



SACRED MOUNTAIN : INTERPRETATION OF SACRED PLACE IN THAILAND

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Program of Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism
(International Program)
Graduate School
SILPAKORN UNIVERSITY
2009**

The Graduate School, Silpakorn University has approved and accredited the Thesis title of “Sacred Mountain : Interpretation of Sacred Place in Thailand” submitted by Ms.Waranan Sowannee as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism

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49056967: MAJOR: ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM

KEYWORD: SACRED MOUNTAIN, MOUNT SUMERU, INTERPRATION, SACRED PLACE

WARANAN SOWANNEE: SACRED MOUNTAIN : INTERPRETATION OF SACRED PLACE IN THAILAND.

DISSERATION SUPERVISOR: EMERITUS PROFESSOR KEN TAYLOR

183 pp.

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning of sacred space and places in Thai context as well as other sacred places in Thai Buddhist region. It aims to understand Thai sacred space and place, to discuss on meaning of sacred space and sacred place in a Thai context and to illuminate concepts, spatial characteristic, and sense of Thai sacred places.

The significance of sacred mountain theme is a medium to interpret the sacred phenomena. Abstract meanings of sacredness can be understood through the sacred space and sacred places that affect human senses. Sacred place idea in Thai culture heritage has always been concerned with the sacred mountain as symbolic and focussing on Mout Sumuru. The sacredness is revealed senses of places and developed by using metaphors of the mountains.

Through the sacred mountain narrative, the knowledge created from within this theme illuminates ways with familiar patterns of existence and can be opened up to process to new meanings. Through this research we come up with the ideas in which various manifestation stages can serve as a medium to create senses of sacredness.

The sacred mountain themes provide with new perspectives, for instance, the sacredness is the attitude of human to nature, it is an approach of human being to nature, the manners of people who live harmoniously with the wholeness is duality existence. The position of people who live under the nature control and accept the power of its that expressed the attitude into several ways such as religion and belief with the holy world. They are new approaches of thinking about fundamental issues. Sacred places cannot be measured by any tools of secular objects and cannot be protected by any secular based methods; just enhance sense, use immaculacy mind and intuition as well as rely on cognitive avidity in experienced impression of its phenomena that beyond visual sensation. The more perceive, comprehend and appreciate, the more totally clear how to maintain and pass Thai sacred place as heritage to the next generation. Nevertheless, as Thai history imprint, Thai sacred space and place reflect the transformation of the association, the social procedure, the living cultural system, and the paradigm of Thai people.

Program of Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism Graduate School, Silpakorn University, Academic Year 2009

Student's signature.....

Thesis Supervisor's signature.....

DEDICATION

*This work is dedicated to sacred power, sacred spiritual,
especially sacred mountain
and
Thai sacred place spirits.*

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Acknowledgements

Sacred Mountain: Interpretation of Sacred place in Thailand, the thematic and topic of my dissertation, like a pilgrim that reach the destination through suggestions and advice from my supervisor; Emeritus Professor Ken Taylor, my advisor; Assistance Professor Dr.Chotima Chaturawong and my teacher; Associate Professor Dr. Woralun Boonyasurat. I have been grateful for their inspiration, advice, teaching, encouragement, and support since I develop the idea of this dissertation.

Thank you all foreign professors of the International Program in Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism and the Faculty of Architecture professors, for valuable knowledge and new vision in cultural heritage.

I would also like to thanks Ajan Kirtikhacara Jayadhira for introduce me to appreciate the sacred place though my mind, Dr.Sutsan Suttipisan, Dr. Wattana Boonjub, Dr. Kraingkrai Kerdsiri, Paramaporn Sirikulchayanont, and my friends that I am not able to mention all their name here for both experience and knowledge share, for their help, kindness, and friendship. For help during my fieldwork, I would like to thank Amarit Muadthong and Sayaporn Arpornthip. For hearten along 3 years, I am appreciative to my friend Alisa Decha.

I am grateful for Strategic Scholarship Fellowship Frontier Research Network, Office of the Higher Education Commission and Interior Design Department, Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University for the scholarship supported.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents for their loving, understanding and supporting everything I do. Last but not least, I am indebted Kruba Norathep Arunmanee who introduce me to experience the sacred world and Kommot Kamolpajak who bring me in balanced layman world. If I contain some degree of merit, I would like to share with them.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	c
Acknowledgement.....	e
List of Figures.....	i
List of Diagrams.....	k
Chapter	
1 Sacred Mountain and Thai Sacred Places Studies :Introduction.....	1
Statement of Significance.....	1
Objectives.....	1
Research Methodology and Process of Study.....	1
Dissertation Structure.....	8
Uncontrollable Factors and Limitations of Study.....	9
Notes.....	9
2 Sacred Mountain as the Archetype.....	11
Universal Concept of Sacred Mountain.....	11
Sacred Natural Mountain.....	11
Imaginary Sacred Mountain.....	15
Artificial Mountain of the God.....	19
Universal Significance of Sacred Mountain.....	20
The Sacred Nature of the Mountain.....	21
Definitions of the Sacred.....	21
Mountain as Sacred Space.....	23
Mountain as a Sacred Symbol.....	27
Spatial dimensions of Sacred Mountain.....	29
Inspiration for the Image of Sacred Mountain.....	32
Mountain as Sacred Medium.....	33
Creators as a Sacred Place Maker.....	34
The Creator’s Interpretation of the Sacred to the Recipients Through the Sacred Mountain Symbol.....	35
The Recipient.....	35
Experiencing the Sacredness of the Mountain.....	37
Chapter Summary	39
3 Chronology of Mount Sumeru: Sacred Mountain in Thai Concept.....	41
The Transfer of India’s Sacred Mount Meru to Thailand's Mount Sumeru and the Belief of Sacred Mountain in Thailand.....	41
The Emerge of India’s Sacred Mount Meru.....	41
South East Asia Mountain Worshipping.....	45
The Impression of Sacred Mount Sumeru in Thailand.....	45
Mount Sumeru and Traibhumikatha or Tri Phum Phra Ruang... ..	48
Sacred Mount Sumeru and Thai Sacred Culture.....	50
Thai Buddhism	50

	Page
Sacred Mountain and Thai Paradigm.....	53
Elements of Thai Paradigm.....	54
The Principle of Mount Sumeru in Thai Paradigm and Thai Sacred Culture.....	55
Cosmology of Mount Sumeru.....	58
Mount Sumeru.....	59
Triphum.....	60
The Mountains and the Oceans (Sithandorn Samut).....	63
The Four Continents: The Human Realm	64
The Transformational Powers of Sacred Mount Sumeru into Sacred Places.....	67
Chapter Summary.....	74
4 Manifestations of Sacred Mountain into Thai Sacred places.....	75
Sacred Mountain and Sacred Places in Nature.....	75
Sacred Places in Nature, in Thailand.....	75
Significance of Sacred Mountain in Sacred Places in Nature ...	77
Values of Sacred Mountain in Natural Sacred Place.....	83
The present Sacred Mountain and Natural Sacred Place.....	86
Sacred Mountain and Ritual.....	87
Sacred Ritual in Thailand.....	88
Significance of Sacred Mountain in Thai Ritual.....	89
Values of Sacred Mountain in Sacred Ritual.....	92
Sacred Mountain in Sacred Ritual in the Present.....	94
Sacred Mountain and Sacred State.....	96
Sacred State in Thailand.....	99
Significance and Values of Sacred Mountain in the Sacred State.....	108
Sacred Mountain and the Sacred State at Present.....	117
Sacred Mountain and Sacred Architecture.....	119
Sacred Architecture in Thailand.....	120
Significance of Sacred Mountain in Sacred Architecture.....	123
Values of Sacred Mountain in Sacred Architecture.....	141
Sacred Mountain and Sacred Architecture at Present.....	142
Chapter Summary.....	144
5 Thai Sacred Place: Spaces of the Mind.....	146
The Meaning of Sacred Space and Sacred Place in a Thai Context....	146
Concepts of Thai Sacred Space and Place.....	148
The Concept about the System and the Interconnection of All Matters.....	148
The concept of “Helix Time”.....	149
The concept of the human relationships and the relationship between human being and nature.....	151

	Page
Characteristics of Thai Sacred Place.....	153
Integrity in Diversity.....	153
Hierarchy Space.....	153
Complex Layers.....	156
Patchwork of Overlapping Spaces	156
Blurred boundary.....	156
Flexibility.....	157
A Space of Symbols.....	157
A Virtual Space.....	158
A Place of Experiences.....	158
The Sense of Place in Thai Sacred Places.....	159
Chapter Summary.....	160
6 Propositions and Reflections on Thai Cultural Perspectives of Sacred Places: Significance and Values.....	163
Intension of the Analogy of Sacred Mountain in Thai Sacred Place...	163
Significance of Sacred Mount Sumeru in Thai Context.....	167
Sacred Mountain as Paradigm.....	167
Significance of Sacred Mountain in Thai Culture.....	168
Values of Sacred Mount Sumeru into Thai Culture.....	171
Religious value.....	171
Historical Value.....	171
Social value.....	171
Politic value.....	171
Aesthetic value.....	171
Interpretative Value.....	171
Integrity value.....	173
Conclusion.....	173
Experiences from the Study.....	173
The Prospect Expressive of Sacred Mountain and Thai Sacred Place.....	174
Bibliography.....	175
Biography.....	184

