit for the situation. The DFA officials argued that old structures could be damaged during the construction, since monks and their supporters did not have enough experience and techniques in preservation.

The administrative monks also took issue with the weak administrative work of the Department of Fine Arts. The Department had around thirty architects but these officers were responsible for taking care of historic sites for the entire kingdom. Among administrative monks at the royal wats, the Department of Fine Arts was notorious for its delays in granting permission for construction and repairs. Every time Wat Pho started the new construction, the administrative monks said they could not wait any longer for the consent from the Department of Fine Arts.

Wat Sraket in the Context of Sarit Era and Beyond

The Vicinity of Wat Sraket: from Sawmill and Slum to Shop-houses

Wat Sraket’s vicinity at the south side along the Bamrung Mueang Road underwent several changes since this road was constructed in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. From 1922 to 1932, the shop-houses and City Water Supply buildings were at the roadside while the inland plots were still vacant lands, small houses and orchards with canals. In 1961, the funeral complex was replaced with the modern buildings of Wat Sraket Carpentry School\textsuperscript{729} which later was renamed the Bangkok

\textsuperscript{729} The document of the college indicates that it was founded in June 1, 1961 but there was no document that it used the present site at the time it was established. However, the aerial photograph of Royal Survey
Polytechnic College under the Department of Vocational Education. Although the funeral complex was demolished, Wat Sraket still operated the temporary, smaller and less prestigious funeral incinerator near the Golden Mountain Pagoda, and in 1955, it was reconstructed with the funding of around 800,000 baht as a permanent building with a large pavilion. Later in 1966, the funeral facility of Wat Sraket was also selected by the Council of Teachers to be the official funeral facility for teachers. From the archival maps of 1945 and 1987, which represented the period of Phibun’s second regime and the end of the military-led civilian government, the urban block of shop-houses and the road had filled up. It was the rapid development of the shop-house that also generated conflict within the monastic donated land of Wat Sraket. From the previous chapter, we learned that the wat’s donated land at the north became a slum area with some sawmills and in the next section, we will see how this area became the hotbed of debate about preservation issues.

**Wat Sraket’s Contested Story No. 1: Wat Sraket and the Exemplary Monastic Complex of Development Project**

Around 1963, the Department of Government sent a notice to Wat Sraket complaining about the public eyesore of the waterfront area at the north of Wat Sraket, particularly since the Lord Mayor of Bangkok had begun using the small plaza on Ratchadamnoen Road opposite to Wat Sraket to receive the government’s honorary visitors such as the leaders of other nations. Wat Sraket now became a national symbol in the world arena and thus faced a similar situation to Wat Pho. In order to improve its

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Department in 1952 show that the school was not there yet. The school modern building appears in aerial photograph in 1965.


visual appearance in keeping with its new international visibility, in 1966, Wat Sraket sent a proposal to the committee of the Exemplary Monastic Complex of Development, in the Department of Religious Affairs, to construct 200 units of shop-houses. The idea behind the project proposal was that the new concrete shop-houses would replace the dilapidated wood houses (see Plate 7.3).

As discussed in this chapter, during the Sarit regime, the government inaugurated the Exemplary Monastic Complex of Development project, and the shop-house construction proposal was accepted as a way of turning the monastic complex into a pilot model of this project\textsuperscript{732}. The construction started in 1969 after it was authorized by the cabinet ministry\textsuperscript{733}. However, implementation of the construction project gave rise to several conflicts. In fact, at the beginning of the authorization process, the Minister of Education opposed the plan, as did the abbot, who found out that the plan had been altered significantly since its conception and was not the one Wat Sraket had agreed upon in 1968\textsuperscript{734}.

In spite of the conflict, the construction went ahead. As displayed on the advertisement of the construction company, the monastic complex was given only 500,000 baht\textsuperscript{735} by the contractor for the construction of the shop-houses on its monastic donation land and it was estimated that the rent from 200 units would be 144,000 baht annually\textsuperscript{736}. However, it was speculated that the contractor would earn more than 40 million baht from selling the long-term lease to tenants. Therefore, the revenue of Wat Sraket from these 200 units of shop-houses was minimal when compared to the cost of construction and benefits for the contractors.

\textsuperscript{732} Ibid., 50. 
\textsuperscript{733} Ibid., 51. 
\textsuperscript{734} Ibid., 51. 
\textsuperscript{735} Ibid., 80. 
\textsuperscript{736} Ibid., 54.
Plate 7.3. Wat Sraket’s controversial story on the front page of Thai Rath newspaper on September 21, 1969 about its development of shop-houses.

There are no documents indicating whether Wat Sraket received more revenue than this amount or not. However, at the time of this field research (2002-2003), the assistant abbot of Wat Sraket also admitted that the monastic complex earned a very minimal amount from the rent of this property. When he was asked for his opinion about the fact that the government might follow the Rattanakosin Historic Preservation Plan to remove the shop-houses and create the park, he replied that Wat Sraket was willing to help the government to develop the area for public use since the revenue was so minimal and the vicinity had deteriorated.

In 1969, the construction company represented the image of the shop-houses in the Thai Rath newspaper as being only 2-storeys tall with modern Thai-style top roofs that would not create a negative visual impact on Wat Sraket (see Plate 7.4). At the time of field research (2002-2003), most of the shop-houses in the controversial area had been expanded to 3-storey height by filling the roof space, and some had even added another floor space to the original 2-storey height. The shop-houses near the canal had also expanded and the waterfront space that appeared in the Thai Rath newspaper of 1969 as a walkway was taken to be part of these shop-houses.

On January 15, 1969, the Association of Siamese Architects led a protest against the development project in Wat Sraket and demanded to meet with the Minister of Education, Mr. Sukit Nimmanahaeminda. The association worried that the new development would create tremendous adverse effects on the Golden Mountain Pagoda, which the ASA considered as one of the nation’s symbols of Buddhist Religion. They argued that the construction symbolized the deterioration of Buddhist integrity in Thailand, and several newspapers offered the opinion that commercialism—not communism as the government propagated—would destroy Buddhism.

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737 Ibid., 54 citing Thai Rath, 12 September 1969.
738 Ibid., 52.
Most people in Thailand are frequently warned that if ever the Communists take over this country all our temples will be destroyed – to a Buddhist a fate worse than death. While the Communists are being pinned down in the far reaches of the Northeast and South, many temples in Bangkok are already being destroyed. In fact if the present rate of destruction continues, nothing will be left to the Communists if they do come.739

Between July and September, 1969, the story had circulated nationwide and was posted several times in major Bangkok newspapers. The Department of Religious Affairs and its Division of Religious Assets and the Committee for Wat Phathana Tuayang denied that they had ever been informed of the project before the construction started, and claimed that the wat had dealt with the contractor alone. In fact, as mentioned above, at that time (1964-1966), Wat Sraket was selected by the Department as a model of the monastic complex for development program in Bangkok, along with Wat Prathumkhongkha in Chinatown, on the grounds that they both had very impressive development programs740. As such, any new construction or development of Wat Sraket had to be approved by the Department of Religious Affairs and the Program.

In addition, rent contracts that were longer than a three-year period had to receive consent from the Division of Religious Assets as indicated in the Religious Law. As such, it was impossible that they did not know about the construction. After the problem became a nation-wide story, the documentation of the rent contract at the Department of Religious Affairs mysteriously disappeared. In the end, however, the ASA, the newspapers, and the popular protest could not stop this project, and today the area reflects the kind of “visual chaos” that had angered and disgusted Thailand’s leaders in the past, particularly Premier Sarit. In addition to Wat Sraket’s northern area, some of the shop-

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739 Ibid., 77, citing Bangkok World newspaper, 10 September, 1969.
740 Ibid. 73-75, citing Bangkok Post, 14 September, 1969.
Plate 7.4. View and plan of the development project of shop-houses at the north of Wat Sraket

From ibid.,
houses that replaced the former funeral complex in the south added some more floor space and height which also created visual chaos.

Besides the problem with the shop-houses, another edifice contributing to the visual chaos was the modern buildings of Wat Sraket Public School. The public school of Wat Sraket was also developed to be a large scale structure within the monastery compound in this period as a consequence of Sarit’s Wat Phattana Tuayang program. In 1964, the school planned to construct a four-storey concrete building on the site of the old wood structure building, and another two four-storey buildings were constructed and finished in 1975.

It is interesting to note that the development of modern school buildings happened in the same period as the construction of controversial shop-houses following the example of the Monastic Complex of Development program (Wat Phattana Tuayang) by the Department of Religious Affairs. Since the period of King Vajiravudh, the modern public school system was under the Department of Formal Education and became independent from the management of the monastic complex. Most of wats also needed to yield to the development of multi-storey modern buildings of public school as it was for public benefit. Moreover, beside the school buildings, several structures were also constructed in the monastery compound of Wat Sraket during this period such as the meeting hall for honoring the late Supreme Patriarch (Yu Yanothayo), the three-storey building of the Center for Buddhist Study and the pavilion celebrating the King 60th Birthday near the Golden Mountain Pagoda.

**Wat Sraket’s Contested Story No. 2: Buddhist Faith not Preservation Practice**

In 1966, the Minister of the Interior, another dictator Praphat, ordered to form the restoration committee for Wat Sraket and designated himself as the chair. The committee decided to clad the pagoda with gold mosaics and to construct the four smaller pagodas at
the corners of the top terrace of the main pagoda, and ordered the Bangkok Municipal Authority to execute the project with a budget of 1.2 million baht. Similar to its previous renovation and reinforcement of the foundation of Golden Mountain Pagoda, there is no indication in the archives of Wat Sraket about technical support or the consent from the Department of Fine Arts. All of Wat Sraket’s major preservation projects were conducted by other government agencies which were more powerful and surprisingly the Department of Fine Arts never got involved or objected the projects.

The three major structures of Wat Sraket are the Grand Mountain Pagoda, the ordination hall and the shrine, none of which have as elaborate architectural details as those in Wat Pho. Thus, Wat Sraket’s structures were not of central interest to the Department of Fine Arts as was Wat Pho. Even so, Wat Sraket was successful in getting enough funding for its major renovations. The mural painting in the ordination hall of Wat Sraket was partly repainted during the period of King Rama VII and was completed in 1958 with the budget of two million baht. The project was executed by the order of the abbot who in 1963 became the Supreme Patriarch on the grounds that the original painting was executed by an unskilled painter. According to Wat Sraket’s guidebook, the mural painting was first painted in the reign of King Rama III and did not represent the fine craftsmanship. In fact, the mural painting was repainted in King Chulalongkorn’s period (Rama V) when the king visited Wat Sraket for the annual Kathin Ceremony and found that the mural painting had deteriorated.

The commissioner for the painting restoration was a senior prince, Prince Worrawatsupphakon, and the report was sent to the king when the restoration was

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741 Ibid., 16.
742 Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Kiaw Uppaseno), Prawat Wat Sraket Ratchaworramahawihan (History of Wat Sraket Ratchaworramahawihan) (Bangkok: Chuanphim, 2000), 23.
743 Ibid., 22.
744 National Archive R 5 S 6/18, Wat Sraket, letter on 23 July, 1908 from the lay manager of Wat Sraket, Phraya Inthrabadisiharatrongmueang to King Chulalongkorn reporting the completion of the painting.
completed\textsuperscript{745}. Moreover, according to the archival document, the story of the painting was the Lord Buddha’s victory over the Mara and ten Jatakas (Ten previous life of Lord Buddha)\textsuperscript{746} while the new painting was comprised of the ten Jatakas, the Three Worlds Cosmology and Lord Buddha’s victory. In contrast to Wat Pho, where the Department of Fine Arts prohibited the restoration of the painting in the Reclining Buddha Shrine, Wat Sraket seemed to have no conflict with the preservation authority regarding its restoration of mural paintings project, although Wat Sraket’s claim of the authenticity of the painting was wrong and the story of the painting also changed slightly.

Currently, the details of elaboration of the roof of the ordination hall of Wat Sraket and its cloister corridor are under the renovation by the monastic community. The donors who funded this project are the wife and brother-in-law of the owner of Thailand’s second largest airlines, Bangkok Airways, and the famous Bangkok Hospital. They came to help Wat Sraket restore the golden cladding of 163 Lord Buddha Statues along the cloister for celebrating the anniversary of the king’s 72\textsuperscript{nd} birthday. The restoration donor, Mr. Sukree was formerly an engineer from Thai Airways and has worked on restoring Buddha images since he retired. He and his sister, the wife of the owner of Bangkok Airways, and his household employees came to Wat Sraket every weekend and started to take down the dilapidated parts of the roof structures by themselves and replace the old wood elements with the new ones. At the beginning, only four or five of them worked on the project. At the time of the interview (2002-2003), there were more than twenty people working on this restoration. Most of them were members of the Thai middle class from various backgrounds such as retired citizens, military captains, teachers and merchants. Many of them came to work with their children and taught their children about the story of Wat Sraket (see Plate 7.5).

\textsuperscript{745} His full feudal title was Prince Phrabowonraratchao Krommamuen Worrawatsupphakon. See Ibid.
\textsuperscript{746} Ibid., attachment indicating the list of painting.
When he was asked about the proper procedure and technique of preservation through the Department of Fine Arts, Mr. Sukree argued that he devoted his time to studying each piece and learning the methods to construct it from the old piece he took down. The Department of Fine Arts did not have enough preservation staff to take care of all royal wats and thus subcontracted to the construction contractors who worked for their profits. Thus, in several cases, they made mistakes. In contrast, Mr. Sukree and his fellows worked for Wat Sraket because they had faith in Buddhist religion and they worked to earn merit not money. For instance, when he first renovated the 163 Buddha images along the cloister gallery, he once asked the contractor for an estimate of the cost of restoring the Buddhas, and the contractor proposed that it would cost more than five million baht. He did not believe that the cost was that much and he conducted work by himself. He finished the project at the expense of 3 million baht. He pinpointed that Wat Sraket would have lost more than two million baht for nothing through the contractor747. He was also skeptical about the relationship between the officials of the Department of Fine Arts and the contractors for preservation projects which were occasionally commissioned to the same company.

747 Sukree Posayachinda, interview by author, 21 September, 2002.
In this case, when I mentioned Wat Sraket’s restoration project to the key staff of the Department of Fine Arts\textsuperscript{748}, the senior landscape architect said that he could arrest Mr. Sukree, as well as monks and others who were involved in violating the Historic Preservation Law. He indicated that these people did not have the knowledge of preservation and might destroy the integrity of the historic structures. Regarding the procedures of renovating the building, he claimed that there were not many construction companies working for preservation projects, so the Department ended up subcontracting to the same companies. However, he declined to visit Wat Sraket and arrest the Historic Preservation Law violators (the wife of the airline tycoon, her brother, military officer and the abbot who is today the acting Supreme Patriarch) on the grounds that Wat

\textsuperscript{748} Ronnarit Thanakoset at Department of Fine Arts, interview by author, 25 September, 2002.

Plate 7.5. Local preservation activities in Wat Sraket’s ordination hall precinct.
Sraket’s structures were not that important as a national heritage. This is in stark contrast to Wat Pho which is designated as the first class royal monastic complex, where the Department of Fine Arts paid regular visits and promptly sent warning letter to Wat Pho for any new unapproved project.

