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BHAKHAKANOK RATANAWARAPORN : THE GUIDELINE FOR CONSERVATION OF LIVING HERITAGE TEMPLES IN THAI CONTEXT : THE CASE STUDY OF LIVING HERITAGE TEMPLES IN RATTANAKOSIN ISLAND. THESIS ADVISOR : PROFESSOR EMERITUS KEN TA YLOR. 172 pp.

Living heritage temple in Thai context refers to Theravada Buddhist temple having heritage significance in which the monks reside and the religious rites have taken place continuously. In Thai society, Buddhist temples are considered as one kind of cultural heritage imbued with unique intangible value. Thus, a relevant conservation concept is needed to protect their special significance and cultural context. Although many living heritage temples have been protected by the laws enacted by the government sector, these laws still have the limitation on conservation concepts which pay more attention to protect tangible aspect and lack a clear concept for safeguarding intangible aspect. Indeed, the preservation of physical components will become completely meaningless if the physical aspects endure while their true meanings are neglected.

The process to achieve the right understanding of living heritage temples should be started with the assessment of cultural significance which is an essential prerequisite to making decisions about the conservation policy. Cultural significance of living heritage temples consists of historic, aesthetic, spiritual and social value. Historic value of Buddhist temples encompasses the history of aesthetics seen in their physical components and the relationship with society found in the continuous traditions of religious activities, including the inspiration from Theravada Buddhism in the creation of tangible aspects and in the formation of religious traditions. Aesthetic value of architectural designs and decorations as well as of images of the Buddha and his disciples found in Buddhist temples reflects the religious belief devoted to the ideal of Theravada Buddhism. This is the true meaning inherent in physical aspects of Buddhist temples. Furthermore, the tranquil surroundings are inextricably linked with physical aspects of Buddhist temples. Spiritual value of Buddhist temple refers to the Teachings of the Buddha or the Dharma. Social value has emerged from the inheritance, maintenance and dissemination of the Dharma or spiritual value by the elder monks to the young monks and to the laity.

The right understanding of cultural significance of living heritage temples can lead to the appropriate conservation policy and is to ensure that all heritage values, tangible and intangible, will be protected. In addition, the conservation policy of living heritage temples should not attempt to freeze them at a moment in time, but rather guide the inevitable changes in ways which are sympathetic to the existence of past and present expressions. Moreover, the conservation policy should be created from a bottom-up approach with residents' participation integral to the planning process. The dissemination of information to the residents and all related stakeholders is an important part for decreasing any further conflicts of misunderstanding and for the accomplishment to sustainable conservation of living heritage temples.

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