List of Figures

Figure	Page
1 Sacred Natural Mountains	12
2 Mount Purgatory, Imaginary Sacred Mountain in European medieval.....	16
3 Mount Meru and Mount Sumeru cosmology in Chinese, Japanese and India Culture.....	18
4 Sacred Mountain in Thai concept.....	19
5 Artificial Mountain of the God.....	20
6 Human body and constructed space.....	24
7 Association between human perception and the mountain.....	25
8 Mythical conceptual spaces that origins to sacred space.....	26
9 Spatial Dimensions of Sacred Mountain.....	30
10 Mount Kailash, Kailash Range.....	44
11 India Architecture in the Mountain Form	44
12 India decorative ornament are inspired from sacred mountain belief.....	44
13 Buddhist Thais' behaviours	51
14 The Cosmology of Mount Sumeru in Thai concepts	59
15 Illustrations of Mount Sumeru in Thai concept.....	60
16 The Position of Triphum or the Three Planes of Existance and Mount Sumeru.....	60
17 The Position of the Sensuous World and Mount Sumeru	62
18 Illustration of The Mountains and the Oceans (Sithandorn Samut).....	64
19 Illustration of the 4 Continents of Human Realm.....	64
20 Khod Nak which is the symbol of water spiraling from Mount Sumeru be duplicated in Buddhist Arts.....	66
21 Examples of Sacred Natural Mountain in Thailand.....	69
22 An artificial Mountain imitates a natural mountain form.....	69
23 Artificial Sacred Mountain rendering.....	70
24 Imaginary sacred mountain rendering.....	71
25 Muang Fai in Northern Thailand : one part in the system of sacred mountains and sacred sources of water.....	78
26 Tra Pang in Sukothai and Barai of Khmer temple are kinds of the system of sacred mountains and sacred sources of water.....	78
27 the System of Sacred Mountains, Sacred Sources of Water and caste-based rule.....	79
28 Sacred Mountains, Sacred Water and human settlement of Muang Nong Han Luang or current Sakonnakorn Province.....	80
29 The source of underground water and swamps and Buddhist sacred place	81
30 Mount Sumeru in royal and local Thai Ritual.....	90

Figure	Page
31 The cosmological model of Mount Sumeru in Phra Raja Phithi Sokhan...	91
32 The principle of Mount Sumeru in secular material possessions in Thailand at the present day.....	95
35 Mandala and the Layout of Sacred City.....	98
34 Ancient Sacred Settlement in Thailand in circular, oval and rectangular shape.....	101
35 Sacred State of Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin.....	102
36 Ancient Map of Cities under the influence of Mount Sumeru cosmology..	104
37 The Buddha King.....	107
38 Bangkok in the present day.....	118
39 Sacred architecture in sacred mountain form.....	120
40 Axes of Sacred Architecture.....	125
41 Lan Sai.....	128
42 The first scene after pass the enclosure approach.....	129
43 The round-shaped Chedi.....	131
44 The base of sacred building.....	132
45 Shapes of the sacred building.....	134
46 Decorative Elements of the sacred buildings.....	135
47 The decorative parts of sacred buildings developed from natural forms and made by Thai traditional technique.....	136
48 Color used and decorative elements of the sacred buildings.....	138
49 The Interior Space of Sacred Buildings.....	139
50 The Interior Space of Sacred Buildings.....	140
51 Serenity, Lightness and Buoyancy in Thai sacred architecture.....	141

List of Diagrams

Diagram	Page
1 Triangulation in the dissertation methodology.....	3
2 The Sequences of Study.....	4
3 Triangulation in the dissertation method.....	5
4 Interpretative Method.....	6
5 Academic Contexts of the Study.....	7
6 Elements of Thai Paradigm	54
7 The Combination of Thai Paradigm.....	55
8 The Transformations of Sacred Mountain.....	68
9 Changing Sequence of the Sacred Mountain Symbol.....	92
10 Sequence of Natural Sacred Mountain Rendering.....	75
11 Sequence of Natural Sacred Mountain Rendering.....	84

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Chapter 1

Sacred Mountain and Thai Sacred Places Studies : Introduction

Statement of Significance

Sacred place idea in Thai culture heritage has always been concerned with the sacred mountain as symbolic and focussing on Mount Sumuru. Whether in the tangible forms as natural mountains or the symbolic forms as in places of worship, religious places, rituals, temples, palaces and shrines, the imaginary forms in social power system as divine king, governance, and social relationship, this symbol attribute in all places. Additionally it dominates Thai order of thought so that Sacred Mountain is a structure of perception or a frame of knowledge¹ that gives guidance to a network of knowledge, beliefs, thinking process of Thai people and the order of Thai culture.

The concept of the dissertation are transpired from Emeritus Professor Ken Taylor's concept of place² which influenced to researcher bring about the conceptual framework of which "Thai sacred place are a literally kind of Thai history imprint. They can tell us, if we care to read and interpret them, something about the achievements and values of our predecessors. Thai sacred place embody physical changes which in turn reflect evolving attitudes towards the place. They contain a wealth of evidence of our social and material history with which we readily associate heritage values."³

Objectives

This dissertation (1.) addresses the meanings of sacred space and places in Thai context and the attitude of Thai people to its concept of sacred place through experiencing the sacred mountain symbol. The knowledge created from within this theme (2.) addresses itself to a deeper understanding of various dimension of sacred places and (3.) illuminates authentic characters, qualifications and spatial characteristic of Thai sacred places, and eventually (4.) discourse the significances of sacred mountain in Thai Sacred Place and in Thai Culture.

Research Methodology and Process of Study

The method to study Thai sacred place is challenging. According to international cultural heritage philosophy which has evolved from physical monument

¹ "A frame of knowledge in a certain issue during that period is like the edge of the sky for thoughts that dominate people in that period. It acts as an indicator that determines whether the spoken words are accepted in the society." See Foucault, Michel (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York : Pantheon Books.

² "Cultural landscape"-- See Taylor, K. (2007). *Cultural Landscapes and Asian Values: Negotiating A Transition from an International to an Asian Regional Framework*.

³ See *ibid.*

to intangible inheritance, the most recent concept is the dynamic perception of the association between the physical object and the mental and the relationship between the tangible and the intangible, including between the spirit and place⁴.

As the sacred symbol, sacred mountain is the manifestation of belief and the concretization of the sacredness. The significance of sacred mountain has been defined as (a.) cultural heritage values either or both tangible or intangible, and (b.) natural heritage values⁵. The association between natural and cultural is also regarded as the integrity in the context of sacred mountain as cultural landscape which implied a balanced state of ecological systems, aesthetic, cultural, religious or artistic association.⁶

In Thailand, sacred mountain has been studied in various issues especially sacred Mount Sumeru in Triphum literatures, Thai architecture⁷, and Thai Arts⁸, as well as the others researches on Thai sacred place which are the in depth conventional academic study. These remarkable researchers created valuable in-depth knowledge. They defined sacred mountain as the belief and inspiration which is dominated in all dimension of Thai culture, nevertheless, none of researcher discourse the significance

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⁴ ICOMOS, (2008). 16th General Assembly and International Scientific Symposium (September 29th to October 4th 2008), ICOMOS International.

⁵ UNESCO-MAB, 2006. *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*, Paris: UNESCO. P.12-14

⁶ UNESCO, 2005. *Report of the Thematic Expert Meeting on Asia-Pacific Sacred Mountains*, Paris: UNESCO. WHC-01/Conf.208/INF.9Rev, p.17

⁷ The sacred mountain in Thai context study such as Donald K. Swearer, Sommai Premchit and Phaithoon Dokbuakaew in their book 'Sacred Mountains of Northern Thailand and Their Legends' which give some introduction about the role of natural mountain in sacred space and the relation between Buddhism, nature and culture. (See Donald K. Swearer, Premchit Sommai & D. Phaithoon, 2004. *Sacred Mountains of Northern Thailand and Their Legends*, Chiangmai: Silkworm Books.),

Christophe Munier collect information about Buddhist sacred mountain (see Munier, C., 1998. *Sacred Rocks and Buddhist Caves in Thailand*, Bangkok: White Lotus.),

Chot Kallayanamit (โชติ กัลยาณมิตร) analyzes influenced of sacred mountain in Thai arts and architecture. He assumes that Sacred Sumeru Mountain is the structure, theory and order of Thai arts and architecture. (See Chot Kallayanamit, 1974. *The Research and Analysis of Element of Thai Arts and Architecture*, Bangkok: Architecture Faculty, Silpakorn University.