**Wat Kor in the Context of Sarit Era and Beyond**

**The Vicinity of Wat Kor: The Arrival of High-rise Structures in Chinatown**

Urban blocks in the vicinity of Wat Kor grew significantly since the period of King Chulalongkorn, when several roads were constructed through Chinatown. However, with the construction of Yaowarat Road as a main street, Sampheng Road, which was the original main road of Chinatown that Wat Kor was originally located on, and Songwat Road became minor routes of transportation. Similar to the Tha Tien Market at Wat Pho, with the changes promoting a road network for the nation’s transportation during Sarit’s period, the activities of rice and grain storage and distribution at the Songwat Port reduced.

However, the companies in the network of rice and grain trade are mostly still in this area, but this became the business headquarters instead. The shop-houses along the route leading to the main street of Yaowarat Road had also grown significantly, and one of these claimed to be the highest building in Bangkok before WWII. This building was not far from Wat Kor, and the shop-houses that were on the land of Wat Kor in the south were also constructed in three and four-storey height. These areas south of Wat Kor to Wat Prathumkhongkha became a famous market for auto parts, sailing equipment and machineries.

**Wat Kor’s History: Wat Kor the New Landmark**

In 1939, Wat Kor proposed to withdraw its rental property management from the Division of Religious Assets in the Department of Religious Affairs. It did so on the
grounds that the division took care of monastic complexes in the entire kingdom, which meant that the division did not have enough time to respond to Wat Kor and take care of its rent collection. It was not until 1953 that Wat Kor took over the old dilapidated wood shop-houses, and in 1959, after twenty one years of administrative struggle, the monastic complex took full control of the entire rent area. This incident indicates the contestation between the Department of Religious Affairs and Wat Kor over the power to collect the rent. In the interview with key administrative monks, the informants did not describe the conflict with Department of Religious Affairs as being one of intense antagonistic feeling, but they did proudly inform me that the Director of the Department of Religious Affairs at the time that Wat Kor took over the management was an ex-resident monk of Wat Kor who used to be the guardian of the old sacred precinct. Moreover, he was also the lay accountant of Wat Kor. This comment implied that the success of Wat Kor in negotiating with the Department of Religious Affairs came from the strong bonds of Wat Kor’s social network.

The entire area of land south of Songsawat Road was developed into 114 units of 3-storey shop-houses, which generated the rent revenue of 144,000 baht annually. Moreover, according to the rent contract, the tenants who signed for this long-term (15 years) lease also paid the initial maintenance fee (Pae Chia) at the time they signed the contract. The total revenue from this maintenance fee was 2.2 million baht, which later was the initial funding for the new ordination hall’s construction cost. With this funding, Wat Kor entered into one of the greatest controversial problems in the history of Buddhist religion in the Bangkok period.

In 1961, the abbot of Wat Kor began the process of requesting royal permission to make changes in the monastic precinct. On October 3rd, he sent a letter to the ecclesiastical district director and the ecclesiastical governor of Bangkok for the Reform
Sect (Thammayutika) asking permission to construct a new ordination hall. In this request letter\textsuperscript{750}, he indicated reasons for demolishing the old 165 year-old sacred precinct (the building compound of the ordination hall with a shrine and pagoda in the cloister corridor). First, he claimed that the ground was so low allowing high water to damage the structure. The buildings were so dilapidated and, even after several renovation efforts, the buildings still easily fell into a deteriorated state. Secondly, the ordination hall was so small that it could not hold lay supporters for several Buddhist holiday ceremonies. The last reason was that the one-storey ordination hall would be too low and maladroit when compared to the highly developed environment. He also mentioned that the monastic precinct was cut by the road, used by other government agencies, and converted to rental shop-houses, and thus had limited space. The residential units for monks also had to be constructed in two and three-storey buildings and the shop-houses around Wat Kor were also two to four storey structures. He argued that the Buddhist worship place should not be lower than these shop-houses.

In the past, most of Thammayutika monks in provincial towns who traveled to Bangkok stopped at Wat Kor overnight before reaching their destination since Wat Kor was the Reform wat closest to the Bangkok Railway Station. Because the royal-led Reform Sect became the dominant sect in the ecclesiastical government, it established several wats in provincial towns. And when Prince Wachirayan developed modern Buddhist education centered in Bangkok, the Reform Order monks in provincial towns traveled to Bangkok to their further study. Wat Kor became their transition point before arriving at their destination.

\textsuperscript{750} Phrakhru Palad Suwathanamongkhon (Prachuab Nanthapanyo), “Rueang Khwam pen ma nai kan sang Phra Ubosot Wat Samphanthawong Lang Mai (Story of New Ordination Hall of Wat Samphanthawong),” in Rai ngan Kan Truad Kan Khana Song khong Somdet Phramahasamanachao Kromphraya Wachirayanwarorot (Report of Monastic Investigation by Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot), cremation vol. of Phramaharatchamangkhlan, (Bangkok: Rongphim Kan Sasana, 1968), 84-87, citing letter No. 332/2504, on 3 October, 1961, from Phra Maharatchamangkhlan (Thet Nithetsako) to Phra Thepyanwisit (Chai Yasotharo), the Reform Order Ecclesiastical District Director (Chao Khana Thammayut Ampher) of Samphanthawong District.
Wat Kor’s Contestation, Story No. 1: The Elevated Sima Holy Space

By these rationalizations, the abbot proposed to construct a three-storey ordination hall and demolish the old ordination hall and shrine. The new ordination hall would be a multi-purpose building. The first floor would be Wat Kor’s museum and school for studying the Buddhist monastic code. The second floor would be the learning hall for Buddhist canonical study. The third floor would be the ordination hall and shrine for conducting holy rituals and worshipping. The cost of construction would be around 2.5 million baht and Wat Kor already had 2.2 million baht which would ensure its completion.

After the Reform Order’s ecclesiastical district director and the governor of Bangkok region accepted the proposal on the same day, the ecclesiastical administrators of the Reform Order called for the immediate meeting on October 7, 1961, to ensure that the elevated holy space on the third floor would not create practical difficulties. Although the committee of the Reform Order realized that a Sima could be elevated as indicated in Buddhist monastic rule (Vinaya) as in the palace (Pasatha) type of Sima, the committee was also concerned about whether the activities on the second and first floors would interrupt the unity and attentiveness of the monks performing the holy rituals on the third floor.\footnote{Ibid., 92 citing the report of committee meeting of the Reform Order (Thammayut) on October 7, 1961.}

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the fixed boundary of sima holy space was one of the tools that Prince Mongkut and his new Reform Order monks employed to challenge the validity of the entire Buddhist monastic community, thus proving his legitimacy as a pious monk. King Mongkut argued that the common practice of constructing a loose boundary of sima holy space that might connect to other sima spaces or other mundane activities was the weak point of the Commoner Order monks. However, as we saw in the
conclusion of Chapter Four, King Mongkut also manipulated sima holy space to benefit his own political movement, especially the double holy space (*mahasima*) that had never been used before in the entire history of Thai Buddhist practice. However, the *mahasima* also helped the *wats* of the Royal Reform Order to establish much clearer boundaries.

Similarly, establishing a *sima* over another enclosed space had never been constructed before in the history of the Reform Order, and as such, it was seen as a modification that could threaten the core values and regulations of this elite-led sect that dominated the ecclesiastical government. On the other hand, the elevated Sima holy space would benefit the monastic complex economically by making the most of limited space. After the investigation on the Vinaya code of conduct, the Reform Order committee reconvened on December 6, 1961, and verified that the elevated *sima* was a valid holy space and allowed Wat Kor to move forward to receive the king’s permission and consent for the new *sima* holy space or *wisungkhamasima* 752. Ironically, as of the time of field research (2002-2003), the *nimits* and *bai semas* (Holy space markers) of this 3-storey ordination hall were not installed. This clearly indicates that this royal *wat* abandoned King Mongkut’s original concept of clearly bounded holy space but focused more on Prince Wachirayan’s practice of generating more monastic revenue.

On December 15, 1961, Wat Kor sent the request to the Department of Religious Affairs for demolition of the old ordination hall and the construction of the new one 753. Within the letter, the abbot added an additional reason that the old ordination hall and shrine used to face the canal. In the present time, the canal was filled up and its location was incompatible with the new Songsawat Road which was constructed through the heart of the monastic residential island. Another reason for constructing the new ordination hall

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752 Ibid., 94-96 citing the report of the committee meeting of the Reform Order (Thammayutika) on 6 December, 1961. Somdet Phramahaweera Wong (Chuan Uttheyi), the head of the Reform Order, sent the letter of approval to the abbot of Wat Samphanthawong indicating that the elevated Sima was validated and allowed him to process the request on 12 December, 1961.

753 Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, letter No. 369/2504 on 15 December, 1961, from the abbot of Wat Kor, Phramaharatchamangkhla Chan, to the Director of Religious Affairs.
was to face the new road. On February 14, 1962, Wat Kor was given the royal consent to
demolish the old ordination hall and shrine and start the construction of the new three-
storey multi-purpose building\textsuperscript{754}. On March 16, 1962, the abbot also sent a letter asking
for help in the construction design of the new ordination hall from the Director General
of the Department of Fine Arts\textsuperscript{755}. The abbot also consulted and asked the Director
General’s advice for how to design the building following the Thai architectural style.
The abbot also planned to request the king to be the chair of the ritual to install the
auspicious cornerstone but later on he made the request to the Prime Minister, Field
Marshal Sarit Thanarat\textsuperscript{756} who responded to the invitation promptly\textsuperscript{757}. The shrine was
demolished prior to the ceremony, which was held on May 8, 1963 by the Supreme
Patriarch and the Prime Minister Sarit. The announcement of the building’s inauguration
indicated that the budget was 3.5 million instead of 2.5 million baht. From this date, Wat
Kor started to construct the new building but still kept the old ordination hall for
conducting holy rituals and planned to demolish it when the new one was finished. The
new gigantic ordination hall was built very close to the old ordination hall and located
diagonally across from the old one but it faced the Songsawat Road.

\textsuperscript{754} Phrakhru Palad Suwatthanamongkhon (Prachuab Nanthapanyo), “Rueang Khwam pen ma nai kan sang Phra Ubosot Wat Samphanthawong Lang Mai (Story of New Ordination Hall of Wat Samphanthawong),” in Rai ngan Kan Truad Kan Khana Song khong Somdet Phramahasamanachao Kromphraya Wachirayanwarorot (Report of Monastic Investigation by Prince Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot), cremation vol. of Phramaharatchamangkhlan, (Bangkok: Rongphim Kan Sasana, 1968), 109 citing letter No. 1634/2505 on 14 February, 1962, from the Acting Director of the Department of Religious Affairs, Colonel Sunthon Thamprida to the abbot of Wat Samphanthawong.

\textsuperscript{755} Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, letter No 62/2505, on 16 March, 1962 from Phramaharatchamangkhlan, the abbot of Wat Samphanthawong, to the Director of the Department of Fine Arts.

\textsuperscript{756} Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, draft letter of invitation on 18 May, 1963 originally typing letter to the monarch but some royal protocol words were altered by hand writing to fit in the formal form for the prime minister.

\textsuperscript{757} Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, letter on 26 April, 1963, from Lieutenant General Net Khemayothin, the Prime Minister’s secretary to Phramaharatchamangkhlan confirming the invitation and refer to the invitation letter on 18 April, 1963.
Wat Kor’s Contestation, Story No. 2: Wat Kor and Preservationists

On March 7, 1969, when construction of the third floor of the new building was about to finish, several newspapers reported that Wat Kor had been bought by foreigners to construct a modern shopping center instead. On the same day, the President of the Association of Siamese Architects sent letter to the new abbot, Phrathepwethi (Choei Yaso), to stop the demolition on the claim that the old ordination hall’s structure was still physically sound and that the architectural craftsmanship of mixed European (Rococo) and Chinese motifs represented an exceptional style. The abbot responded in a press conference of the Department of Religious Affairs on March 19, 1969 that they were not constructing a shopping mall, and that they had already received permission to demolish the old structures from the Department of Fine Arts. In this letter, he also indicated that the monastic complex had a committee for monastic complex of development which was chaired by the high respect prince, Prince Narathipphongpraphan, whose mother was from the lineage of the founder of Wat Kor.

The abbot asked his fellow monk, Phrakhru Sangkhaborihan, to send the letter to the Director of the Department of Religious Affairs for further consultation. The Director wrote back in the same letter indicating that Wat Kor shouldn’t ignore the opinion of outsiders such as this group of architects, but that ultimately the wat certainly had its own rationale and should use its own judgment to conduct its work. The Director also responded to the Association of Siamese Architects with the promise to organize a

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758 “Wat Samkhan Krang Krung Sang Pen Sunkankha tham lai sinlapa lae Watthanatham (Used 15 million baht to buy an important monastic complex in the center city for building shopping center and destroying more than 100 years old art)” in Thai rath, 7 March 1969; “Khao Khai Wat (news about selling monastic complex)” in Siamrat, 7 March 1969.

759 Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, letter No. KO 7/2512 on 7 March, 1969, from President of Association of Siamese Architect (ASA) to Phrathepmuni, the abbot of Wat Samphanthawong.


761 Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, letter on March 20, 1969, from Phrakru Sangkhaborihan to Colonel Pin Mutukan, the Director of Religious Affairs and the writing of Col. Pin’s responding letter on the same page on 21 March, 1969.
meeting and solve the conflict. However, on November 6, 1969, the Deputy Director of the Department of Religious Affairs sent another letter explaining that the old ordination hall was not parallel to Songsawat Road and asked about the possibility of rotating the old ordination hall to make it parallel to the road and the new ordination hall. Needless to say, such a proposition was impossible. The Association of Siamese Architects petitioned to the king, and on February 13, 1970, the Royal Secretary informed the ASA of the royal wish to initiate negotiations between the ASA and Wat Kor. On August 10, 1972, the Royal Secretary Office informed ASA that the Department of Religious Affairs ordered Wat Kor to cease the demolition. The abbot responded to the Department of Religious Affairs with strong opposition. (see Plate 7.6 and 7.7)

Interestingly, the Department of Fine Arts had just conducted a survey of Wat Kor in February, 1973 and on March 2, 1973, the Director General of the Department of Fine Arts told the abbot about their decision to register the old ordination hall on the National

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762 Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, letter No. KO 12/2512 from the President of Association of Siamese Architects, Mr. Wathanyoo Na Thalang to the Director of Religious Affairs and the director wrote on the same letter promise to solve the problem.

763 Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, Letter No ST 0407/9753 on 6 November, 1969 from deputy director of the department to the President of Association of Siamese Architect.

Plate 7.6. Wat Kor’s controversial story on the front page of Thai Rath newspaper and Thai architectural journal.

Plate 7.7. Wat Kor’s detail of the old and new ordination hall

From Wat Kor’s private document.
Register of National Historic Sites. The abbot responded to the Director on March 27, saying that he disagreed with the register. On April 3, 1973, the Director ordered to continue the process of putting the hall on the National Register and told the abbot about the Historic Preservation Law of 1961 which empowered the Department of Fine Arts to imprison the violators of the law. In spite of this, from April 5 to 8, the ordination hall was demolished.

The Association of Siamese Architects sent an urgent letter to the Minister of Education describing the demolition and the abbot’s resistance to the royal order. Moreover, the Association for the Preservation of Art and Environment urged the Minister to enforce the preservation law, which could imprison the violator up to six years and fine him up to 20,000 baht. The Minister of Education thus ordered the Department of Fine Arts and Religious Affairs to send the request to the Ecclesiastical Government to punish the abbot of Wat Kor. In the meeting on July 5, 1973, the cabinet members of the Ecclesiastical Government simply indicated that the abbot did not do anything wrong.