Anuwit Chareonsupakul (อนุวิทย์ เจริญศุภกุล) analyses influence of Mount Sumeru cosmology in Thai architecture

Thada Sutthitham (ธาดา สุทธิธรรม) analyses about belief system in Thailand and Indochinese countries, manifestation of belief to symbolic and cities plan and the new perception of city symbols in Modern Life in Symbols of Suvarnabhumi Cities: Mouth, Navel, and Mandala. and Etc.

⁸ Son Srimatrang (สน ศรีมาตริง) analyzes influenced of sacred mountain in traditional Thai fine arts.

Julathat Payakkaranon (จุลทัศน์ พัยัคฆรานนท์) analyses influence of Mount Sumeru cosmology in Thai Arts.

of this phenomena⁹, the intension of place or its spiritual element. Therefore, these specific matters seem an impediment to understanding the intention of sacred place and the precept meanings that have been conveyed in sacred mountain symbol. Thus it may require an extreme approach to attach this place.

This dissertation use the inside view to understand Thai sacred places through researcher eyes of Thais and under the Thai way of thought. Through a multi-disciplinary approach within systematical scholastics, aesthetic and holism combined with experience by the sensation and the intellectual cognition¹⁰. In this dissertation, experiencing sacred space, reading change though time and reading the present are branches dissertation methodology (See Diagram 1) to read Thai sacred place as a document of Thailand's history ¹¹.

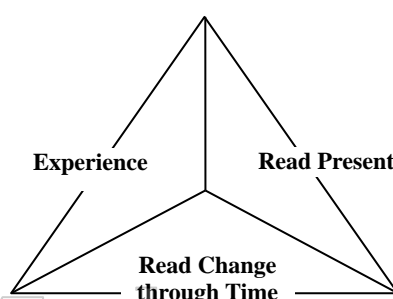


Diagram 1 Triangulation in the dissertation methodology

(Adapted from “to read the landscape as a document of human history” in Taylor, K. (2007). *Cultural Landscapes and Asian Values: Negotiating A Transition from an International to an Asian Regional Framework*.)

There are two procedures of study sequences and two methodologies. The first duration is research to collect and to analyze data. It based on qualitative research procedures that are literatures review, data collection by field work, physical survey, conversation of professionals and experts who have direct experience in the related field, analyses, evaluation, and syntheses (See Diagram 2). The second duration based on interpretative method to narrate consequence and use a theme to interpret the research outcomes.

⁹ Except Srisak Wanlipodom who commit the discussion about Sacred Sumeru Mountain system in Irrigate totalitarianism and Robert Heine- Gelden in his book *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*. See Srisak Wanlipodom, (2008). in *The seminar on supernatural power in ancient water management*, Rim Kobb Fah Bookshop: AncientCity. And Heine-Gelden, R., 1956. *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, New York Cornell University.

¹⁰ An information processing view of an individual's psychological functions which are perception, memory, introspect and imaginary. Cognition is the capabilities of the mind and expected properties of an artificial or synthetic “mind” and an abstract property of advanced living organisms and a direct property of a brain (or of an abstract mind) on at the factual and symbolic levels.

¹¹ Transpired the concept from Taylor, K. (2007). *Cultural Landscapes and Asian Values: Negotiating A Transition from an International to an Asian Regional Framework*.

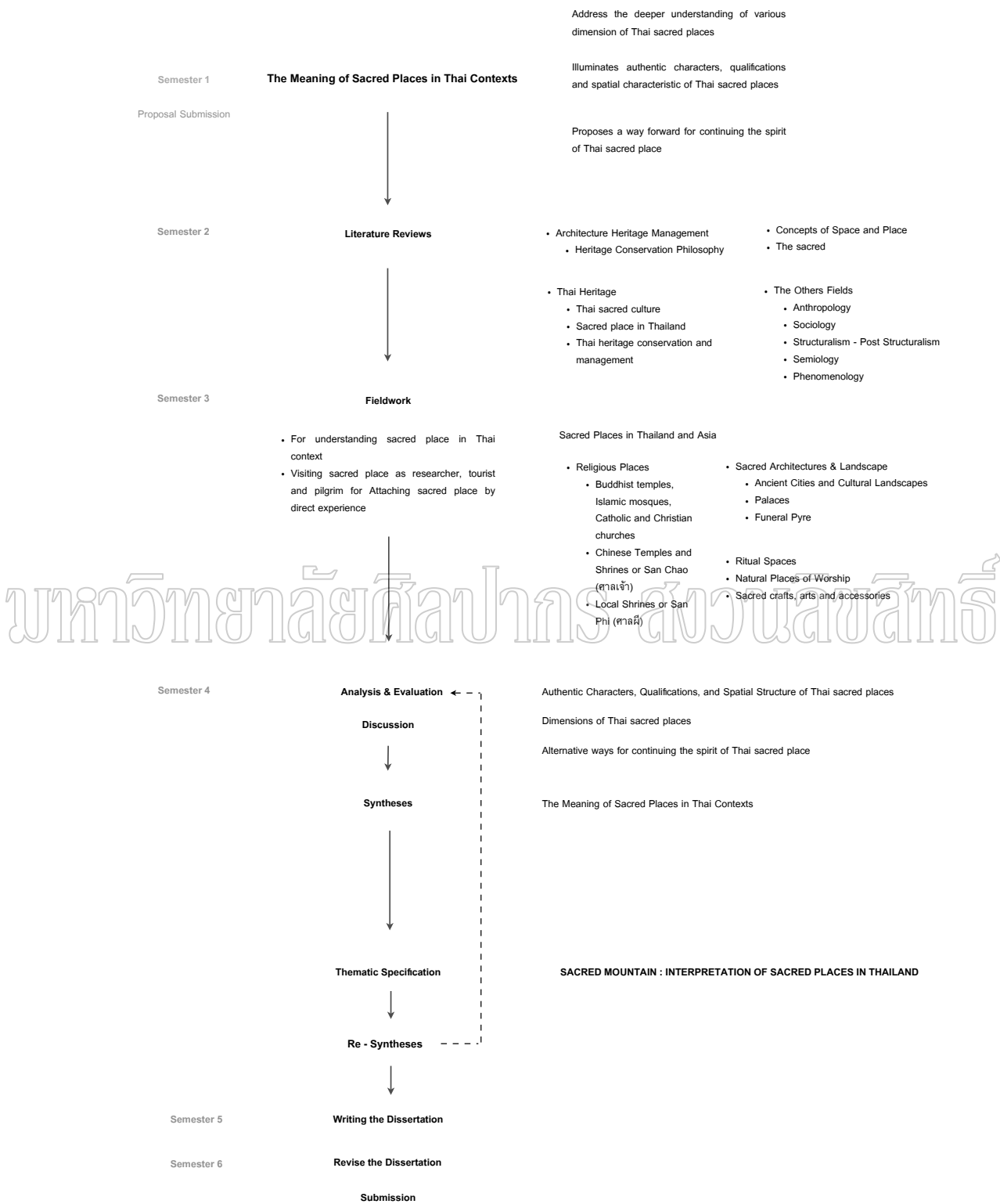


Diagram 2 The Sequences of Study

Research method includes historical study, critical review, and direct experience on site sample life study fieldwork. (See Diagram 3)

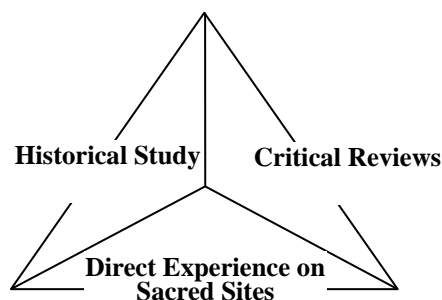


Diagram 3 Triangulation in the dissertation method

Historical Study proposes to understand history which associates with sacred places in Thailand and other Buddhist region, such as the original form and the reliable function of acreage. It aims to analyze authenticity and change that takes place.

The critical reviews are referred to analysis of a critical evaluation of sacred places to understand the present situation and discourse analysis.

The direct experiences and current sites sample fieldworks are approaches to understand places. According to direct experiencing method, firstly sacred space will be attached, subsequently understood and comprehended. The recognitions and culturally defined values that are connected to sacred places in Thailand are explored. The expression of sacred practice is investigated and discussed. Additionally, impact on the contextual meanings of sacred space and places is examined.

The study reveals the origins, characteristics, identities and authenticity of Thai sacred space and places, beliefs and myths related to sacred places. They are assembled with critical reviews, personal experiences, and current site example fieldworks to figure out new interpretative models of Thai sacred places. These are then deconstructed and reconstructed to find the best narrative model to render the consequent messages of sacred places by using sacred symbols as an interpretative medium.

An interpretative method uses symbols as an intermediary to describe abstract meanings as concrete objects. (See Diagram 4)

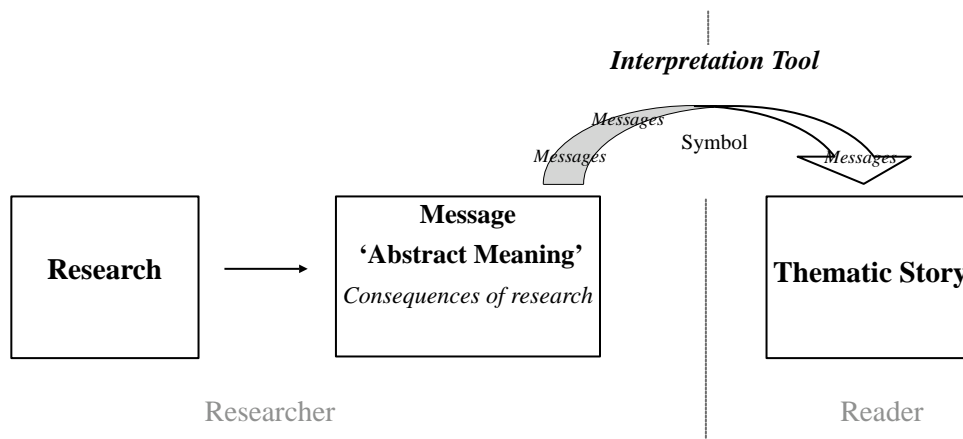


Diagram 4 Interpretative Method

The selected potent symbol of sacred places in Thailand is the ‘Sacred Mountain’. Therefore an interpretative method of this dissertation uses a sacred mountain as a tool to express and describe the concept of “Sacred Mountain: Interpretation of Sacred Place in Thailand”

The academic contexts of the dissertation is divided into four levels. The primary is the general data such as the knowledge about sacred place in Thailand, the international concept of cultural heritage conservation and management, and the theory about the sacred. The secondary context is the issues about Thai sacred culture, the sacred, space and place and the situation about sacred places in Thailand. The thirdly context is the meaning of sacred space place in thai context that are the results from study. Lastly is the discussion which are concepts, characteristics, and sense of Thai sacred place. (See Diagram 5)

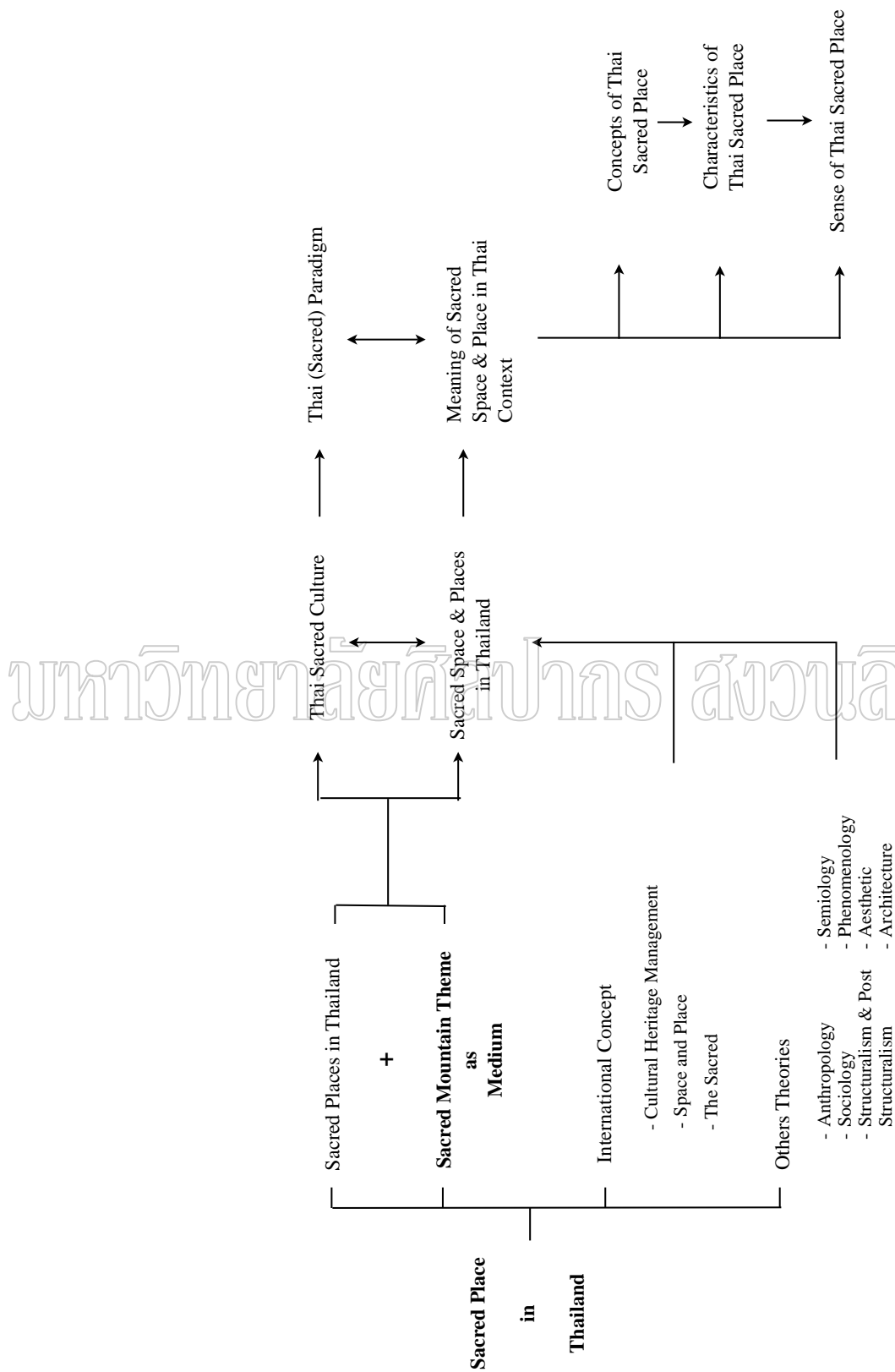


Diagram 5 Academic Contexts of the Study

Dissertation Structure

The dissertation is divided into six inter-related chapters;

The first chapter, “*Sacred Mountain and Thai Sacred Place Studies: Introduction*”, addresses the context of the dissertation, statement of significance and conceptual key issues, objectives of study, logical methodological grounding, academic contexts, and thematic sequence of dissertation.

Chapter two, “*Sacred Mountain as the Archetype*” generally inspects mountain as universal symbols of the sacred sphere, the sacred nature of the mountain and its spatial dimensions as well as the theory about mountain as sacred symbolism and the scheme to create and attach sacred mountain symbol.

Chapter three, “*Chronology of Mount Sumeru: Sacred Mountain in Thai Context*”, explicates about sacred mountain in Thai context that a belief of sacred mountain in Thailand is the local belief on natural sacred mountain blended with the influence of sacred Mount Meru from India culture. It evoked ‘Thai Sacred Sumeru Mountain Concept’ that used as the archetype in all Thai sacred space and place. The transformational powers of Thai sacred mountain induce the various shapes that convey intention, hidden meanings and significances.

Chapter four, “*Manifestations of Sacred Mountain into Thai Sacred Places*” illuminates and discusses various aspects manifested in the sacred Mount Sumeru concept. This part analyze the systematic set of signs, the meaning, values and the significance of sacred Mount Sumeru symbol in the sacred natural mountain, in the sacred ritual, in the sacred state and in the sacred architecture. These manifestation forms contain the meaning and the dimensions that are metamorphosed into places, are transferred and are made appropriate to different group of people and more accessible to common people who have different levels of intellect.

Chapter five, “*Spatial Structure of Thai Sacred Places*” describe what is the meanings of sacred space and places in Thai context. This chapter Illuminates some characteristics, determine the physical and imaginary appearances, the directed and the connoted meaning, including will discuss about sense of Thai sacred place.

Chapter six, “*Propositions and Reflections on Thai Cultural Perspectives of Sacred Places: Significance and Values*” is a summation of the research findings and speculations of the dissertation which are intensions of the analogy of sacred mountain in Thai sacred places, significance of sacred mountain in Thai context, experiences from study and conclusion of the dissertation.

For the prospect expressive of sacred mountain in Thai sacred place, because of humans do not blindly believe and follow the pattern of cultural values. On the contrary, humans have thought, therefore, humans can change, argue and always

reinterpret the value of culture¹², as the sacred medium, the mountain symbol will continue its transformation, and as the document, the meaning of Thai sacred place will be re-defined and interpreted. Thailand might be known as the sacred land. The authenticity of Thai sacred places still exists; however, it could be expressed in the other ways.

Thai sacred place with in sacred mountain theme is a symbols of who Thais people are and it can serve to remind us of the past. It interprets Thais minds. The ways that Thai people perform sacred places depends on opinions and attitudes of Thais toward the sacredness. Thais manner in the present dominate the sacred place at the present which become the heritage of the future generation. The challenges and imperatives is in what way Thais people maintain and create the sacred place as remarkable representatives of the totality of Thais cultural development and achievement.