It is interesting to note that Wat Kor did send the letter to the Department of Fine Arts asking for architectural consultation and service. From the interview with the assistant abbot, the new ordination hall was designed by a Department of Fine Arts’ architect in 1962 but there is no record that the architect of the Department of Fine Arts visited the site before starting the design. If the Department of Fine Arts had investigated and sent the notice by that time, the Department of Fine Arts would have prevented the demolition at least five year prior to the time of conflict’s eruption.

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765 Ibid., citing the letter No. KO 1/2516 on 12 May, 1973, from the President of Association of Siamese Architects, Mr. Chira Sinlapakanok, to the Minister of Education and the letter No. 5/2516 from the president of Association of Preservation of Art and Environment to the Minister of Education.
766 Historic Preservation Law 1961 Section (Matra) 32 which was enhanced by the Revolutionary law on 13 December, 1972.
767 Raingan kan Prachum Mahathera Samakhom Pho. So. 2516, Rueang Kan Rue Phra Ubosot Wat Samphantawong.
Why and how did the Department of Fine Arts forget to register this old building? It was clear that the abbot at the time of initiation was a prominent senior monk. His royal rank was at the level of Rong Somdet, or the second highest position below the Supreme Patriarch, and he controlled several connections to the key military dictator. For instance, the Prime Minister, Field Marshal Sarit, paid a visit for the ritual of laying the cornerstone. Furthermore, the key administrative monks indicated that Wat Kor followed the suggestions of the Prime Minister and Luang Wichitwathakan, the chief architect of nationalism, who also suggested building the large scale ordination hall for the sake of housing a modern school to embracing the nation’s children and instruct them in Buddhist and English education. At the ceremony, the Prime Minister announced that he would support this monastic complex to make sure it finished the construction because the new ordination hall would make a big contribution to the education of the nation. Given this overwhelming support from the military dictator, who would dare to enforce the preservation law to stop the construction? Moreover, Wat Kor also sought to display the present king’s regalia in the bas-relief on the ordination hall’s front panel, and it successfully received the royal permission.

**Wat Kor’s Contestation, Story No. 3: Wat Kor the Amulet Producer**

By the time of the Cold War, Wat Kor’s ordination hall funding was shrinking and the construction expenditures expanded. The abbot in 1970 indicated that its construction cost was 4.3 million baht and asked Wat Kor’s major patron, Major General Prince Narathippraphanphong about the possibility of producing the coin amulets with an image of the king and the Supreme Patriarch (Chuan Utheyi) together\(^{768}\). In 1972, the air force captain claimed to see a mysterious monk floating through the sky while he was flying the air force fighter jet over the mountain range in Chiang Mai province. After the\(^{768}\) Wat Samphanthawong’s private document, letter No. 88/2513 on November 5, 1970, from the abbot, Phratheppanyamuni (Choei Yaso), to Major General Prince Kormmamuen Narathippraphanphong.
incident, he searched all over the mountain and found an old monk residing in Wat Doi Maepang. The air force pilot recognized the venerable monk as the one who was flying in the air. The story of the venerable monk, Luangpu Wan Suchinno, became a nationwide story. The venerable monk received recognition from the key administrative figures of the ecclesiastical government in Bangkok and also hosted several visits of the royal family.

The abbot of the monastic complex where the venerable Luangpu Wan resided was the relative of the key administrative monks of Wat Kor and resided in Wat Kor prior to his abbotship at Wat Doi Maepang. From 1969 to 1987, the key administrative monks of Wat Kor frequently traveled to visit Luangpu Waen769. Wat Kor became the main producer of the amulet of Luangpu Waen. When the Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia, in 1977, Thailand was in panic and the eastern border of Cambodia was under critical watch by the army and border patrol police forces. The abbot of Wat Doi Maepang who was also the chair of Wat Kor’s Alumni Association, asked Wat Kor to produce the amulet coin named “Rao Su” (We Fight) for distributing to military personals and police for the sake of national security. The concept behind producing this coin amulet was to inspire the holder to fight with the enemy of the nation who wanted to destroy “our nation, religion and the king770.” There was news from Aranyaprathet at the border of Prachinburi province that the Thai army was engaging in heavy battle and all army soldiers who also held Luangpu Waen’s amulets were safe. The news filled up Wat Kor with huge crowds asking for the “Rao Sue” amulets.

Although it was the traditional practice that monks could not sell any products or produce the amulets, there were many loopholes around this prohibition. For instance, rather than using the term “sell” (khaay), wats or monks would “rent” (hay chaw) the

769 Munlanithi Suchinno Anuson (Suchinno Memorial Foundation), Anuson Nai Warokat Sadet Phraratchathan Phoengsop Phrakhunchao Luang Pu Waen Suchinno (Memoir of the Royal Visit for Royal Cremation of Venerable Waen Suchinno) (Bangkok: Po Samphanphanit, 1987).
770 Ibid., 105.
amulets. The monastic complex received a “donation” in exchange. The key administrative monks of Wat Kor were the designers of this coin\textsuperscript{771}. Moreover, the committee who made the coin maintained around 37,000 coins and Wat Kor received 10,000 coins for its portion to distribute to the supporters of the monastic complex.\textsuperscript{772} Later on, Wat Kor also produced Luang Pu Waen coins for other occasions. The abbot of Wat Kor at the time also indicated that Wat Kor relied on the reputation of Luang Pu Waen for finishing the new ordination hall and main Buddha statue\textsuperscript{773}.

**Conclusion**

From the beginning of King Rama I’s reign (r. 1782-1808) to the present time, Bangkok has been through significant transformations. The city that was once established as the new center of a kingdom echoing continuity with Ayutthaya abandoned its initial ambition to restore the lost past due to several economic and political changes. While it still retained aspects of its traditional symbolism of being a Buddhist center, by the time of King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910), Bangkok was remodeled after the preferences of the western colonial city. It was not the center of cosmology but the last stronghold of Theravada Buddhist Kingdom in the world. The royal monastic complexes in Bangkok were reconfigured to be the centers for spreading public education, the seats of the ecclesiastical administration, the world’s Buddhist academies, and the elegant landmarks of Bangkok’s urban scene and national identity. Financially, they were also considered private economic units.

During the period of King Vajiravudh, the decline of colonial power and the rise of the modern nation-state in Southeast Asia also transformed the role of the Buddhist wats in Bangkok and greater Siam. The king and the Supreme Patriarch separated their

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\textsuperscript{771} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{772} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{773} Ibid.
domains of secular and religious affairs more clearly than in the previous traditional practice. The prominent functions of wats in public education and legitimation of the royal rulers were replaced by the public school system of the Department of Formal Education. Moreover, rather than building wats, the king legitimated his rule via the development of western standardized facilities such as hospitals, roads, and a telegraph system, which were initiated mostly in King Chulalongkorn’s reign but completed in King Vajiravudh’s period. Monastic complexes (wats) became more independent financially while their roles in society were reduced.

During the tumultuous period of the People’s Party, although the state had long withdrawn its responsibility from supporting wats, the new government sought to control and exploit the revenue from the central religious assets and monastic properties using different facets of the new religious law. At the state level, the Minister of Education could supervise the decision-making process of the ecclesiastical administrative bodies which were comprised of the ecclesiastical cabinet, congress and judicial court. At the local level, the law appointed the Department of Religious Affairs to take control of the long-term rent contracts of monastic properties. The law also put the responsibility of maintaining wats upon the abbot. In this period of turmoil, when the military faction took the lead in the government, the ultra-nationalistic policies were implemented and made royal wats a part of the nation’s heritage under the supervision of the Department of Fine Arts. The royal monastic complexes with their historic structures became a site of contestation between administrative monks with the support of the Department of Religious Affairs and the Department of Fine Arts.

During the Sarit Era, the situation changed again, as Sarit reversed the trend of the previous regime by revering the crown and reviving most royal Buddhist rituals in public space. Nevertheless, the construction or renovation of royal wats for building the crown’s legitimacy was not essential anymore because, by this time, the emphasis had shifted to an ideology of anti-communism. In other words, rather than investing in the royal
monasteries located in the capital, the goal of the Sarit government and its restoration of the monarchy was to promote a nation-wide cultural campaign of Thai identity against the spread of communism. Herein, the focus shifted from the urban royal wats to the rural wats of exemplary development. Yet, some of royal wats with a large area were also in this program, such as Wat Sraket and Wat Prathumkhongkha.

During this period, the government increased its control over monastic complexes and assets in myriad ways via the new 1963 Religious Law. For instance, the law made monks with ecclesiastical positions into officials according to the Criminal Law Code, the Department of Religious Affairs became the legal owner of central religious assets, and the government was enabled to dethrone the Supreme Patriarch. Another flagship of Sarit’s regime was the initiation of the National Development Plan which also affected all monastic complexes in nation. The Monastic Complex of Exemplary Development (Wat Phattana Tuayang) project was imposed to make a wat into a good example of cleanliness and public sanitation for the local community.

In the post-Sarit period, the idea of the exemplary wat was extended to be the Monastic Complex of Educational Park (Utthayan Kan Suksa) which promoted a clearer plan for not only the sacred precinct and residential quarter but also the monastic rental property and public schools. By allowing public schools inside monastic complexes, the government’s standard multi-storey buildings were constructed within historic wats.

Moreover, Sarit’s initiation of the Tourism Authority and first Master Plan for Bangkok were yet further examples of how American ideas of development influenced the function of the monastic complex. The Master Plan for Historic Preservation and Development of Rattanakosin City were generated to revive the glory of Bangkok, and aimed at capturing the aura of King Chulalongkorn’s success and making it a world metropolis. However, the preservation planning and urban building regulations were promulgated in the late-80s, when the urban blocks of shop-houses were already in place.
In addition, the planning and building regulations were not seriously enforced, causing an unchecked expansion of structures.

From King Vajiravudh’s period to the present time of the post-Sarit Era, monastic complexes have gradually lost their everyday-life functions in society, while becoming more independent in their financial stability. However, they did not completely gain control over their monastic asset management at first. During the tenure of Prince Wachirayan\textsuperscript{774} and Prince Chinnawon\textsuperscript{775}, the ecclesiastical government was more powerful and gained control of most monastic properties and central religious assets. By the revolutionary period of People’s Party, the government tried to gain control over the monastic assets for their own secular purposes by proclaiming the new religious law. The power of the Supreme Patriarch was significantly reduced by the more democratic structure, but the abbot was empowered to take care of his \textit{wat} and the Department of Religious Affairs asserted tighter control over their assets. Monastic complexes have struggled to gain power to control their properties from the state authority.

In the pre-modern context, the monastic complex was a place to balance the power of the state. Although the kings had tight grip on monastic order, the monastic complex and its holy space still was a sanctuary and a place to accumulate power to gain political advantage, as was the case with King Mongkut. By the time of King Vajiravudh, Prince Wachirayan reduced this important aspect of holy space to only a temporary concession, but increased the autonomy of the \textit{wats} and monks to manage the monastic donated land and its properties. His standard text books and standard monastic practices actually transformed Buddhist religion into a standardized nationalist ideology. \textit{Wats} lost their unique position in the socio-political contexts but gained more independence in the economy.

\textsuperscript{774} His title was Somdet Phramahasamanachao Krom Phraya Wachirayanwarorot, Supreme Patriarch.  
\textsuperscript{775} His title was Krommaluang Chinnawon Siriwat, Supreme Patriarch.
During Sarit’s regime and in today’s post-Sarit regime, the economy has grown significantly. One of the legacies of the Prince Supreme Patriarch is that royal monastic complexes have gained more revenue from rental properties and tourist businesses while the state has also increased its power to supervise these wats’ revenue and put more responsibility on the shoulders of administrative monks by binding them with a legal status. Furthermore, because the Supreme Court’s decision indicated that a wat was a juristic entity, many wats also tried to gain their right to manage their land from the Department of Religious Affairs.

From Chapter Three to this chapter, we have seen that the state authority has usually intervened in the monastic order with the aim of making the Sangha a mechanism compatible with the state’s main political agenda. At the same time, the monastic complexes and ecclesiastical government have also gained autonomy in the economic system while the state has tried to make them compatible with western international practices. As a result, the contestation between the state and the Buddhist wats has also grown significantly.

In terms of the case studies, Wat Pho in Sarit’s period was in a significantly different situation from the previous regime. Its immense historic structures were fully renovated and its financial stability was fully recovered to ensure its perfect physical appearance due to the revival of the royal visits and the rise of heritage tourism. However, Wat Pho’s new look was contested by the preservationists, as it did not follow the Romantic approach of preservation. The local communities and Thai pilgrims complained that it had lost its core values and compromised its Buddhist sacred ambiance.

In contrast, Wat Sraket was still largely independent, due to its large rent property and its practice of maintaining a variety of supporters from poor to rich. Except for its immense structure of the Golden Mountain Pagoda, its historic structures were not highly detailed or valued, so it did not have any serious conflicts with the preservation authority.
When it needed large scale renovation, Wat Sraket received support from powerful state and business figures such as the Department of Irrigation, military dictators, and airline tycoons who rallied with great help. However, with the rapid urbanization accompanied by the widespread investment in building tall shop-houses, Wat Sraket’s monastic donated land became contested when it planned to invest in this development.

For the small scale *wat*, Wat Kor with its high land value was manipulated by Prince Wachirayan for maximizing its rent space. Since the monastery island was cut in half in Rama V’s reign, its monastic precinct experienced a significant spatial rearrangement of the residential buildings to be multi-storey apartments. When Wat Kor reached the deal over the construction of the new four-storey shop-houses which would generate a large amount of profit, the monastic complex destroyed its historic ordination hall in order to build the new multi-storey ordination hall, the first in Thai Buddhist history. Moreover, it was fully supported by the Prime Minister Sarit. Both Wat Sraket and Wat Kor entered into conflict because they had both adopted the same approach to development. They had both followed Sarit’s Exemplary Monastic Complex of Development Project.
CONCLUSION

In this conclusion, my aim is to provide an overview of the major conflicts and contestations of each of the three case studies in order to draw comparative lessons for appropriate management strategies and to make planning recommendations. In the first part of the chapter, I summarize the major transformations of each of the wats, including a discussion of the site, physical conditions, socio-economic and political conditions, and management conditions. Following this overview of each of the case studies, I summarize the major historical changes in the royal wats of Bangkok and then turn to a discussion of lessons learned from history for urban design, planning and preservation policies.

The Conflicts and Contestations of Wat Pho: A Summary of Wat Pho’s Major Transformations

Site Analysis

Wat Pho’s vicinity has been through many transformations. During the Taksin period, the area was a marshy swampland. At the time, Wat Pho was situated next to a Chinese community in the north, swampland in the east, and a shipyard in the west. When Bangkok was selected as the site for the new capital city in 1782, Wat Pho was surrounded by feudal princes’ palaces. The Chinese community moved out, creating space for King Rama I’s new Grand Palace. The swampland became the site of an ammunition house and prison, and the shipyard along the riverfront and city wall was gradually filled with the new princes’ palaces, markets, floating houses and shops. During the reign of King Mongkut, the palaces and waterfront west of Wat Pho caught on fire, and the area was turned into a colonnade-style courthouse for foreign subjects and an apartment compound for King Mongkut’s western advisors. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, he turned the area of Tha Tien into a modern market embraced by colonial style shop-houses, while the floating houses gradually disappeared. He also
constructed western-style manors for his son’s palaces to the south of Wat Pho and Tha Tien. The vicinity of Wat Pho was transformed again from traditional palaces to colonial shop-houses, princes’ manors and modern markets.

By the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, the palace to the south of Tha Tien was redeveloped to be three blocks of modern shop-houses and the palace manors to the south of Wat Pho were renovated to serve as government offices, and some modern buildings were added to these government office sites. In spite of the law established in the 1980s by the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority intended to regulate historic preservation zoning and height control in Rattanakosin Historic District, many of the owners of these modern buildings have continued to expand their properties. While the private owners of shop-houses south of Tha Tien market have added more floors to their buildings creating adverse visual effects on Wat Pho, the street vendors and floating houses that once defined the area have been prohibited. Wat Pho today is a mix of buildings from several periods, but the indigenous temporary structures of floating houses and wood shelters used by the poor have been completely erased. When the first Master Plan for Historic Preservation of Rattanakosin City was introduced in 1994 to preserve the historic sites connoting the glory of King Chulalongkorn, it aimed to preserve only the colonial architecture and the royal wats. As discussed in Chapter Five, it is important to underscore that the image of Chulalongkorn’s Bangkok in the Master Plan distorted the truth about the urban landscape during his reign, which was comprised of both indigenous temporary structures and the more elaborate structures of colonial architecture (see Figure 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3).

Physical Condition Analysis

The monastic structures of Wat Pho were constructed on a grand scale at the beginning of its first renovation-expansion. King Rama I endowed Wat Pho with elaborate architecture, Lord Buddha Relics, and a spatial arrangement representing the
Wat Pho and its vicinity before King Mongkut’s reign (circa 1850) the waterfront area was occupied by floating houses and boat houses

Wat Pho at the end of King Mongkut’s reign (1867) the area at the left corner became the courthouse for foreign subjects and apartment compound for foreigners

Figure 8.1. The FormZ Models of the urban elements around Wat Pho from the period of King Rama III (circa 1850) to the end of King Mongkut’s reign (1867) showing the changes in the area of Tha Tien.
Wat Pho and its vicinity circa 1890s the city wall was removed and the area of the courthouse was converted to a market with courtyard and colonial style shop-houses.

Wat Pho and its vicinity in 1945 the Tha Tien area became 3 clusters of shop-houses while the city wall, fortress, floating houses and boat houses disappeared.

Figure 8.2. The Form Z Model of the urban elements around Wat Pho from 1890s to 1945 showing significant changes in the area of Tha Tien.
Figure 8.3. The Form Z Model of the urban elements around Wat Pho in 1987 showing the unchecked growth of shop-houses and the development of the waterfront area.
cosmological order as part of his competition with his brother for legitimacy. Hindu-Buddhist mythical icons were used to signify the king as a god who protected the Buddhist religion. During the reign of Rama III, the king expanded the scale and grandeur of Wat Pho in order to compensate for his lack of legitimacy. The main structures were expanded using Thai traditional craftsmanship while Chinese embellishments were also integrated in minor architectural details. For instance, the ordination hall was expanded, the new reclining Buddha Shrine was built, the library hall was reconstructed and another two grand pagodas were added. Moreover, various forms of Thai traditional knowledge were inscribed in the walls of Wat Pho, and the monastery compound was rebuilt in a concrete structure.

During the reign of King Mongkut, the king added another grand structure but prohibited his successor to do so on the grounds that Wat Pho had no space left. After this period, Wat Pho entered state of decline. In King Chulalongkorn’s reign, minor structures of Wat Pho, such as the pavilions along the wall, were demolished on the grounds that they had no function, even though they were historic structures housing Rama III’s inscriptions of Thai knowledge. While the king did finance the construction of several new elaborated royal wats, he did not finance any major renovations at Wat Pho because it no longer signified the king’s legitimacy in the modern context. However, more modern school buildings appeared at the edge of the monastery compound.

By the end of the absolute monarchy, Wat Pho’s major structures were in decay and they continued to deteriorate because the new commoner governments didn’t support them until the end of World War II. Due to the limited funding, only a few of the major structures were stabilized, and some architectural details disappeared out of neglect. When the monarchy was revived and tourism was initiated during the government of Sarit, Wat Pho structures were fully renovated, but by this time, several details and construction techniques were already lost.
Socio-Political and Economic Conditions Analysis

At the time of my field research in 2003, Wat Pho’s Phra Phutthayotfa Foundation reported that it had approximately 300 million baht in its saving account. Wat Pho’s account had also grown to around 300 million baht. Thus, Wat Pho today has approximately 600 million baht in total savings. Beside its revenue from interest on the saving’s account, the revenue for 2003 from public donations and land rents was around 42 million baht. The revenue from collecting entrance fees was around 21 million baht. Wat Pho is now famous for the school of massage therapy that was inscribed during King Rama III’s reign, and Wat Pho also generates revenue from the rental of two pavilions for the School of Traditional Massage. The revenue from renting these two pavilions was around 100,000 baht per month and the rent revenue from Tangtrongchit commerce school was around 300,000 baht per month.

In contrast, Wat Pho earned much less from its monastic donation land than from the rental of space in the monastic precinct. For instance, one unit of shop-houses in the Tha Tien area paid Wat Pho only 300 baht per month, while the market value would be approximately 2,000 baht. The reason for this discrepancy is that Wat Pho has found it difficult to increase the rent for the tenants. Therefore, Wat Pho earned only around 15,000 baht per month from all the units of shop-houses combined. This was even lower than the revenue generated from donation boxes at Wat Pho’s new public toilet (20,000 baht per month). The other monastic donation lands were in Kanchanaburi Province, which earned only around 10,000 baht per year. In contrast, the revenue from donation boxes and renting space inside the monastic sacred precinct was much higher, and it is also clear that people are willing to pay for making merit or participating in unique

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776 Interview with Phra Sriwisutthiwong, the assistant abbot of Wat Pho, on April 27, 2003.
777 Interview with Mr. Joon Darunwichitkasem and Mr. Huang Tangtongchit on May 24, 2003.
778 Interview with Phra Sriwisutthiwong, the assistant abbot of Wat Pho, on April 27, 2003.
779 Interview with Mr. Joon Darunwichitkasem and Mr. Huang Tangtongchit on May 27, 2003.
780 Interview with Phra Sriwisutthiwong, the assistant abbot of Wat Pho, on April 27, 2003.
rituals. From my analysis of Wat Pho’s revenue, it is clear that Wat Pho earned most from its national-level social networks and its reputation as a wat that is supported and frequented by the monarchy, a feature which attracts Thai pilgrims who make donations. Surprisingly, the revenue generated from tourism was less than half the amount generated by donations, and the rent from its monastic donated land was almost nothing.

In terms of the relationship with the local community, as we saw from the study of Wat Pho’s history in Chapter Three, from the outset, Wat Pho was not really a wat serving local commoners in the community. In the pre-modern period, Wat Pho was first renovated by King Rama I and, during the period of rebuilding the manpower structure, the site was surrounded by the palaces of princes. Thus, Wat Pho served the king and the royal princes as a stage for royal spectacles, hosting grand rituals, and fostering legitimacy. The palaces of princes in the past were minor political centers because the prince who received a palace was assigned government duties and a feudal department. Therefore, the noblemen who served a prince in a feudal department would live nearby around the princes’ palaces. In addition, historically associated with Wat Pho was the female servant community of the inner palace compound. Wat Pho might have served this extended community comprised of minor bureaucrats, conscript laborers of the princes, female servants and monastic conscript laborers, but this would have been a secondary function of this royal wat.

It was not until the reign of King Chulalongkorn, when the first wave of the separation of church and state ideology was implemented, that Wat Pho had to bear its own financial responsibility. When the crown support from conscript labor ceased due to the dissolution of the semi-feudal system, the king advocated alternative means of earning revenue for the royal wat, including arranging festivals. Although Wat Pho was spared from the state’s total abandonment of support and received a maintenance allowance as one of the Bangkok’s special urban landmarks, the allowance did not equal the amount of tax lost from conscript laborers. For instance, upon the completion of Wat
Pho’s renovation in King Rama III’s reign, Wat Pho was recorded as having one thousand laborers. If the number was correct and sustained until the period of King Chulalongkorn when laborers paid head poll tax of 6 baht, Wat Pho should have earned more than 6,000 baht a year for its maintenance. At the end of feudal system when all conscript laborers were converted to the new military drafting system, the king provided only 2,400 baht for the maintenance of Wat Pho.

After the crown maintenance support to this wat finally ceased in the reign of King Prachathipok (r.1925-1935), Wat Pho’s space was dramatically altered to serve the emerging Chinese community of Tha Tien. This shift to a new Chinese clientele was necessary because of the gradual disappearance of surrounding bureaucratic communities due to the dissolution of the feudal system. Similarly, this period witnessed the decline of the inner palace female community due to the establishment of the new Suan Dusit Palace at the north of Bangkok in King Chulalongkorn’s reign and the proclamation of monogamy by King Rama VI.

One of the ways the abbot sought to attract the Chinese residents to get involved with Wat Pho was by initiating a Chinese New Year Festival and establishing Chinese language schools in the pavilions around the great pagodas. In addition, the abbot needed to ask for government permission to hold funeral ceremonies for the Chinese patrons. Moreover, from my field research, I learned that Wat Pho also allowed the Chinese to install their ancestors’ remains at the base of the Buddha statues as a means of attracting Chinese to rent space for their ancestor ashes, then come and worship their ancestral shrines on the Chinese Ancestral Holidays.

The Tha Tien community was not an old community dating from the pre-modern period. The Chinese merchants came to dominate this area because of the establishment

781 Interview with Mr. Huang and Mrs. Lek Tangtongchit on September 13, 2002.
782 It is commonly known that traditionally, in pre-modern period, no funeral ceremony and cremation rituals for commoners were allowed within the city wall of Rattanakosin area.
of the new extension of the Tha Tien Market during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, when he promoted the building of more shop-houses on the land that belonged to him. By the time of King Prachathipok, the palace of Prince Chanphat was demolished and as more shop-houses were constructed, the Tha Tien community expanded and became a strong Chinese enclave outside Chinatown. Over the years, the Tha Tien community established a unique relationship with Wat Pho, exemplified by the affiliations between their offspring and the temple boys. Members of the Tha Tien community also became involved in the social network of the senior patriarchs of Wat Pho.

Social dynamics of the wat began to shift again with the restoration of the monarchy during the Sarit era (1957-1963), and Wat Pho gained significant financial stability because of the return of the crown to the public arena. Wat Pho was one of the major wats that the king visited for the major annual Buddhist Kathin rituals and the key military generals also followed in the monarch’s footsteps by supporting Wat Pho and building the well-endowed Phra Phutthayotfa foundation. While Field Marshall Sarit’s support for the royal appearance in public rituals directly benefited the financial status of Wat Pho, his development policies focusing on road building projects undermined the importance of water transportation and reduced the economic vitality of Tha Tien. Moreover, in the post-Sarit Era when heritage tourism became the major source of revenue, Wat Pho’s affiliation with the Tourist Authority of Thailand to develop the sacred precinct for tourism fostered resentment among the local Chinese community and occasionally the Department of Fine Arts.

Management Condition Analysis

In terms of the management of historic structures, Wat Pho was registered as historic place on November 22nd, 1949, and by the Historic Preservation Law, any new construction in Wat Pho has to receive the permission from the Department of Fine Arts. The department is supposed to supervise all construction in the wat. Unfortunately,
endowed with ninety-nine pagodas, nine shrines, numerous residential quarters and several gigantic structures, Wat Pho always has to fix its minor structures that deteriorate every year and it is impractical to report and receive the permission from the Department for these renovations. In fact, Wat Pho has violated the law numerous times since it was passed and the Department of Fine Arts has failed to stop these kinds of construction projects. By the law, the Director General has full authority to stop and prosecute the violators. However, there is not a single lawsuit prosecuting the abbot of Wat Pho. One would wonder why these numerous errors happen.

To make sense of why the Department of Fine Arts has not been able to exercise its authority in Wat Pho, one must first understand the power vested in the abbot. Following the formation of the central ecclesiastical government in 1902, Senior Patriarchs (Somdet) who became regional governors had real power to control abbots and the local education of the regions they supervised. In practice, senior monks with high status were also widely respected. In addition, he had real political influence in Thai society since politicians could gain legitimacy by supporting senior monks and thus gain votes from the Thai populace. Along with this, the abbot was also expected to exercise his authority to protect the monastic assets, and if he failed in this duty, he could be punished.

Traditionally, abbots of royal wats in Bangkok had to be at least at the level of junior patriarchs. Wat Pho’s abbot was always promoted to the highest rank since Wat Pho is the biggest wat, thus giving him significant opportunities to manage Buddhist education for a large number of his disciples, arrange the royal rituals, and cooperate with the government projects. Since the time Wat Pho was registered as a historic place, Wat Pho has had four abbots before the present one. Two of them were at the highest level of Senior Patriarch, (Somdet) which is also one of the eight ecclesiastical cabinet ministers. One of these two Somdets became the Supreme Patriarch and his two successors were in
the second highest rank of patriarchs or Rong Somdet. The present abbot is also in this second highest patriarch position.

In 1941, a new religious law was passed replacing the Sangha Act of 1902, and the power of the abbot was expanded to include taking care of his monastic structures. According to the Sangha Act of 1941, he was also bound by Civil Law, which meant that a monk with an ecclesiastical position was also a government official. Thus he could punish anyone who resisted his order and he could be punished if he failed to properly manage his monastic assets.

It is important to note that the Director of the Department of Fine Arts was also responsible for taking care of monastic structures designated as historic property. However, the Director General of the Department of Fine Arts did not have the reputation of abbots, and was under the Minister of Education, who was also a politician. Moreover, unlike the abbot, no article was written to punish him if he failed to protect historic sites. Given the political influence of the abbot described above, the Director General of the DFA was unlikely to prosecute the abbot of Wat Pho or any royal wat.

When Wat Pho started to cooperate with the Tourist Authority of Thailand in organizing events and making the space more appropriate for tourist business, the monastic order also constructed several minor buildings in a contemporary style to facilitate tourism without consent from the Department of Fine Arts. However, in terms of major restorations which require expertise in preservation, Wat Pho can not undertake the construction alone and unchecked. The Department of Fine Arts, TAT and Wat Pho have had to cooperate on several major structures such as the four grand pagodas, the ordination hall and Reclining Buddha Shrine. Some of these projects proceeded smoothly, but most of them spurred contestation between these groups due to their different ideologies about the royal wat’s space.

The major differences of opinion centered on the aesthetic ideas in British Romantic Picturesque practiced by the Department of Fine Arts versus the Buddhist
ideology of making merit for the continuity of the Buddhist religion upheld by the monastic communities. In the past, Wat Pho’s immense structures were cared for by the government authority in various ways. In the pre-modern period, the organization of various feudal departments close to the king conducted major renovations following the king’s orders. The festivities in this wat were also sponsored by the monarch. However, there was no record of monks’ involvement in the renovation process. In fact, monks of Wat Pho historically had nothing to do with the structures. By the time of modernization, the Ministry of Public Construction had the responsibility of Wat Pho’s major renovations in the sacred precinct, but the renovation of the residential quarter was carried out using the patriarch’s own funding except in the case of the abbot’s residence. After 1902, the first religious law was passed and subsequently, senior monks became more involved with the preservation of Wat Pho since the major revenue from the head poll tax was cut and the abbot became responsible for managing the monastic assets by law.