Uncontrollable Factors and Limitations of Study

The uncontrollable factors of the dissertation is individual intention. Additionally, the critical tensions are individual perception, experiences, opinions, attitudes and limited intellect of researcher, especially of readers. Each person has own intentions, therefore, everyone has different direction to attach sacred place. This dissertation might render more understanding of sacred places in Thai context; however, it is long for the individual sacred mind.

Notes

Even though this research focuses on the study of the meanings of present sacred space, it is necessary to explore the origin of the sacred space beforehand in order to understand its transformation. It is, thus, vital to investigate ancient Thai kingdoms, cities and communities because they contributed to the emergence of different types of sacred space in Thailand nowadays.

The terms Siam, Siamese, Thailand, and Thai throughout the dissertation follows a simple criterion: Siam is used for the country and Siamese is used for Siam people before the change of the country's name in 1939; Thailand and Thai are used for the post-1939 context. The term Tai is used for people relating to a population group within Tai dominant cultural group who live both inside and outside of Siam and Thailand boundary.

¹² Anan Ganchanapan. (2006). Thais' Order of Thought . In G. Anan (Ed.), *Thais' Order of Thought: Concept and Methodologies* . Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund .p.3

The word “Thailand” in this study means the current sovereignty of Thailand as a country with fixed boundary. Thailand is indeed made up of a collection of kingdoms, cities and communities. The history of Thailand, thus, covers every kingdom, city and community within the current boundary of Thailand.

The word “Thais” or “Thai people” in this study means people who live in Thailand, speak Thai language as an official language and practice Thai customs and traditions - whether they are Lanna people, Ayuttaya people, Sukhothai natives, northerners, southerners, Chinese or Laos descendants. Since this study concentrates on Buddhist sacred space, it concerns Thai people who practice Buddhism only.

The phonetic transcription for most Thai words follows the "*General System of Phonetic Transcription of Thai Characters into Roman*" devised by the Royal Institute. The Pali and Buddhist words follow the "*Dictionary of Numerical Dhammas* (พจนานุกรมพุทธศาสตร์ หมวดธรรม) devised by P.A.Payutto (พระธรรมปิฎก ป.อ.ปยุตโต).¹³ Thai and Buddhist words are interpreted and their Thai word are given in the parentheses at the first reference to each chapter and their meanings are given in the appendix. The name of spaces, places, rituals, temples, and etc. are given as they are known (such as Wat Phra Keaw, Wat Phrabudda Chinnaraj, Doi Suthep), their formal name and Thai name are given in the parentheses at the first reference to each chapter.

The English names of certain Thai kings and princes, as they are known among historians, their ranks and their longer titles are given in the first reference to each chapter. Thai people are referred to by their first names while Westerners are referred to by their surnames. In the bibliography, Thai names are entered according to first names.

¹³ Payutto, P. A. *Dictionary of Numerical Dhammas*. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

Chapter 2

Sacred Mountain as the Archetype

Mountain is symbol that found in every sacred place in Thailand. Meanwhile, it also the universal symbol of the sacred sphere. Because of its sacred nature and its spatial dimensions, the mountain are used as a medium to convey the sacred phenomena. This chapter will inspect, 2.1, mountain as the universal sacred archetype, 2.2, the sacred nature of the mountain, 2.3, inspiration for the image of sacred mountain and, 2.4, experiencing the sacredness of the mountain or the scheme to create and attach the sacredness through the sacred mountain symbol.

2.1 Universal Concept of Sacred Mountain

2.1.1 Sacred Natural Mountain

Mountains have been recognized by many cultures throughout the world as a sacred place. They are ingrained in various aspects of human lives, particularly at social, cultural and religious levels. With its peak rising up to the sky, the mountain is deemed to represent the abode of gods. The legends about mountains are found in various parts of the world. They include, for example, the legends about Mount Ararat as the place where Noah's Ark came to rest, Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb which is believed to be the site God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, and the sacred Ayers Rock (Uluru) or Mount Olga in Australia. In Asia, the mythical Mount Kailash is central to Hinduism while Buddhism and Jainism refer to Kailash as Mount Meru, the axis mundi or the centre the universe.

The sacred mountains are related to both cosmogony and cosmology. It is the symbolism of archetype motif of identifying a centre and represents the relationship between the earth and the sky, the centre and the periphery, the central pillar and the ascent, and the underlying unifying threads.¹ In animist cults, the sacred mountain is associated with gods and placed at the centre of either a macro cosmos or a micro cosmos. It was worshiped and recognised for their sacredness.

In addition to their immense physical appearance, many mountains become sacred because they are birthplaces of important religions. Sacred mountain in Buddhism are mountains associated with the life of the Buddha several times. For example, *Benjakiri Mountain* (เบญจคีรี) in India was places where historic events during Buddha's period took place. Benjakiri Mountain comprises *five sacred mountains* surrounding Rajgir city in the state of Bihar (มคธ). (1.) Mount Khitchakut or Dhungeswara (ภูเขาคิชฌกูฏ); the place where Buddha was enlightened², (2.) Mount Pandava (ภูเขापถมนทวะ); the place where Buddha had the first meal after his enlightenment, (3.) Mount Isiekili (ภูเขาวิสีคิลิ); the meditation place of 500 Buddhas in the past, (4.) Mount Vepurra (ภูเขาวะปุระ); the meditation place of preachers, and (5.) Mount Veparra (ภูเขาวะการะ); the first chanting place of Tipitaka.

Mount of Olives at the border of Jerusalem is an important mountain in Christian and Jewish traditions. Biblical references mentioned that the Jewish King, David, went up from Jerusalem by the ascent of the Mount of Olives³. The Old Testament believes that God had come to the Mount of Olive in the day he punished Jerusalem people.⁴ It is also frequently mentioned in the New Testament as the place where Jesus stood when he wept over Jerusalem⁵. Jesus is also said to spend time on the mountain to teach and to prophesy his disciples⁶, as well as to return after each day

¹ (1991). *Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern* ed. V. Kapila New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts Abhinav . p.xiv.

² Or the local name is Pragbodhi Mountain is situated near Gaya district in the state of Bihar

³ The Mount of Olives is first mentioned in connection with David's flight from Absalom (II Samuel 15:30): "And David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up." The ascent was probably east of the City of David, near the village of Silwan. The sacred character of the mount is alluded to in the Ezekiel (11:23): "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city." [1] Solomon built altars to the gods of his wives on the southern peak (I Kings 11:7-8). During the reign of King Josiah, the mount was called the Mount of Corruption (II Kings 23:13). From Menashe Har-El.(1977), *This is Jerusalem*, -: Canaan Publishing House, p.117

⁴ The book of Zechariah 14: 2-5, The Bible Old Testament

⁵ Matthew 21:1;26:30, etc.

⁶ Matthew 24, *Bible*

"Jesus left the temple area and was going away, when his disciples approached him to point out the temple buildings. He said to them..... As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives,.....then those in Judea must flee to the mountains,....."

to rest⁷, and to come there on the night of his betrayal⁸. After the last supper, the twelve Apostles were in the retinue with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. It was also a place where the body of Jesus was placed after he was crucified at a small hill named Golgotha⁹. The Mount Olives is likewise the place where Jesus ascended to heaven¹⁰. It is also a sacred place for Jewish people who make pilgrimages there for weeping and lamenting the destruction of the Temple Mount."¹¹

Mountain is also important in Muslim culture. *Jabal an Nour*¹², the Mountain of Light, where Hira cave was located, is located near the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. It was a place where Muhammad is said to have received his first revelation from Allah or God.

Some mountains have their origins in the myths. For instance, in Greek mythology, Mount Olympus is home of God Zeus and other Olympian gods and goddesses. Lying between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, Mount Caucasus or Kaukasos was one of the pillars supporting the world and the place where Zeus chained Prometheus after he presented fire to mortals. Mount Etna in the Sicily Island, Italy, is regarded as a site where Zues imprisoned Encedalus (the Gigantes).

Asia also has mountain myths. For instance, in Japanese myth, Mount Fuji is regarded as the place where several deities, such as the goddess Sengen, resided.¹³ Myth of Korea also states that Mount Inwangsan, Mount Mokmyeoksan (Inkyeongsan), Mount Baekaksan and Mount Namsan are four guardian mountains of Seoul.¹⁴

According to Chinese geomancy, the five great mountains demonstrate the five points of compass and the axis of the world. They include Tai Shan, the Leading Peaceful Mountain of the east; Hua Shan, the Splendid Mountain of the west; Hang Shan, the Balancing Mountain of the south; Heng Shan, the Permanent Mountain of the north, and Song Shan; the Lofty Mountain at the centre.

⁷ Luke 21:37, *Bible*

"Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives,...."