At the beginning of King Vajiravudh’s reign, the Department of Fine Arts was founded, and Wat Pho’s work under the Ministry of Public Construction was transferred to that department with some funding for renovation. Until King Vajiravudh’s time, the senior monks of Wat Pho were still excluded from the major renovation projects in the sacred precinct area. In 1925, the renovation support and maintenance allowance finally ceased, and the financial support for the preservation of the entire monastic precinct fell on the senior patriarchs of Wat Pho. From the 1940s onwards, the record shows that the senior monks of Wat Pho have struggled to generate enough funds to maintain the historic structures.

As a consequence of Sarit’s policies, Wat Pho’s financial situation stabilized. The monastic complex became financially independent with savings approaching a billion baht, and as a result, the monastic community could safely disregard the DFA when undertaking restoration and conservation projects. In addition, several new preservation
projects of Wat Pho were also funded by several businesses, such as the Tangtrongchit family and the former temple boy who now is one of the richest men in the country controlling a majority of beer and rice whiskey businesses, lucrative real estate properties and luxurious hotels in Thailand. These projects were also implemented without the oversight of the DFA.

While it would seem that Wat Pho is doing well in terms of generating revenue for its own maintenance, the financial success of this monastery points to one of the fundamental contradictions of the current law regarding monastic management. Under the Sangha Act of 1941 that stipulated that the abbot must maintain the monastic assets which belong to Buddhist realm, a clean, neat and organized monastic precinct was seen as a reflection of the abbot’s success in adhering to the law and perpetuating the Buddhist religion. But in fact, with its focus on the material realm of Buddhist assets, this religious law contradicts one of the core concepts of Buddhist belief and practice—namely, the detachment from material desire. This principle of detachment from the worldly presupposes that any form of a monastery that could support the continuity of the Buddhist religion and convey the core ideas of the Buddhist doctrine would suffice. On the other hand, the preservationist principles that emphasize the British ideology of valuing antiquated materials as “heritage” have tended to classify living historic wats as historic sites, making them incompatible with living Buddhist practice.

This brings me to the central lessons to be drawn from my analysis of Wat Pho. First is the conflict between preservationist concepts and Buddhist belief and practice. As we have seen, the Department of Fine Arts is primarily geared towards preserving the material edifices of this wat as national heritage. What the DFA’s preservationist agenda overlooks, however, are the complex responsibilities of the administrative monks of Wat Pho, who have been put in a position of balancing three important aspects of the monastery: the continuity of Thai Buddhist practice, service to the local lay community, and coordinating with the state authorities. The latter poses major challenges because
within the state authority, there are four major agencies that are not coordinating well with each other.

This leads the second lesson to be learned from Wat Pho: the competing agendas of various government bodies. As we saw from many examples in this dissertation, the Religious Affairs and Historic Preservation agencies have different agendas and employ dissimilar ideologies vis-à-vis the monastery. Adding to the conflict, there is the Department of Formal Education which has also had as stake in Wat Pho since the reign of Rama V, when it began to establish modern education inside the monastery compound. Finally there is also the relatively new organization—the Tourist Authority of Thailand—which is seeking involvement in new plans to support tourism in the complex. The monastic community must somehow negotiate and mediate all of these competing interests, over and above their key responsibilities of perpetuating the Buddhist religion.

**Wat Pho Conclusion**

It is important to recall that historically, Wat Pho was a *wat* that served the ruling elite, and hence it is not surprising that, when the government began to focus its attention on Wat Pho again in the Sarit era, members of the Wat Pho monastic community were willing to comply with the new demands of the state. Indeed, senior patriarchs of Wat Pho had always cooperated and complied with the government’s new policies. During King Rama III’s period, the abbot of Wat Pho, Prince Patriarch Wasukri, was also responsible for controlling the growing faction of Prince Mongkut’s Reform Order. Moreover, as mentioned before, the space of Wat Pho and its grand celebrations (usually held after the completion of the new renovation) were an arena for the king to establish his legitimacy in both the reigns of King Rama I and Rama III. When King Chulalongkorn initiated the modern public school system, Wat Pho readily opened a public school in its residential quarter, and when Prince Wachirayan launched the new modern school in provincial towns, the patriarch of Wat Pho also became one of the
provincial educational advisors supervising the educational and ecclesiastical affairs in the region.

During the Cold War, senior patriarchs of Wat Pho also served the government as the Buddhist missionaries in areas that were considered vulnerable to communist infiltration such as the Northeast. Wat Pho also cooperated with the government to foster national unity by promoting Buddhist religion. Given this history of cooperation with the government, it was not surprising to see that, when heritage tourism became the major source of the country’s revenue and the development of historic sites became the government’s major policy, Wat Pho, with its status as the largest royal wat, was willing to cooperate with the TAT. Wat Pho’s cooperation with the government was not without its detractors, however, and during my fieldwork, many people in the local community complained that the monks of Wat Pho now favored the tourist industry and had abandoned the local community and pilgrims because of the high revenue from the tourist fees, even though in reality, Wat Pho earned almost twice as much revenue from the donations from Thai supporters than from the tourist entrance fees.

The local community’s negative perception of Wat Pho as catering to tourists stems from a number of factors. First, it is true that Wat Pho now complies with the Department of Fine Arts’ policies regarding the royal wat as a national heritage site, meaning that it has implemented stricter measures regarding the use of space within the compound. For instance, Wat Pho has cooperated with the TAT to promote several events to attract more tourists, but for the most part the local community does not participate in those rituals and ceremonies. In fact, local merchants who had connections with senior monks were eligible to sell their goods at the festivals, but they had to comply with the new strict standards of decorum and appearance. These measures have served to marginalize those residents in the vicinity who feel such festivals are staged for tourists.

783 Interview with Mr. Huang Tangrongchit who followed the senior monk of Wat Pho for the Buddhist missionary project on September 13, 2002.
This stands in contrast to events in the pre-modern period, when all major events were organized by the monarch. For such festivals and Buddhist ceremonies, the space of Wat Pho was public because it was shared by the local commoners and the ruling classes, even though the priority was given to the elite. Furthermore, Wat Pho was also a place for redistributing wealth surplus from the elite to commoners, and this facet of the historical relationship to the community has been downplayed in the contemporary era of heritage tourism.

Secondly, some residents of the Tha Tien community feel betrayed by Wat Pho because they were supporters of this wat during times of financial hardship, such as after the fall of the absolute monarchy in 1932. Ironically, during the nationalist period, the architecture of royal wats such as Wat Pho became the symbol of the nation’s heritage but even so, the government did not support this wat as much as the monarchy had in the past. For this reason, Wat Pho needed to attract Chinese at Tha Tien. The Chinese community and local supporters could only sustain the historic structures but were not in a position to restore them to their former glory. In reality, Wat Pho only became prosperous again because of the restoration of the monarchy and the rise of heritage tourism.

Because of the grandeur and architectural detail of its structures, Wat Pho has in fact always needed the support of the ruling classes and the government authority, and it has always tended to serve these elites as a first priority. In this sense, the post-revolutionary period—when the Chinese merchant middle-class of Tha Tien became Wat Pho’s primary patrons—must be understood as an historical exception. Still, a critical distinction between the present and the past is that tourists are foreigners who most likely do not understand Buddhism and who do not share the epistemology of merit-making and wealth redistribution that comprises the cornerstone of Buddhist belief and practice. By contrast, in the past, the elite were the noblemen and royal members who understood and respected the Buddhist practice of merit. Within this social structure, local commoners
would pay more respect to these elites than to foreign visitors, as the latter are not seen as participating in the monastery’s system of merit and patronage. Another factor is that in the past, major events and ceremonies for the ruling classes did not occur as frequently as the tourist activities and visitor businesses that operate around Wat Pho every day. The latter activities are widely viewed as disruptive to the more esoteric goals of Buddhist practice, such as meditation.

Today Wat Pho’s authorities recognize the need to re-establish their legitimacy as a Buddhist monastic community, and they continue to discuss strategies for redistributing profits from tourists and donations to the commoners who are underprivileged. Wat Pho houses a primary school under the Bangkok Municipality Authority and provides several scholarships for its students. The pupils are mostly from the laboring class, and work at the Tha Tian and Pakkhlong Talad markets. Wat Pho also has several foundations to support novices to study Pali and the Buddhist Canon following the modern system that has been developed to be compatible with the secular degree system. Still, these efforts have not completely changed the popular attitude that Wat Pho now serves tourists rather than Thais. The new discourses of cultural heritage (including both historic preservation and tourist business) are also a part of the government policies that Wat Pho has needed to incorporate into its mandate, while at the same time endeavoring to continue to provide services to the local community and Buddhist populations at-large.

**The Conflicts and Contestations of Wat Sraket: A Brief Summary of Wat Sraket’s Major Transformation**

**Site Analysis**

Wat Sraket was originally in a mangrove forest and bounded by several canal routes. When Bangkok became the new capital city for King Rama I, Wat Sraket became the royal wat just outside the city wall which served as the official site for funerals. Its canal edge was also designated by Rama I as a waterfront for poetry festivals. Wat
Sraket’s vicinity was altered when King Rama III ordered to construct two new royal wats inside the city wall across from Wat Sraket. These new royal wats brought communities of monastic conscript laborers into Wat Sraket’s vicinity, and its mangrove area became a new suburban community. Moreover, King Rama III’s unfinished project to construct a momentous pagoda at Wat Sraket resulted in a large quantity of unused lumber in the area. Some enterprising commoners established saw mills to process the lumber for sale, and this area became a construction wood market until the present time.

When King Mongkut ordered the expansion of Bangkok with another ring canal in the east, Wat Sraket became an urban center. King Mongkut also constructed a new road, Bamrung Mueang, which divided Wat Sraket’s monastery compound and funeral complex. In the period of King Chulalongkorn, more roads were constructed on Wat Sraket’s land along the canals that naturally marked its parcel. The funeral complex became incompatible with the western preference for roadside shops along the new road. As the road became the main mode of transportation, the canal fell into disuse and the waterfront area along the canal deteriorated into a slum condition. The vicinity of Wat Sraket was finally filled up by blocks of modern shop-houses during Sarit’s era, and most of these were still in the lumber business. Several floor expansions were added to these shop-houses at the edge of Mahanak canal (see Figure 8.4, 8.5 and 8.6).

**Physical Condition Analysis**

Unlike Wat Pho, Wat Sraket was originally a simple royal wat without any of the spatial arrangements that signify the cosmological order, such as cloister corridors. It gradually developed many more cosmological features and a strong axis. During the reign of Rama III, a shrine, a corridor embracing the ordination hall, and a monumental Khmer-style pagoda were constructed in a linear order following orders of the king. Its funeral pavilion and incinerator were reconstructed in concrete. However, the foundation of the pagoda sank, and it was left unfinished. King Mongkut finished the construction by
Wat Sraket in King Rama III’s reign (circa 1850) Wat Sraket’s precinct was an island outside the city wall

Wat Sraket at the end of King Mongkut’s reign (1887) the new Bamrung Mueang Road divided Wat Sraket and its funeral facilities

Figure 8.4. The Form Z Models of Wat Sraket and its environment from the end of King Rama III’s reign (circa 1850) to 1890 showing the change in Wat Sraket’s area.
Figure 8.5. The Form Z Models of Wat Sraket and its environment from 1920 to 1945 showing the growth of urban block with shop-houses.
Wat Sraket circa 1950s the area north of the Golden Mountain Pagoda was a dilapidated area with lumber yards.

Wat Sraket in 1987 after the shop-houses were constructed on the site of lumber yard and dilapidated area.

Figure 8.6. The Form Z Models of Wat Sraket and its environment from 1950s to 1987.
filling the structure with stones and soil, creating an artificial mount crowned with a Sri Lankan-style pagoda.

The mountain pagoda became the tallest structure in Bangkok before the arrival of modern buildings with elevators. Although it became the landmark of historic Bangkok, the base of the artificial mountain has long been cluttered with unmanicured greenery and disorganized graves. The path leading to the pagoda was originally a straight, steep staircase to the top, but later this was altered to be a spiral staircase wrapping around the mount. Wat Sraket’s architectural significance is not its elaborate architecture but rather its role as the city’s largest and most visible Buddhist landmark. Wat Sraket’s monastery compound was also originally in a linear arrangement and was later altered significantly. Several large structures for public education and other secular purposes were constructed inside the monastery compound during the Sarit period in contemporary Thai style.

**Socio-Political and Economic Conditions Analysis**

While Wat Pho collected more than 20 million baht from the tourist fees, Wat Sraket also collected fees from tourists to visit the top deck of the Grand Mountain Pagoda. This amounted to only around 500,000 baht annually\(^\text{784}\). Similar to Wat Pho, the revenue from regular donations was much higher than tourist revenues, and profits from renting booths at the festival celebrating the Grand Pagoda was the major source of income (around 2 million baht per year). However unlike Wat Pho, Wat Sraket also earned some substantial revenue from the rent of its shop-houses on a large monastic donated land, although the rent rate per unit was very low. Moreover, donations from the wealthy elite to the abbot and senior patriarchs was also significant but was not disclosed. Overall, Wat Sraket’s revenue from several sources seemed to be in equal proportion, in

\(^{784}\) Interview with Phra Ratchathammasan (Thongchai Sukhayano) on May 12, 2003.
that Wat Sraket did not seem to rely too much on one source. Wat Pho in contrast, relied heavily on donations of the elite and tourists.

While Wat Pho’s space has served mainly for high level royal rituals and state ceremonies, Wat Sraket, has served people of all walks of life. For instance, the funerary complex of Wat Sraket served the royal members, noblemen and homeless wanderers alike. Moreover, historically its supporters also came from many groups, ranging from the high ranking royal elite to lower ranking bureaucrats, Chinese merchants and commoners. When the commercial activities came to be dominant in the area following the construction of Bamrung Mueang Road, Wat Sraket dissolved the funeral facilities since these became incompatible with urban preferences, but still kept the function of the incinerator on a smaller scale near the Golden Mountain Pagoda and collected rent from shop-houses along the road. Today poor community members still praised the lord abbot of Wat Sraket for his kindness in providing them with services almost free of charge.

As we see from these examples, Wat Sraket was highly adaptable to the changing social economy. This was because unlike Wat Pho, which was established amidst royal palaces, Wat Sraket had originally been established in a forested area on the periphery of old Bangkok. This meant that Wat Sraket not only had more flexibility to extend its boundaries, but also that it had more land to use to generate revenue for its maintenance. It also meant that these two royal **wats** served a very different lay community. Here we see clearly that location and size of each **wat** had major implications for the financial circumstances and social identity of the monastic complex.

Whereas Wat Pho was not involved with the Exemplary Monastic Complex Development Project (Wat Phathana Tuayang) since it had been developed better than any other **wats** by the end of King Mongkut’s reign, Wat Sraket still had many elements and pieces of land to develop and hence was targeted for growth during the Sarit era. The Wat Phathana Tuayang project fit well with Prince Wachirayan’s original concept promoting the prosperity of religious assets and the **wat** as a self-sufficient, economically
viable entity, in that it created opportunities for Chinese merchants to invest in the real
estate development of monastic complex’s donated land\textsuperscript{785}, producing revenue for Wat
Sraket. On the other hand, what we see clearly from this case is that the Wat Phatthana
Tuayang project neglected issues of historical and cultural preservation. This project was
concerned with promoting cleanliness of the wats and their financial autonomy, but it
ultimately failed to address issues of Wat Sraket’s importance as a landmark or center of
the local community.

**Management Conditions Analysis**

Regarding the tourist industry, in contrast to Wat Pho, Wat Sraket has not been
successful in drawing group tourists to the monastic precinct although it possesses the
pagoda which was the highest structure and an important Buddhist landmark in the pre-
modern period. In 2002, when the assistant abbot was asked about the tourist business,
he indicated that Wat Sraket was interested in developing itself into a major tourist
destination, but when he contacted the tourist agencies, none of them were interested in
bringing tourists to Wat Sraket. The tourist agencies complained that the Golden
Mountain Pagoda was too high and took too long to hike up and down\textsuperscript{786}. Tourists who
came to Wat Sraket were different from those at Wat Pho as they were mostly young
individual travelers who came to Wat Sraket on their own or in small groups. The
assistant abbot explained that Wat Sraket also had high costs relative to the size of its
structure. Its expense for annual maintenance was around 3.6 million baht\textsuperscript{787} and Wat

\textsuperscript{785} The Chinese construction contractors normally invested in the construction of shop-houses on the wat’s
donated land. The structure of shop-houses belongs to the wat and in return, the Chinese contractors were
be awarded the right to sell the long-term lease to rent the shop-houses to the prospective tenants. After
signing the lease, the tenants would pay the rent and maintenance fee to the wats who own the land. If the
leases end or the tenants want to resell the lease, they would pay the wat for renewing or transferring the
leases. The wats usually earned significant revenue from this transaction not the rent. So, the wats normally
did not earn much from the rent annually but occasionally the fee for transferring lease.

\textsuperscript{786} Interview with Phra Ratchathammasan (Thongchai Sukhayano) on 30 August, 2002.

\textsuperscript{787} Ibid.
Sraket also faced other problems related to the rapid deterioration of its public facilities such as the public restrooms. The assistant abbot pointed out that people who went to Wat Pho were different from those who visited Wat Sraket.

As for Wat Sraket, the poor came to the monastic sacred precinct for their recreation and religious practice, but they did not help maintain the facilities, while people who went to Wat Pho were primarily rich tourists and elite supporters. The assistant abbot also stressed that Wat Sraket had tried to adhere to the principle that it would never create any burdens for its neighboring communities or the government for its renovation projects. It never asked the Department of Fine Arts for financial support because it had its own foundation to fund the renovation projects. The foundation was established by the late abbot and Supreme Patriarch (Yoo Yanothayo) when he mobilized the support for the Golden Mountain Pagoda.

He further mentioned that Wat Sraket tried to be independent from the government for its preservation and aimed to help the poor to develop a better community. Wat Sraket had a large parcel of land for rent in the urban area but did not take advantage of tenants by charging high rents, and thus the income derived from monastic donated land was relatively low. If the revenue from rents and festivals was not enough, the monastic complex used the revenue from the donations of wealthy people who were willing to support the monastic complex. However, Wat Sraket’s generosity towards its local community had some drawbacks, as most of its numerous shop-houses had been expanded without Wat Sraket’s permission. Moreover, the rent contract with the Department of Religious Affairs encouraged the expansion since the rent of each additional floor was reduced if the tenant constructed more floors.

My archival research confirmed the assistant abbot’s opinion that Wat Sraket has been historically independent and had never formally requested the government’s help during the period of modernization. The autonomy of Wat Sraket is also reflected in their renovation practices. In the contemporary period, this wat conducted renovations of its
ordination hall and cloister corridor without asking the Department of Fine Arts and vice versa. It is significant that the DFA has never bothered to take issue with the fact that Wat Sraket violated the preservation law. One probable reason might be that Wat Sraket’s architecture is not as exceptionally elaborate as Wat Pho, and a second reason is that the lord abbot was always at the highest ranking patriarch below the Supreme Patriarch.

Unlike Wat Pho, where DFA preservationists attempt to assert their authority, at Wat Sraket they tend to avoid conflicts with Wat Sraket. Instead of relying on the advice of DFA experts, Wat Sraket approached its wealthy supporters and persuaded them to take responsibility for renovating historic structures to increase their merit. In keeping with this trend, the relatives of a wealthy businessman and an airline tycoon have led the local pilgrims to renovate Wat Sraket by themselves, partly by studying the details of historic architectural elements. Interestingly, this highly autonomous character of Wat Sraket’s monastic and lay community is in keeping with the monastery’s history of self-reliance, for which the monastery was complemented during the era of Prince Wachirayan in the late-1920s.

**Wat Sraket Conclusion**

Unlike Wat Pho, Wat Sraket had always been independent of state authority. Its historic structures are not exceptionally aesthetically elaborate or highly valued as national heritage. Moreover, it has long had a unique method of preservation that brought local and elite pilgrims together, and it has never relied solely on one particular patronage group. This wat’s patrons ranged from the highest level of the king to the lowest class of the poor and homeless. Several of its programs supporting both Buddhist and modern education and it offered funeral services for all walks of life. Its atmosphere outside the precinct of ordination hall was somewhat messy, but Thai commoners felt peaceful there and used it as their recreational park. Its management of the monastic precinct and service to local community did not present any serious problems.
Although its sacred precinct was not a site of contestation between the monastic community and government offices, the visibility of its landmark pagoda was a major issue for preservation. This issue is linked to its development of monastic donated land in the north, because this area became highly visible from the main royal thoroughfare of Ratchadamnoen Boulevard with French modern buildings along its edge. This strong edge and path linked the new Renaissance parliament district to the old Grand Palace, and hence its appearance has long been of major concern to the central government. Along with these western classic urban elements, a strong Thai urban architectural order exists between Wat Ratchanatda, Wat Thepthida and Mahakan fortress, which are at the junction of the city wall and Ratchadamnoen Boulevard. This area became the crucial part of the first Master Plan for Historic Preservation and Development of Rattanakosin City, since it reflects unique urban elements of both western and Thai classical order.

Because Wat Sraket mainly served the poor, the assistant abbot feared that the neat public facilities would soon be dilapidated. He believed the poor and uneducated were more likely to vandalize and neglect the facilities and landscape elements. Whether or not this was the case, the fact that many Wat Sraket did not have as many daily tourists and visitors to cover the maintenance costs as Wat Pho made caretaking difficult.

Another major issue with Wat Sraket was that it still lacked an effective management system to control the unchecked construction and expansion on its monastic donated land. The visual chaos created by shop-houses was a major problem, and this was a key issue where the state’s planning and preservation was seeking Wat Sraket’s cooperation with the new development plan. Whereas Wat Pho had a small number of Art Deco shop-houses and had nothing to do with the majority of surrounding shop-houses, the situation of Wat Sraket was such that it would soon need to find a way to compromise between the state’s demands for more organization and oversight of its large number shop-houses and the needs of the local communities renting these shop-houses. This issue brings to light one of the main predicaments of the state’s devolution of
control and management of the wat to the monastic community. Namely, the core principles of Buddhist practice decree that monks must renounce the realm of the worldly material desires. And yet, by collecting rent revenue and regulating rental properties, monks of Wat Sraket have had to intervene directly in secular matters of business, thereby taking the risk of being condemned by local communities and renters in the shop-houses. Wat Pho was similar in this respect, in as much as administrative monks had to intervene in tourist and commercial businesses inside the sacred precinct. Wat Sraket has tried to avoid the dilemma by freezing rent for several decades and allowing the tenants of shop-houses to expand some floor space and structure, but this kind of leniency was no longer possible in light of the state’s demands.

The Conflicts and Contestations of Wat Kor: Brief Summary of Wat Kor’s Major Transformations

Site Analysis

Wat Kor’s vicinity was originally in the southern area of Chinatown outside Bangkok proper, which was delineated by the city wall prior to the reign of Rama IV. When King Mongkut expanded Bangkok by cutting another ring canal in the east, the new city moat embraced Chinatown within Bangkok. The Chinatown area transformed from a muddy and flooded area to a busy commercial area of shop-houses, warehouses and ports during the reign of King Mongkut. By the time of King Chulalongkorn, the new network of modern roads was built and urban blocks of concrete shop-houses replaced old wood shops shaping Chinatown into a modern commercial district with soaring land value. Yaowarat Road was cut parallel to Charoenkrung Road and it became the main artery of Chinatown instead of Sampheng Alley, which passed Wat Kor’s sacred precinct. Another parallel road, Songsawat, cut right through Wat Kor’s monastery compound, causing Wat Kor’s spatial transformation. The modern row houses of multiple stories
began to fill in the vacant land beyond the main road of Yaowarat and overshadowed Wat Kor.

Physical Condition Analysis

Wat Kor changed dramatically from the beginning of the Bangkok period to the modern day. Its sacred precinct was altered significantly by the new road network in Chinatown. Its original sacred precinct was a rectangular quadrangle with L-shape pavilions at its four corners. Inside the quadrangle, a small ordination hall and shrine with Chinese-style embellishments were situated next to each other with a round pagoda in the middle. Next to its sacred precinct was a small island monastery compound wrapped by a canal. This island was cut in half by the new construction of Songwat Road (later Songsawat) in Rama V’s reign. After this, Wat Kor’s spatial orientation and built-form were altered to be parallel to the new road. Wat Kor began to construct multi-storey monastery buildings concentrating on the east side of the new boundary near Songsawat Road, and finally the historic sacred precinct constructed in a quadrangle platform was demolished to make space for a new multi-storey ordination hall complex in a crucifix plan, which was the typical plan of Rama V. The new ordination hall was arranged to face Songsawat Road and it was embraced by a small wall while the monastery compound concentrated on the northeast corner of the precinct.

The original plan of Wat Kor was not parallel to either Songsawat Road or Sampheng Road. Rather, it was oriented in relation to the canals, and constructed according to a traditional cardinal order plan in which the Buddha statue inside the ordination hall had to face the east. As discussed previously, in the pre-modern context, canal routes were more important than the road network. By the time of King Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, however, the street network became more important.

Another major transformation at Wat Kor was the destruction of the historic sacred precinct in order to make way for the new multi-storey ordination hall. By
stacking the ordination hall and shrine and Buddhist school together, Wat Kor was able to maximize revenue from its valuable land. One of the resulting problems, however, is that it still cannot figure out how to install proper *sima* holy markers for this building\(^{788}\) (see Figure 8.7, 8.8 and 8.9).

**Socio-Political and Economic Conditions Analysis**

Wat Kor today has approximately 210 units of shop-houses in different sizes around the precinct of its monastic complex. While the land value of Chinatown for rent was over 10,000 baht/month for a small shop-house that has an average area around 300 square feet, tenants of Wat Kor paid rent of around 500-650 baht/month plus the maintenance fee of around 4,000 baht/month or 54,000 baht annually. Some smaller units paid the rent plus a maintenance fee of approximately 15,000 baht/year. The tenants paid rents which were half or less than half of the real value. Nevertheless, Wat Kor still earned between 3,510,000 and 11,340,000 baht annually. In fact the maintenance fee was collected at the time the tenants signed the 15-year lease contracts. Wat Kor received around 30 million baht or more at the time the tenant of several blocks signed the leases, and it had also earned interest revenue from depositing these funds in a savings account. Moreover, occasionally, the tenants would sell the lease contract to a new renter, and in these cases, Wat Kor also asked for ten percent of the sale. The shop-house lease contract was sold for the first time to a Chinese contractor for about 2 million baht per unit, but with the climbing land value, the lease contracts have normally sold for more than 2 million baht although the duration of the lease has lessened. If the tenants sold their lease contract, Wat Kor would earn at least 200,000 baht in each case.

\(^{788}\) As described and illustrated in the Chapter 2, the underground body of the holy markers or *nimit* balls and the upper part of holy marker in lotus leaf form or *bai semas* of the ordination hall were laid beside the new ordination hall of Wat Kor.
Figure 8.7. The Form Z Models of Wat Kor and its environment from 1890 to 1920 showing the rearrangement of Wat Kor’s precinct.
Wat Kor in 1945 Wat Kor's monastery structure was constructed in multi-storey and the shop-houses were constructed on the monastery compound on the other side of the road

Wat Kor in 1969 Wat Kor's sacred precinct was demolished and its old ordination hall was in the way of the new multi-storey ordination hall

Figure 8.8. The Form Z Models of Wat Kor and its environment from 1945 to 1969 showing the growth of shop-houses around the monastic complex and the demolition of the old sacred precinct.
Wat Kor also had parking spaces around its ordination hall for renting to businesses in Chinatown, generating revenue of around 200,000 baht/month or approximately 2,400,000 baht annually. With the soaring land value in Chinatown, Wat Kor could earn at least 6 million and sometimes more than 13 million baht annually. On top of this revenue, Wat Kor received support from the multi-billionaire Chialwaranon family, the owner of CP Group, whose central office was on Wat Kor’s monastic donated land. The Chialwaranon family and CP Group represented the king to deliver the royal Kathin annual support. Moreover, they had recently paid for the construction of a new pavilion honoring the lord abbot who became one of the eight highest senior patriarchs of the Thai ecclesiastical order. These Chinese replaced the original major patrons of the ethnic Chinese royal family of Prince Chui mentioned in Chapter Two.

It can be argued that Wat Kor has successfully managed its monastic donated land and had become financially independent. However, this independence would not have
been possible without the support the economically powerful Chinese merchants. In the past, a half-Chinese prince supported Wat Kor on behalf of King Rama I and raised it to a royal status. Since that time, Wat Kor had become a symbol confirming Chinese support of the Thai monarch. During the era of modernization, Wat Kor opened a Chinese and English evening school and members of the Chinese middle class came and participated in the school along with the royal family of Wat Kor’s founder. In the past, Chinese merchants supported Wat Kor by offering donations and participating in Buddhist ritual practices. Today, however, these same groups come and use the space of Wat Kor as their parking lot. The public area around the ordination hall has become commercialized for the personal use of private business. The poor never come to Wat Kor for recreation purposes like at Wat Sraket, but only visit for the important events when the monastery redistributes forms of wealth to the masses. As with Wat Pho, several locals and tenants complain that Wat Kor took care of the rich and ignored the poor.

Wat Kor, like Wat Pho and Wat Sraket, provided several public functions. Wat Kor constructed a four-storey primary school under the BMA inside its precinct near Sampheng Road, and the abbot always supported the school by providing scholarships to poor pupils. Most of the students were children of laborers and street vendors in Chinatown. Wat Kor also had a meditation quarter run by famous nuns inside its precinct, and the abbot supplied them with food from his alms offerings every morning. Already in his 80s, the lord abbot was one of a few senior patriarchs of the highest rank (Somdet) who still walked into the neighborhood for alms. Local communities always praised the abbot; nevertheless, they condemned other monks as being materialistic.

There is only limited information in the archives regarding the historical activities of Wat Kor. However, by analyzing the old plan of its historic sacred precinct, it is clear that this wat had open space inside the sacred precinct around the ordination hall which was typically the place for festivals. In contrast to the old sacred precinct, the present three-storey ordination hall is more isolated, and it is difficult to organize festivals on the
second or third floor. This clearly indicates that public festivals and events were not a primary activity or source of revenue for Wat Kor.