⁸ Matthew 26, *Bible*

⁹ -, 2008. Golgotha Hill The Gospel Mysteries website.

¹⁰ Acts of the Apostles 1:12, *Bible*

¹¹ Har-el, Menashe (1977). *This is Jerusalem*. Jerusalem: Canaan. pp. 120–123.

¹² Jabal an-Nur or Jabal Nur or Mountain Hiram

¹³ Frederick, H., (1992). *Myths and Legends of Japan*, New York: Dover Publications.

¹⁴ Cho, I.-S., (2009). *Integrity: Conservation vs. Relocation - Seonbawui Meditation Rock and Guksadang Shamanist Ritual Shrine in Seoul*, in Conference on Conservation and Management of Sacred Places Bangkok, Thailand: ICOMOS Thailand.

Mount Himalayas is the most spiritually influential mountain in Asia that inspires the myth of the sacred mountain. Billions of people in India, Tibet, Nepal, China, Japan, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries have recognised the Himalayas as focus of where holy spirits and deities reside. A number of summits in the Himalayas are named after the deities or served as a symbol of different faiths such as the mountain range of the world guardians, the mountain range of worship and the mountain range of fertility.

Many people believe that the Himalayas are lying at the centre of the world and equivalent to Mount Meru or the imaginary axis mundi. As a result, many high mountains near the Himalayas are used as the symbol of Mount Meru, including Mount Kailas, Mount Sagarmatha¹⁵ or Mount Chomolungma, Mount Gauri Sankar, Mount Annapurna, Mount Makalu and Mount Kangchenjunga.

This believe also influenced to natural mountain in South East Asia. Many mountains are used as the symbol of Mount Meru, including Porpa mountain (ภูเขาพอพา) in Myanmar where is the adobe of Mahakili Nat or deity (มหาคีรีรัตน์), Rangmaw mountain (ภูเขาเรียงแมว) of Champa where associate to Mison ancient monument, Lingabanpot (สิ่งคบรรพต) of Panturanga State (ปถมพุงรังคะ) in South Champa, Mount Paung Laung in Myanmar where is the location of Kyaikhtiyo stupa (ไ้ก้กัทยโย, พระธาตุใจที่โย, พระธาตุอินทร์แขวน), Phu Kaw in Champasak, Lao where associate to Phrasat Wat Phu ancient monument, Mount Agung in Bali, Mount Sumeru in Indonesia etc.

2.1.2 Imaginary Sacred Mountain

In addition to the myths that originate from natural mountains, humans likewise created imaginary mountains as the symbols of the sacred mountains. The most significant imaginary mountains are for example as the following mountain:

Mount Purgatory is the great medieval imaginary mountain. It was referred in 'Divine Comedy' written by Dante Alighieri¹⁶ as an imaginary island mountain located under the earthly paradise. It is the great medieval imaginary mountain that demonstrates a profoundly Christian vision of man's temporal and eternal destiny. According to Christian belief, a part of the Mountain of Purgatory above the inferno hell is divided into sevens terraces inhabited by human souls that are purged according to their sins. The summit of Mount Purgatory is a flat, circular land called the earthly

¹⁵ or Everest Summit, Chomolungma in Tibetan

¹⁶ Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is Italy's greatest poet and also one of the towering figures in western European literature. He is best known for his monumental epic poem, La commedia, later named La divina commedia (The Divine Comedy). From the Encyclopedia Britannica

paradise, which is indeed the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were exiled so long ago.¹⁷

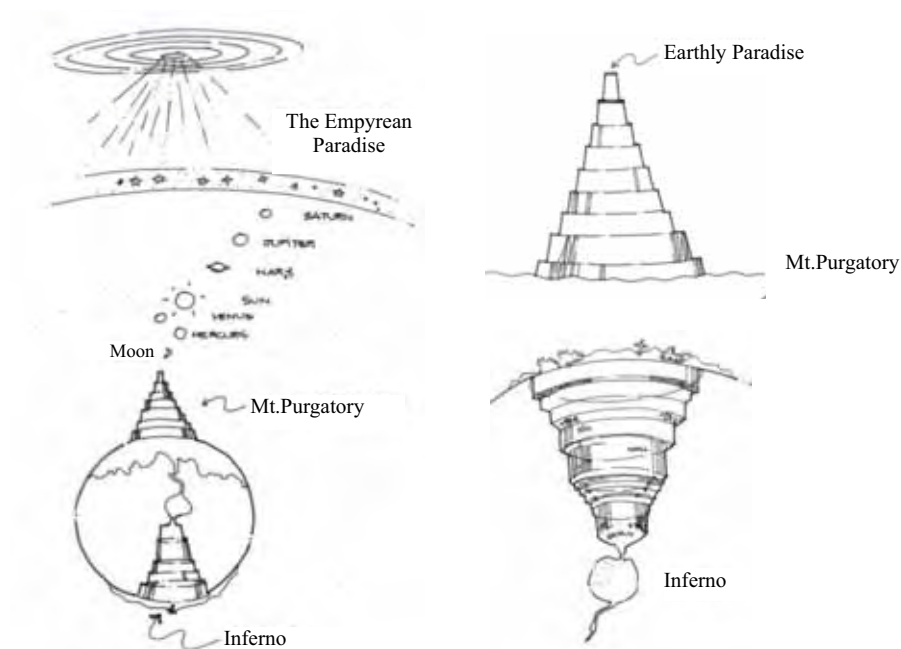


Figure 2 : Mount Purgatory, Imaginary Sacred Mountain in European medieval
(Redrawn from devine-comedy-art.com and johncoulthart.com)

Mount Purgatory¹⁸ in accordance with Catholic teaching is a place or a condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their providence and free transgressions. All sins are not equal before God, nor dare anyone assert that the daily faults of human frailty will be punished with the same severity that is meted out to serious violation of God's law.¹⁹ Dante's Mount Purgatory dominated Western cosmology thinking for centuries before the political and intellectual authority of the medieval church declined with time, leading to the creative anarchy of scientific period. Foremost to this new style of thinking was a strong connection between ideas and facts.

Mount Meru; According to Asian imagination, Mount Meru is located at the centre of the world. Deemed as the centre of all physical and spiritual universes, it is

¹⁷ Alighieri, D., *The divine comedy*, in *The divine comedy / Dante Alighieri*; translated by Allen Mandelbaum; with an introduction by Eugenio Montale; and notes by Peter Armour, eds. Eugenio Montale & P. Armour London: David Campbell.

¹⁸ From the Latin 'purgare', to make clean, to purify

¹⁹ Hanna, E. (1911). *Purgatory*. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved October 12, 2008 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12575a.htm>

the imaginary sacred mountain in Jain mythology and Hindu and Buddhist cosmology as well as it is believed to be the abode of Lord Brahma and other divinities. The mountain is said to be 80,000 yojanas (โยชน์) or leagues (450,000 kilometer) high and located in Jambudvīpa (ชมพูทวีป), one of the continents on earth in Hindu mythology. In Hindu legend, Mount Meru is said to have a shape of a tube²⁰. Its pinnacle pole is the adobe of Gods while the opposite end is resided by the Asuras. The earthly realms in Mount Meru, where humans live, consist of four continents²¹ include Jambudvīpa (ชมพูทวีป), Purvavideha (บูรพวิเทหะ), Aparagodaniya (อมรโคยาน) and Uttarakuru (อุตรครุฑ). Together with the other three worlds, they form seven continents²² (Saptadvīpa -- สัตตทวีป) later. The sphere of Mount Meru is encircled by seven upper and seven lower divisions.²³

²⁰ Mihira, V., (The six century). The Panchasiddhantika, in *E. J. Lazaeus and co.-Benares*.

“..... The round ball of the earth, composed of the five elements, abides in the midst of the starry sphere, like a piece of iron suspended between magnets. In its middle there is Sumeru, the abode of the gods. Below, at the pole opposite Meru, there are placed the Asuras Straight above Meru in space one pole is seen; the other pole is seen below, placed in space..... *For these who dwell on the back of Meru the sun once risen remains visible for six month, while he moves in the six sign beginning with Arises; for the Asuras he is visible as long as he is in the latter.....*”

²¹ (1997). Encyclopaedia of Hinduism Vol.38 Purana, ed. N. K. Singh New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD. P. 337 – 388

“.....It has four petals which were the four continents round the mountain Meru, viz, Bradrasva, Bharat, Ketumala, and Uttarakuru. Throgh there is some difference between the cosmological and geographical statements, the original source seem to be the same, the unmanifest, i.e. the primeval Waters (salilam). This became Hiranyagarbha and from this proceeded the whole universe. (from Vayu II. 34.36-37; 42-46; 56-60, cf. Varaha 75.41-50.).....”

“.....Geographically we have seen that lotus-shaped earth with Meru as pericarp and its four petals, viz. Bradrasva, Bharat, Ketumala, and Uttarakuru was originated from the unmanifest (avyukta). This was the ancient conception of the earth consisting of four dvīpas (chaturdvīpl), the same was developed into that of seven continents (saptadvīpl) later on. (Vayu LL.34.36-37, 56-60. Mataya 113.43-44)”

²² Ibid. p.337-338

“.....Priyavrata divided this whole earth among his seven sons after their names. Those seven sons futher divided their respective continents into seven sub-divisions each designated after their seven sons. Hence the Puranic writers describe the geography of seven continents with their seven Varsha-mountains, seven great rivers, etc. Pushkara is divided into two divisions while Jambu into nine, otherwise the order is the same.....”

²³ Chaturdasa-Bhuvanatmak Bramanda see Ibid. p.338

“.....The Puranas often deal with the chaturdasa-bhuvanatmak bramanda constituting seven upper and seven lower divisions. The seven upper divisions including the earth are bhuh, bhuvah, svah, mahah, janah, tapah, and satyam and the seven lower regions are attala, vitala, sutala, talatal, rasatala, mahatala and patala.....”

“..... According to seven continental theory of the earth jambu dvīpa is in the centre of all continents whith mountain Meru as it neval. It is encircled by an ocean of salt of equal extent. Similarly Plaksha, Salmali, Kusa, Krauncha Saka and Pushkara each having double area of its preceding one. All of them are surrounded by an ocean of sugarcane juice, wine, ghee, curd, and sweetwater.....”

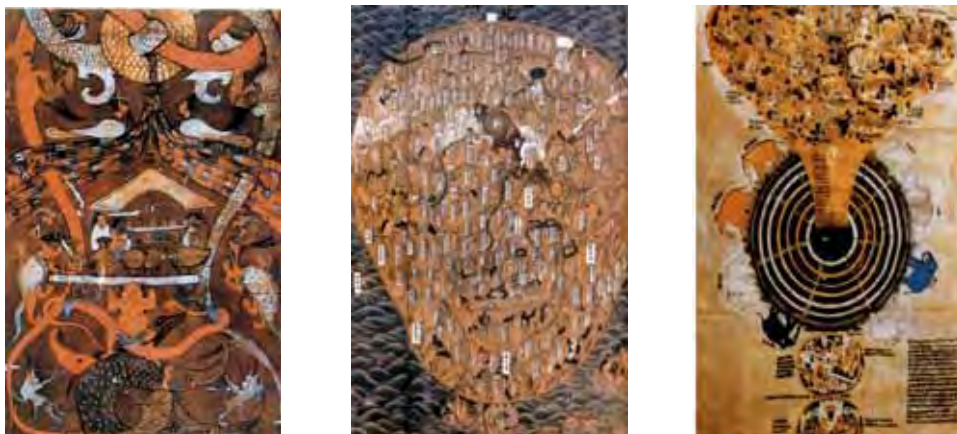


Figure 3 : Mount Meru and Mount Sumeru cosmology in Chinese, Japanese and India Culture
(Figure from -(1985), *The Fine Arts in Triphum Concept*, Silpakorn Journal, 28th Issue 2, p.1-8)

Mount Sineru or Mount Sumeru : Mount Sineru or Sumeru is located at the center of Buddhist cosmology. The concept of Sumeru is closely related to the Hindu mythological concept of a central world mountain, Mount Meru, but differs from the Hindu concept in several particulars.²⁴ Mount Sumeru is said to have a shape of an hourglass, with a circle or might be a cylinder form.²⁵ It also descends beneath the surface of the surrounding waters, being founded upon the basal layer of the Earth. Sumeru is often used as a symbol in Buddhist moral, texts, architecture and arts.

Mount Sumeru is surrounded by a moat-like ocean, which is in turn surrounded by a ring (or rather square) wall of mountains, which is surrounded by another ocean, each diminishing in width and height from the one closer to Sumeru. Altogether, it contains eight oceans and nine mountain ranges around. The ocean is in turn surrounded by a circular mountain wall called Cakravada (จักรวาล -- universe) that marks the horizontal boundary of the world. Indeed, there are four continents around Sumeru, comprising Jambudvipa to the south (where human being reside), Purvavideha to the east, Aparagodaniya to the west and Uttarakuru to the north. The top of Sumeru constitutes the "heaven" (devaloka -- เทวโลก), which is the highest plane in direct physical contact with the earth. Below this heaven consists of sheer precipice, narrowing in like an inverted mountain above the sea. Below Sumeru, in the seas around it, is home of the Asuras (อสูร -- devil).

The imaginary mountain of Hinduism and Buddhism share some similarities in their organizations of cosmos that surround the sacred mountain and the symbolism of

²⁴ Etymologically, the proper name of the mountain is Meru or Neru, to which is added the approbatory prefix su-, resulting in the meaning "excellent Meru" or "wonderful Meru"

²⁵ Sumeru is 80,000 *yojanas* Width x Height x Depth. The exact measure of the *yojana* is uncertain, but some accounts put it at about 24,000 feet, or approximately 4 1/2 miles

centroid. Therefore, the cosmogony and cosmology of Hinduism and Buddhism that involve the imaginary sacred mountain represent the relationship between macro cosmos and micro cosmos. They also symbolize the archetype motif of identifying a centre in the similar ways.

The Concept of Mount Sumeru in Thailand:



Figure 4 : Mount Sumeru in Thai concept
(Figure from -.(1985), *The Fine Arts in Triphum Concept*, Silpakorn Journal, 28th Issue 2, p.1-8)

The cosmology principle of Mount Meru expressed in the organization of Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms in Southeast Asia²⁶. Thailand was influenced by both Hindu's Mount Meru and Buddhist's Mount Sumeru from India. Both ideals are transformed and converted to suit the Thai Buddhist way. The concept about Mount Sumeru in Thailand transcends natural mountains and all physical grounds. Almost everything can be associated with Mount Sumeru -whether it is a natural mountain or a representation of an artificial mountain such as a city, a palace, a temple, a house, a decorative ornament, a painting, a craft and a person. Mount Sumeru becomes an ideological mountain regarded as an axis of cosmos, an axis of the sacred space, a centre of the world and a centre of a sacred place.

2.1.3 Artificial Mountain of the God

Humans created the physical symbols of the imaginary sacred mountain in artificial mountain forms that have facility and spiritual functions like mountain of the God. The obviously artificial mountain is architecture. The architecture either from the world's cradles of human civilisation such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greek, India and China, or from the unique cultures in Machu Picu, Megalithic Main Stream and South East Asia islands appears to involve structures that were built as a symbolic representation of the sacred mountain.

²⁶ Heine-Gelden, R., 1968. *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, New York Cornell University.



Figure 5 : Artificial Mountain of the God
(Figure from <http://static.howstuffworks.com/gif/pyramid-17.jpg> and by Waranan S.)

This type of mountain is recognised as the Mountain of God. It is the place where the mysterious potency of the earth and all life are intense. It is essentially the mystifying sphere of activity of the superhuman powers.²⁷ The god was imagined to dwell in these artificial mountains. The deity is clearly a personification in myths, sculptures or decorative elements. The ancient people created conditions under which communication with the gods became possible when they erected the artificial mountain.

2.1.4 Universal Significance of Sacred Mountain

The universal significance of the sacred mountain contains the aspects of the cultural and the natural heritage. For the cultural heritage, the sacred mountain offers tangible and intangible values. It is associated with the deepest and central values and beliefs of different civilisations throughout the world. It caused inspiration to create artificial monuments, structures, technology ensembles, and landscapes which illustrate momentous stages in human history.

As for natural heritage, the high and inaccessible mountains are by their nature a place where the biodiversity is well preserved. The environment around the natural sacred mountain usually displays significant on-going ecological and biological

²⁷ H.G. Quaritch Wales, P. D., Litt.D., 1953. *The Mountain of God; A Study in Early Religion and Kingship*, London: Bernard Quaritch, Ltd. P.7-8, 46,53,75, 147-149.

processes in the evolution and the development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals. It is often considered as a tool to reconcile the environmental conservation.

In a case of cultural landscape, a sacred mountain is an expression of how humans interact with the environment. It shows the combined works of nature and mankind. It is illustrative of the evolution of human society and their settlements over the time.

2.2 The Sacred Nature of the Mountain

Natural sacred mountains are not adored as mountains; they are worshipped precisely because they represent something that is no longer mountain but sacred.²⁸ In the religious perspective, sacred mountains are related to the sacred centroid of the physical and the spiritual world and used as a prototype of sacred space, places and all matters. Sacred mountains embody imposing power. They symbolize the axis of cosmology. Its sacred power is translated into other forms such as the temples, the states, the palaces, the persons etc.

Sacred mountain demonstrates distinction between the sacred and the profane. It also serves as a link between the sacred and the secular worlds. It is a unified system of beliefs and practices relating to sacred things, that is to say, things are set apart and forbidden²⁹. It is a form of physical appearance that allows humans to experience beauty and reminds us of another world that is more real than our daily life.