Management Conditions Analysis

In contrast to Wat Pho and Wat Sraket, Wat Kor did not attract any tourists, since it had already destroyed its historic sacred precinct in 1969, and its ordination hall building possesses neither outstanding modern architecture nor elaborated historic elements. However, the reason behind the destruction of its historic precinct and the consequences of the demolition are worth discussing in some detail. Wat Kor’s monastic community claimed to have been maintaining its sacred precinct, but it failed to preserve the structure because its foundation was under the water-level and occasionally flooded. The assistant abbot and ex-resident monks substantiated this fact and further defended their former abbot’s decision that Wat Kor’s sacred precinct was not worth preserving as the nation’s historic site. They justified their actions by saying that the mural paintings were not so elaborate and the structure’s architectural details were not very unique, and moreover, the structure was about to collapse. This position conflicted with the Department of Fine Arts and the Association of Siamese Architects, who claimed that the ordination hall was a unique Chinese-Rococo style with elaborated window frames. The DFA finally listed it as a historic site although the rest of the sacred precinct was demolished.

The key idea behind the demolition in fact was to maximize the use of space since the precinct was not parallel to the new Songsawat Road. Since the space outside the sacred precinct had become fragmented by the road, it had become difficult to organize this space for useful purposes. The old sacred precinct was also small and lower than the shop-houses in Chinatown. In fact, it is important to note that the abbot also had in mind to turn this entire historic wat precinct into a commercial complex and move Wat Kor to
a suburban location\textsuperscript{789}. However, the ecclesiastical government disagreed with this idea. After this, the abbot also planned to purchase the seven-storey hotel near Yaowarat Road, which was the tallest structure in Bangkok at the time, as Wat Kor’s monastic donated land property. Again, the Reform Order opposed, but finally, this hotel was purchased by Mahamakut Ratchawitthayalai, the Reform Order’s university trust fund\textsuperscript{790}. The previous lord abbot of Wat Kor had a similar idea to Thammasakmontri, the Minister of Education, to move from the business area so that the \textit{wat} could earn high revenue from rent. Wat Kor indeed represented Prince Wachirayan’s new core value of Buddhist Religion, which was to develop the prosperity of Buddhist assets rather than renunciation. The best lord abbot was no longer a “world renouncer” but rather the capable real estate manager.

\section*{Wat Kor Conclusion}

Wat Kor is similar to Wat Sraket in terms of its independence from state support. However, it is similar to Wat Pho in that it has served and depended on a particular group of patrons, the Sino-Thai merchants. Because it is a small royal \textit{wat} without either highly significant architectural craftsmanship or a landmark structure in Chinatown, it did not come under the investigation of the DFA until it destroyed most of the historic sacred precinct and built a new one. Unlike Wat Pho and Wat Sraket, Wat Kor successfully managed its rent revenue from highly valued land. However the shop-houses on the land were tall edifices which overshadowed the sacred precinct.

Chinatown’s rapid urbanization and the royal policies for developing the road system during the reigns of King Mongkut and Chulalongkorn had a tremendous effect on Wat Kor. Land value soared after the economy was stimulated by Mongkut’s Bowring treaty, and Chulalongkorn followed in his father’s footsteps by encouraging more roads

\textsuperscript{789} Phra Thammakitiwathi, interview by author, 10 July, 2002.
\textsuperscript{790} Ibid.
in the area. Wat Kor’s land value increased when the royal cabinet decided to cut the road through its monastery compound. There was no documentation indicating why the royal cabinet decided not to preserve the island of Wat Kor, but it was clear that Prince Wachirayan was eager to increase Buddhist assets. Prince Wachirayan’s involvement in the king’s decision to construct new roads to benefit some decaying wats, and his views about increasing Buddhist assets as a solution for the survival of the Buddhist Religion seem to provide the reasons for demolition. In fact, the abbot at that time was just following Prince Wachirayan’s core tenet of increasing the Buddhist assets. Wat Kor’s gigantic ordination hall and the history behind it was indeed a landmark of Prince Wachirayan, the first Buddhist Pope.

Wat Kor’s success in raising the rent and maximization of rental space also had some detractors, who condemned the monastery as being a religious business machine for the rich. These same critics point out that its historic sacred precinct was totally destroyed by its monastic order, and today, its gigantic ordination hall complex stands empty devoid of daily public activities. Its multi-storey monastery buildings were also vacant. As with the case of Wat Pho that has been successful in managing the sacred precinct as a symbol of nation’s heritage and a tourist destination, Wat Kor’s success in collecting rents has also led to the criticism that this wat has yielded to commercialism and lost touch with the meaning of Buddhist sacred space. Wat Pho and Wat Kor have sustained these critiques even though they both have several programs providing education and services to the public, especially the poor.

The Outline of Major Historical Changes in the Royal Wats of Bangkok

At the time of the establishment of Bangkok, the urban space of the capital city was founded as a conglomeration of villages. Within the city wall, royal wats became the cosmological centers located near the palaces of the royal rulers. Over time, the Grand Palace of the king and his major royal wats became the most important cosmological
center, subsuming the smaller princes’ palaces and their less extravagant royal wats. At the time Bangkok was established, one of the ruler’s main motivations for constructing and maintaining wats was to achieve a symbolic revival of the kingdom of Ayutthaya. Wats were also a place to accumulate wealth and to bolster the legitimacy of the rulers as righteous Buddhist kings. Given the importance of wats to the authority of the ruler and the state-building project, policies were introduced to control the construction of certain architectural symbols and to oversee the management of monastic conscript labor supporting royal wats.

Both the state’s religious policies and the urban space of Bangkok started to change during the reign of Rama III. Chinese merchants were on the rise since they supported the king in the Sino-Siamese tributary trade and tax farming system, which undermined the power of the feudal lords. Bangkok became a port city and Chinese shops and manors emerged on the scene. During this period, we see a shift of meaning with respect to the construction and maintenance of wats. Rather than signifying the revival of Ayutthaya, the king’s practice of building and maintaining royal wats was implicitly a way of recognizing the role of the Chinese merchant-bureaucrats and integrating them into the Thai ruling class. Chinese craftsmanship and the expansion of the traditional cosmic order in the royal wats connoted the victory of the king with Chinese help over his traditional feudal rivals.

When Mongkut disrobed and became the king (Rama IV), the state policies for urban Bangkok and the Buddhist wat transformed significantly. As we saw in Chapter Four, Mongkut’s influence on the conceptualization of Buddhist space had already begun during his tenure as a monk in the reign of Rama III, when he developed the idea of the clear sima boundary as part of his incipient reform movement.

Another major impact of King Mongkut’s reign was his adoption of western geography and his openness to western knowledge and free trade. By allowing free trade, the commercial activities with western traders increased significantly and western urban
preferences of street network and storefronts started to eclipse an indigenous urban pattern that had the *wat* at its center both physically and symbolically. Bangkok transformed into a colonial trade depot and expanded when the king constructed his palace in the eastern suburban area. Building and renovating royal *wats* began to lose its significance during this period as a tool for rulers to consolidate their power and establish their legitimacy, since the trade with colonial powers generated more revenue than the traditional manpower system.

As shown in Chapter Five, during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910), the modernization policies imposed more western preferences of road networks and urban blocks while the king also preserved and expanded the indigenous pattern of canal systems. Bangkok’s urban space had two layers: one of modern roads, and a second of indigenous canals. It is important to underscore that King Chulalongkorn’s vision of Bangkok’s urban space was ambiguous. That is, while the Siamese leader sought to adopt civilized urban configurations to Bangkok, he was nonetheless reticent about using space in a way that would bring together royal members and commoners as equals. Stated otherwise, Rama V was ambivalent about embracing ideas of civil society as they are expressed in urban space.

During this period, the royal *wat* was neither a symbol of the prosperity of the kingdom nor a site of royal legitimation. Instead, it became a financial burden to the state since western civilized space became they key symbol of the monarch’s potencies. Only a select few royal *wats* were still maintained for their value as Bangkok’s urban landmarks and aesthetic beauty. The policies toward royal *wats* in this period were also unclear. In 1902, the Sangha Law was proclaimed and set the legal terms separating religious properties from the state’s assets and responsibility. As the state withdrew its support, a *wat* had to learn to be one form of corporation, which knew how to generate its own revenue and balance its expenditures.
As I have demonstrated, in the pre-modern period, the wat was constructed by the king or feudal prince and maintained by monks, and in this context, it can be said that neither the prince nor the monks were the “owners” of the wat. This relinquishing of ownership of the wat by both these parties created a void of power, which I have argued means that the wat can be viewed as a pre-modern civic space for commoners. However, during modernization, the state relinquished its financial duty to support the monastery and handed the space of the wat to the monastic community as a “Buddhist asset.” While other modern nation states in Europe such as France and Modern Italy seized religious properties for their people, Siam’s modernization turned the wat’s space, which was once a civic-like space, into religious property and urged the wat to use the property to earn revenue. Moreover, even though it gave up direct control, the state also tried to maintain its power over the wat through the abbot and the state’s religious affairs agencies. In addition, state also established modern schools in the precinct of wats and formed a centralized ecclesiastical government to collaborate with state agencies to control monks in the entire kingdom and spread modern education in provincial towns. This situation of the Thai state’s indirect control of the royal monasteries via the centralized ecclesiastical structure and the abbots is unique to Thailand, and it is one that has had tangible effects on the space, architectural detail, and use of the monastic complex. For instance, the abbot’s residence became bigger since there were more functions for the senior patriarch in central ecclesiastical government positions.

The ambiguous and sometimes contradictory policies of Rama V regarding the separation of Buddhist religion and the state became clearer during the reign of Rama VI (r. 1910-1925). During this period, the king did not intervene in the monastic order but let his uncle, the Supreme Patriarch Prince Wachirayan, manage Buddhist affairs. Even though the state and religion were officially separate, Prince Wachirayan nevertheless managed the monastic order in keeping with the king’s promotion of nationalist propaganda. The policies toward Bangkok’s urban space also changed in this period, and
the canal networks were left to decay while the road networks and urban blocks were expanded. The government’s policy of constructing more western-style monuments also meant that the state stopped investing in the construction and renovation of monumental royal wats, as they were no longer considered to be Bangkok’s most important urban landmarks. Although the state founded the Department of Fine Arts as a national level authority to preserve the nation’s historic sites, this resulted in the separation of historic royal wats from the realm of the everyday and their subsequent relegation to the national past.

Relations between the state and ecclesiastical governments entered a period of turmoil when the absolute monarchy was replaced with a commoner-led, republican regime. During this period, the state policies towards urban space and religion became anti-monarchical, and new secular monuments and modernist buildings were added to Bangkok’s main thoroughfares to signify the new era of revolution, while traditional structures such as the royal wats and the canal network signifying the royal past were left to decay. In the new Sangha Law, the central ecclesiastical organization of senior patriarchs was divided into three democratic bodies, and the state increased the power of the Department of Religious Affairs and the duty of abbots as civil officials to control Buddhist religious assets. Another state intervention was the first preservation law of 1934 that gave the power to manage the nation’s historic properties, which were mostly old wats, to the head of the preservation authority. Now the space and architecture of the historic wat became a contested site among state authorities of religious affairs, preservationists, and abbots.

As we saw in Chapter Seven, during Sarit’s paternalistic regime (1957-1963) and beyond, the state policies for urban Bangkok and religion became more confusing and contradictory. On the one hand, Sarit’s promotion of a pro-American socio-economic development agenda led to the rapid decay of what was left of the indigenous urban structures. Canals and temporary structures such as floating houses were destroyed and
road networks were constructed on top of them, echoing America’s notorious Urban Renewal program that erased several ethnic neighborhoods in America. The rapid road expansion was a part of the development scheme to erase the remnants of pre-modern Bangkok. On the other hand, Sarit also intensified the contestation in the *wat* by increasing the power of both state agencies involved in the management of the *wat*: the Department of Fine Arts and Department of Religious Affairs. Adding to this, he passed laws that supported completely different ideologies of national heritage and Buddhist assets within less than two years.

First, Sarit revived the monarchy and revised the Sangha Law to its original centralized structure, thus reunifying power at the level of the cabinet of senior patriarchs. Following this, Sarit implemented the development and public cleanliness program in the *wats*, allowing public buildings in a standard modern Thai style to be built within the historic monastery area.

Second, he initiated the promotion of heritage tourism and enhanced the power of the Department of Fine through the new preservation law, which allowed them collect revenue from historic sites as tourist destinations. These two new laws and three government agencies conflicted with one another as they sought to alter monastic space to best fit their different goals.

Third, Sarit initiated the idea of planning. The first master plan of Bangkok conducted by a Boston based planning firm in 1960s followed America’s preference for the automobile city, ignoring the vitality of indigenous urban pattern such as canals. However, it must be remembered that every plan for Bangkok has failed, since there has never been enough police power to enforce its regulations. The preservation and development planning of Bangkok’s historic area was launched in the late-1990s with implicit aims of making it a major tourist destination. In its efforts to create the atmosphere of Bangkok’s glorious past associated with King Chulalongkorn and bring Bangkok into circulation of other world metropolis, the plan connoted the typically
western ideals of American’s City Beautiful Movement and Europe’s romantic revival of the lost past.

**Lessons from History for Urban Design, Planning and Preservation Policies**

As we have seen from this overview of the case studies examined in this dissertation, Thailand’s modernization has had major ramifications for the royal *wat*. Firstly, the state’s devolution of financial control of monastic assets to the monastic order beginning during the reign of Rama V has led to fundamental changes in the social function, identity and meaning of the *wat*. As the space of the wat space became more commercialized to balance its expenditures, its historical function as a civic space where wealth was redistributed to the underclass was erased or downplayed. Instead of serving as a site for redistributing wealth from the elite to the poor, the *wat* with its new financial burdens had to seek out and serve rich donors and use its sacred space for commercial activities.

Even with this devolution, however, we saw that the state did not completely relinquish control over the socio-political meanings and uses of the *wat*. In fact, several administrations sought to increase their control over the *wat* via government policies pertaining to modern education, standard religious architecture and plans, economic development and tourism. These policies resulted in intense contestation over the use, construction and renovation of royal *wats*.

Another consequence of modernization with significant implications for the *wat* was the transformation of Bangkok’s urban fabric. As we saw in Chapter Five, state policies for the development of urban Bangkok beginning at the turn of the 20th century introduced western preferences for urban blocks and street networks into an indigenous context defined by a canal system connecting communities together. Within this indigenous urban context, the royal *wat* was the urban center and key landmark, since its permanent tower stood over temporary structures of houses and the tropical landscape.
The two-storey colonial shop-houses of the modern era came in between these temporary elements and their permanent religious cores. The state policies gradually gave favor to the western urban block system, which culminated during the Sarit era of American development ideology when the decaying canals and religious structures were completely overrun by unchecked modern multi-storey urban blocks and streets without proper planning enforcement.

Instead of attempting to resolve these historical problems and contestations, the master plan for historic preservation introduced in 1994 simply tried to eliminate the disorganized structures around the royal wats which were considered visually chaotic according to western preferences of good urban design. Lacking detailed knowledge or awareness of the indigenous character, history, contestation and political contexts of the royal wats, this planning and design project instead created more problems that it solved. For instance, by removing local communities around the wats in order to fulfill a western ideal of urban landscape preferences, the plan would further isolate royal wats from the very people who support the daily monastic activities. Furthermore, this removal of “unkempt” communities would erase the historical function of the wat as a locus of communities and wealth redistribution to the poor.

Instead of recognizing wats as a form of indigenous “civic space,” the first master plan neglected this social contribution of the royal wat to the community and attempted to create open spaces in the western style of a riverfront park by eliminating local communities. The Bangkok Metropolitan Authority “Specific Plan” which was created to counterbalance this master plan, was supposed to recognize the neighborhood and reduce the demolition of communities; however, in reality, this plan did little to change the situation and did not recognize the social or civic role of the royal wat.
Recommendation #1: Managing the Site & the Communities around the Wat

In light of these failures and shortfalls of the current plans, this final section offers a number of recommendations for effective royal *wat* preservation and management. Firstly, preservation planning and urban design policies have to recognize the royal *wat* in relation to its history within the broader community before implementing a plan for the improvement of the area’s physical condition and its visibility. One key component of this is to redefine the idea of the *wat* to include indigenous structures in the vicinity. The local, poor communities with their seemingly messy temporary structures in fact are a crucial part of indigenous urban elements that enrich Buddhist landmarks. Light wood construction has long been the character of tropical architecture and it is highly suitable for the tropical environment. Erasing these temporary structures, creating large empty lawns and preserving only colonial shop-houses and royal *wats* actually destroys the true meaning of Thai Buddhist landmarks and creates a British romantic garden instead.

However, it must also be said that the overbuilt modern shop-houses with unchecked floor space expansion overshadowing historic landmarks were not a part of the indigenous urban landscape and may not meet safety standards. In keeping with the suggestions outlined in the Specific Plan for Tha Tien, some of these additional structures should be removed but not the entire communities. Furthermore, in order to compensate residents for some of their losses, the plan should allow for more temporary structures along the riverfront and street, but with clear regulations and modern facilities for controlling proper sanitation and scale.

Another suggestion pertains to the space around the sacred site of the *wat*. As we saw above, the *wat*’s precinct in the past was a bounded space, but it had soft edges of canals, which were filled up during the era of modernization. Given the importance of maintaining the sacred ambiance of the monastery, one recommendation is for a buffer zone around the monastery. Residential and commercial backyard activities are
incompatible with the wat and should not be near the sacred site. However, instead of evicting all communities and creating a large scale park around the wat’s precinct, a buffer zone should be encouraged. The set back guide line for buildings should be applied and the soft edge of canals, community pedestrian walks or small urban parks should be encouraged for this buffer zone.

**Recommendation #2: Managing the Sacred Precinct**

It has already been shown that the space of the royal wat in the past was in fact civic space. However, as we have seen from the case studies, in the contemporary period, the range of mundane activities taking place within the sacred space of the wat on a daily basis has increased significantly, undermining the function and meaning of the wat as a serene refuge for monks to practice meditation and study the Dharma.

This study recommends that the sima holy space enclosing the ordination hall should be shielded from other public activities at the special times of holy congregations. Moreover, tourist-related and local worshipping activities should not disturb the important functions of the wat such as meditation and Dharma study that require a tranquil atmosphere. Some areas of public service to local communities should be preserved from other activities.

Wat Pho and Wat Sraket have their sacred precinct open to public activities. Wat Pho has clear zoning for its different functions with gateways demarcating different areas, but when they had big festivals, these spaces could be connected to one another. However, Wat Pho has had major problems with the tourist activities that regularly disturbed local pilgrims and communities conducting their worshipping and meditation activities. The parking for tourist buses and drop-off area are also a major traffic problem. Wat Pho’s problems derive primarily with its lack of management for regulating zone and activities.
In contrast, Wat Sraket’s space was more tranquil since it had fewer tourists. Nevertheless, it lacked clear zoning and orientation for its different functions. The ordination hall and shrine have a short wall and platform separating them from other areas in the sacred precinct, but the area near the Golden Mountain Pagoda is somewhat disorganized with its haphazard parking spaces and funeral pavilion. Its main entrance is an inner road without a pedestrian walk. Wat Sraket could learn from Wat Pho in terms of coordinating landscape elements such as gateways and pedestrian walks to create strong edges and paths leading visitors to different zones.

In comparison to Wat Pho and Wat Sraket, Wat Kor did not have any unique events or landmarks to draw tourists. In Wat Kor’s case, the most significant problem was that its sacred precinct was also a parking area which was open to traffic. This obviously represents a major infringement on the traditional concept of the sacred precinct.

A core lesson to be drawn from these case studies is that the separation of zones serving different groups of visitors should be considered a first priority for managing a royal wat’s sacred precinct. In terms of spatial zoning, the landscape elements should be used to delineate zones within the wat, while at the same time allowing for flexibility during Buddhist events or festivals, when these zones can be connected. In terms of the zoning for different activities, areas of the wat can be clearly marked with signs indicating zones requiring silence and tranquility. The activities of local pilgrims and community services should not be disturbed by tourist-related activities. However, these various users should be encouraged to socialize for some special events. The sima holy space comprising the ordination hall precinct and the corridor should be designated as a quiet zone, but it should be open to local worshipping activities for the specific periods when is not occupied for holy congregation. Signs explaining the character of different zones should be installed so that visitors can be made aware of these activities. In addition, by demarcating some open spaces in the royal wat as active zones for
recreational activities such as sports, the royal wat can continue to serve the community as a civic space, therefore reducing the need for parks which was one of the objectives of the master plan for Rattanakosin City. The automobile circulation and pedestrian routes should be clearly separated, and landscape elements providing an orientation to different zones along the route should also be provided.

**Recommendation #3: Managing Monastic Donated Land**

Turning now to the monastic donated land, the shop-houses of the royal wats should also be reorganized. In the case of royal wats with a large number of shop-houses, the zoning and regulation of building height should be redesigned. The shop-houses close to the royal wats or the main road should be at a lower height to allow visual access to the historic landmark and visual corridors to the riverfront area. For instance, in the case of Wat Sraket, the shop-houses on the other side of Bamrung Mueang Road which are far from Wat Sraket’s precinct could be three to four floors higher but the shop-houses near Wat Sraket at the north and south sides should have only two floors. The last two blocks of shop-houses of Wat Kor on the other side of Songsawat Road near Wat Prathomkongka should be allowed to develop more space while the shop-houses near Wat Kor from the southwest should have only two or three floors. As for the private structures that overshadow the historic structures, the compensation of bonus space and extra height at other suitable location should be offered to encourage the owners of overbuilt row houses to reduce their floor space. In the cases of Wat Pho and Wat Sraket which have waterfront areas, the area along the water’s edge and street could be used as compensation for the loss of floor space of shop-houses near the monastic precinct. These areas with temporary shelters could be valuable commercial space and add a soft edge emphasizing the historic landmarks following an indigenous urban preference.
Recommendation #4: Managing Socio-Political and Economic Conditions

As we have learned from history, royal wats had to serve three major user groups: the poor and underprivileged, the upper classes, and the ruling authority. Traditionally, the elite and ruling authority were responsible for constructing and renovating the royal wats as a means of redistributing wealth to the poor, acquiring social prestige, and establishing their legitimacy. However with the separation of wat and state during King Chulalongkorn’s reign, the royal wat lost this elite base of patronage, and the administrative monks put in charge of the wat’s management had to seek other sources of revenue for the monastery’s maintenance. As the newly autonomous wat expanded its entrepreneurial and commercial activities both on monastic donated land and within the sacred precinct, the traditional social function of the royal wat also changed. Rather than being a site for redistributing wealth to the poor, the royal wat became more reliant on the lay community for donations and on the bourgeoisie, who became the monastery’s main patrons. It was only after the royal wat had gained some financial stability that it could return to its former role of offering social services to the poor, and in some cases, this role was never recuperated.

As discussed previously, it was the Sangha Law of 1902 that gave the administrative monks and abbots’ control over religious property and financial resources of the wat. In an effort to curb the accumulation of assets and commercialization of the wat that occurred as a result of this law, the government revised its regulations and the Sangha Law to increase the power of its agencies vis-à-vis the wat. The government also drafted several laws pertaining to historic preservation which classified the royal wats as national heritage, and with this new status, some of the royal wats became major tourist sites.

The changing meanings and social functions of the wat have given rise to contestations among its various users and stakeholders. For instance, as we saw from the
case studies, there have been numerous instances of conflict between preservation authorities and administrative monks regarding the renovation practices of historic buildings, and there have also been conflicts between local pilgrims and the tourist authority regarding the use of the sacred precinct.

In order to mitigate these conflicts, this study recommends the establishment of a state authority whose responsibilities are to manage the revenue, oversee the renovations, and mediate stakeholder interests in Bangkok’s royal wats. Members of the authority would include representatives from the Department of Fine Arts, the Department of Religious Affairs, and the Ecclesiastical Administration, as well as one local representative from each of the royal wats.

The goals of this organization would be threefold. First, by overseeing the revenue of the wats, the organization would free the abbot and monastic community to resume their traditional duties as teachers and practitioners of the Buddhist religion. In this sense, the organization’s role would be much like that of the Chao Krom Wat, or feudal officials, who took care of secular concerns of the wat in the pre-modern context. In the past, the abbot and resident monks had the primary duty of conducting daily Buddhist activities, and they reported to the Chao Krom Wat if the wat needed minor improvements. However, as we have seen, with the gradual dissolution of the Chao Krom Wat, the abbots and key administrative monks became responsible for managing the finances of the wat, which is in conflict with the core tenet of Buddhist religion that requires monks to renounce worldly concerns.

A second aim of the organization would be to create a structured forum for dialog and shared decision-making among the wat’s key stakeholders. For instance, with regards to renovation projects, the current situation is one which fosters conflict rather than cooperation between the monastic community and the preservation authorities. This is because abbots and their patrons tend to implement renovation projects without the prior approval of the DFA, which is essentially powerless vis-à-vis the influential abbots.
Abbots and \textit{wat}'s patrons, in turn, complain that the DFA does not have time to oversee renovation projects, and takes too long to approve them in any case. In order to moderate these conflicts, it is necessary to bring together these stakeholders to discuss their concerns and generate solutions. This can only be achieved if all parties share responsibility for the management of the royal \textit{wat}'s assets.

The third overarching aim of the organization would be to re-establish the role of the royal \textit{wat} as a civic space whose primary commitment is to local residents and the underprivileged. As discussed above, the royal \textit{wat}'s dependence on wealthy patrons, tourism, and business enterprises has undermined its historic commitment to providing social welfare and Buddhist teaching. By including local residents—particularly the underprivileged—in the discussion about the \textit{wats}' projects, the monastic community could be more responsive to their specific needs. In order to best facilitate this process, each royal way would have to establish a community-based organization comprised of local residents, of whom one selected representative would present views and interests of the community to the larger organization for the management of royal \textit{wats}.

**Recommendations for Further Studies**

In order to implement the above recommendations, some further studies are required. First, as stated in Recommendation #1, the temporary structures of floating houses, shops and vendor shelters were historically important elements of the indigenous urban around royal \textit{wats}, and there should be a study about the history of these temporary structures to gain better understanding of why and how they disappeared. Moreover, this research should also focus on how to redesign temporary structures for modern activities and to be suitable for historic sites.

Regarding Recommendation #2, the author suggests that there should be a study of the use of the royal \textit{wats} by various user groups, including monks, laypersons, vendors and tourists. The study should analyze the schedules of each of these user groups to
determine the nature and duration of their respective activities within the wat. It should also garner the opinions of each of these groups about the wat and other user groups who share the space. This data could be used to develop a schedule and sign posts for the monastery designating some areas as off-limits to particular activities at certain times of the day.

With respects to Recommendation #3, interviews and focus groups should be conducted with the owners of shop-houses on monastic donated land, to elicit their opinions about the proposed zoning regulations which in some cases would require them to reduce the height of their buildings. Information and opinions would be sought about the option of compensating these building owners either with buildings elsewhere, or with the use of temporary structures along the waterfront.

Finally, with respects to Recommendation #4, the author suggests that interviews and focus groups should be conducted with the different stakeholders in the royal monastic complex, to garner their opinions about the reorganization of the wat’s administration system, and to determine their willingness to participate in the wat’s new management via community organizations.
APPENDIX I:
Administrative Structure of Government agencies responsible for Royal Wats

Pre-Modern Period (before 1892)

King
- Department of Public Instruction (Krom Thammakan)
- Department of Monastic Personals (Krom Sangkhakari)
- Department of Royal Pundit (Krom Rachabandit)
- Department of Labor Register (Krom Phrasuratsawadi)
- Department of Monastic Structure (Krom Phra Aram)

King Chulalongkorn (1889)

King
- Department of Public Instruction and Religious Affairs (Krom Thammakan-Sangkhakari)

King Chulalongkorn (1892)

King
- Ministry of Public Instruction (Krasuang Thammakan)
- Department of Public Instruction (Krom Thammakan)
- Department of Monastic Personals (Krom Sangkhakari)
- Department of Monastic Structure (Krom Phra Aram)
- Department of Formal Education (Krom Saman Sueksa)
- Ministry of Treasury (Krasuang Phra Khlang)
- Ministry of War
- Department of Labor Register (Krom Phrasuratsawadi)

King Vajiravudh (1911)

King + Supreme Patriarch
- Ministry of Public Instruction (Krasuang Thammakan)
- Department of Public Instruction (Krom Thammakan)
- Department of Monastic Personals (Krom Sangkhakari)
- Department of Monastic Structure (Krom Phra Aram)
- Department of Formal Education (Krom Saman Sueksa)

King Vajiravudh (1916)

King + Supreme Patriarch
- Ministry of Public Instruction (Krasuang Thammakan)
- Department of Public Instruction (Krom Thammakan)
- Department of Formal Education (Krom Saman Sueksa)

King Vajiravudh (1919)

King + Supreme Patriarch
- Ministry of Palace (Krasuang Wang)
- Department of Public Instruction (Krom Thammakan)
- Department of Monastic Personals (Sangkhakari)
- Department of Monastic Revenue (Kalapana)
King Prachathipok (1925)

King + Supreme Patriarch

- Ministry of Public Instruction (Krasuang Thammakan)
  - Department of Public Instruction (Krom Thammakan)
  - Department of Formal Education (Krom Saman Sueksa)
- Ministry of Finance
  - Department of Monastic Revenue (Krom Kalapana)

People Party (1933)

Prime Minister (King + Supreme Patriarch)

- Ministry of Public Instruction
  - Department of Public Instruction (Krom Thammakan)
    - Division of Religious Asset (Kong Satsanasombat)

Phibun 1 (1941)

Prime Minister (King + Supreme Patriarch)

- Ministry of Education (Krasuang Sueksathikan)
  - Department of Religious Affairs (Krom Kan Satsana)

Phibun 2 (1952)

Prime Minister (King + Supreme Patriarch)

- Ministry of Culture
  - Department of Religious Affairs (Krom Kan Satsana)

Sarit Regime (1956) and Post-Sarit Government (until 1997)

Prime Minister (King + Supreme Patriarch)

- Ministry of Education
  - Department of Religious Affairs (Krom Kan Satsana)
    - Division of Religious Asset (Kong Satsana Sombat)
    - Division of Buddhist Religious Place (Kong Phutthasatsanasathan)
    - Division of Planning (Kong Phan-ngan)
    - Division of Religious Education (Kong Satsanasueksa)
    - Division of Religious Support (Kong Satsanupatham)
    - Office of Ecclesiastical Government Administration (Lekhathikan Mahathera Samakhom)
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546


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