2.2.1 Definitions of the Sacred

The word “Sacred” is equivalent to “Saksid” (ศักดิ์สิทธิ์) in Thai, which means something believed to have alchemic power to encourage the desire such as holy object, sacred item and amulet.³⁰ The word “Saksid” comes from ‘Sak’ (ศักดิ์), which is referred to power, ability, status, condition or position and ‘Sid’ (สิทธิ์) that is the rightful power to liberty. The sacred is usually used collectively with the profane.³¹ For example, in Thai language, Saksid (power) is the opposite of Saman (สามัญ --

²⁸ Eliade, M., 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York A Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. P.12

²⁹ See Durkheim, Emile (1915) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: George Allen & Unwin (originally published 1915, English translation 1915)

³⁰ The Royal Institute, (1999). Saksit (ศักดิ์สิทธิ์), in *The Royal Institute Dictionary B.E.2542 Bangkok: The Royal Institute*.

³¹ Eliade, M., 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York A Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. p.10, 14

mundane), and ‘Lokutra’ (โลกุตตระ) or the supramundane world which is often compared with ‘Lokiya’ (โลกียะ) or the material world. The profane is the human world that concerns activities and relationship in everyday life – it is the world as we experience everyday. It is full of avarice, anger and infatuation including ambition, affection, love, and anxiety. The profane might not be noble but it is not vicious.

“The Sacred” can be explained in various dimensions. The followings are the examples;

By wording study; “Sacred” is an important technical term in the scholarly study and the interpretation of religions. The word “sacred” has its origin in the Latin language. The word ‘*sacrum*’ is correlated to the word “*holy*” that comes from the old English word ‘*halig*’ derived from ‘*hal*’ meaning *health, happiness and wholeness*. So “sacred” from its beginning meant “wholeness”. Holiness may be taken to indicate a state of religious completeness or perfection and also the “wholeness” of nature. Other terms such as holy, divine, transcendent, ultimate being (or reality), mystery, and perfection or purity have been used for this domain.³²

By definition study; Longman Dictionary defines the meaning of the word “Sacred” as relating to a god or religion or as very important or greatly respected.³³ The definition of the “Sacred” in the Merriam – Webster dictionary is ‘not secular or profane’. It also refers to something ‘dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity’, ‘devoted exclusively to one service or use (as of a person or purpose)’, and ‘highly valued and important’. Other terms of sacred such as holy, divine, transcendent, ultimate being (or reality), mystery, and perfection (or purity) have been used for this domain.

Mircea Eliade defined the word ‘Sacred’ as referring to the gods or anything in their power”³⁴and determined the sacred as “equivalent to a power” and, in the last analysis, “to reality”³⁵. Eliade insisted that this experience was not reductive to any other experiences. “The sacred is not a mere experience, but it really exists”. Thomas Luckmann, a German-American sociologist, described the sacred in modern society as that “strata of significance to which everyday life is ultimately referred.”³⁶

The sacred is the power, being, or realm understood by religious persons to be at the core of existence and to have a transformative effect on their lives and

³² “sacred” in Britannica Dictionary, Merriam - Webster and Cambridge

³³ (2008). in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online.

³⁴ wikipedia. (2009). ‘Sacred’. Retrieved March 8, 2009

³⁵ Eliade, Mircea (1957) *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World).

³⁶ Thomas Luckmann. (2008). In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved October 01, 2008, from *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/350654/Thomas-Luckmann>

destinies.³⁷ The sacred is in everywhere that anyone can feel it. Anything in nature could be the subject of sacred experience, as being sacred: mountains, stones, trees and whatever.³⁸ The sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from “natural” realities. By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain, for it to continue to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone. Nothing distinguishes it from other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality.³⁹

According to the definitions, “the sacred” and “the profane” are completely separated. However, in the practical way, the sacred and the profane is in the same oneness.⁴⁰ The sacred in this dissertation is the natural being that is a duality of the profane world. The Sacred’ and ‘the profane’ are part in the whole. The sacred is higher than the profane world of perception. Human can reach the sacred through their own appropriate level of wisdom.

2.2.2 Mountain as Sacred Space

The sacred mountain is one of the manifestations of the sacred. It contains the duality - the sacred power and the attitude, the intangible consecrated form and the tangible form, the meaning and the medium. In the place, the power, the being, or the realm it is understood by humans to be at the core of existence and have a transformative effect on human lives and destinies.⁴¹

The sacred mountain space is an abstract term for a complex set of ideas that interprets a position of a human body and its relationship with the world. The space is created from the human body that relates to the world. The body is a ‘lived body’ and the ‘space’ is a human constructed space.⁴² (See figure 6)

³⁸ See Eliade, M., 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York A Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. P.8-13

³⁹ Ibid. p.12

⁴⁰ Pravech V. (2007). *The Way of Human Being in the Twenty First Century* (4th ed.). Bangkok: Suan Gern Mee Ma .p.12

⁴¹ sacred. (2008). In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved October 01, 2008, from Encyclopedia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/515425/sacred>

⁴² Tuan, Y. F., (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. P.35

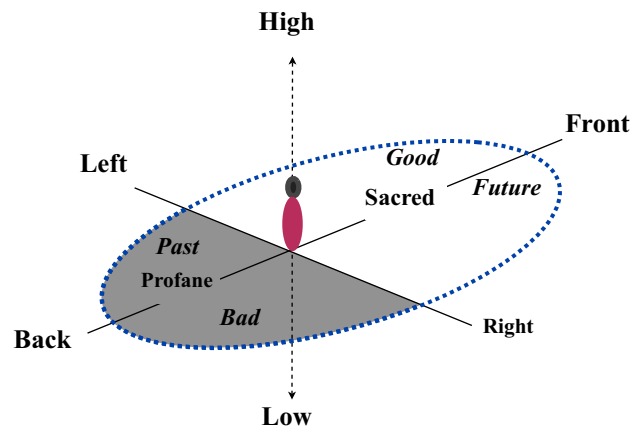


Figure 6 : Human body and constructed space
 (Adapted from Tuan, Y. F. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.
 Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.)

Human body is structured in favour of an upright position. Upright, man is ready to act. The space opens out before him and is immediately differentiable into front-back and right-left axes in conformity with the structure of his body. Vertical-horizontal, top-bottom, front-back and right-left are positions and coordination of the body that are extrapolated onto space.⁴³ The sacred space projected from the body is biased toward the front. The profane is behind or the back. The good thing is up and front while the bad is below and behind. The future is up and front while the past is below and behind.

⁴³ Ibid. p.35

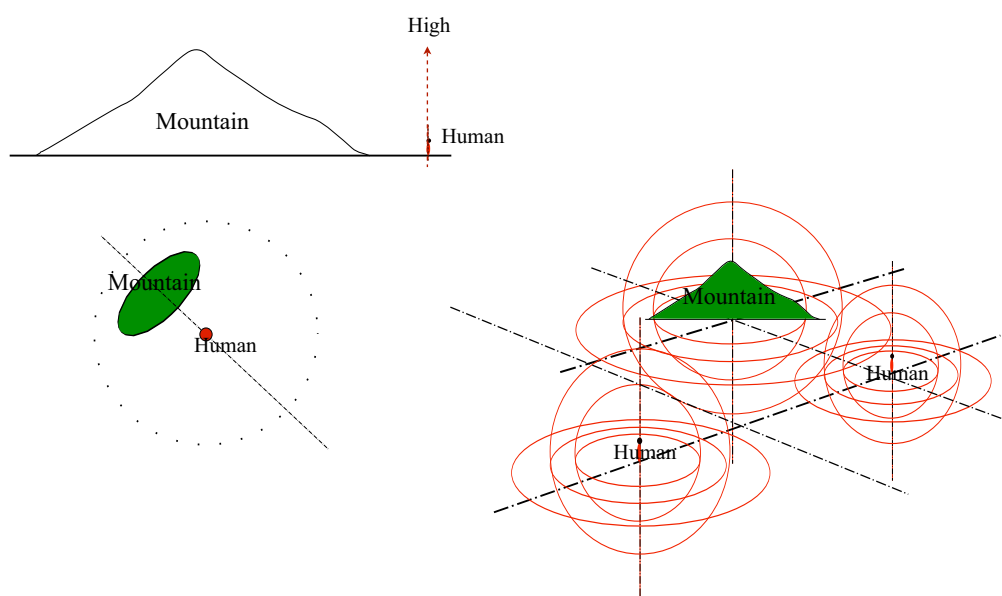


Figure 7 : Association between human perception and the mountain

In case of mountain, the mountain is the huge object amidst the flatlands. With its peak rising up to the sky, the mountain is deemed to represent the sacred place where the higher power reside.

The sacred mountain is the sacred space which represents spiritual experience; it is continuously replete with symbols, sacred centres and meaningful objects.⁴⁴ Here, experience of space, place and time that are different from our profane life. Its special quality could reveal the sacred phenomena to human experience.⁴⁵ The sacred mountain demonstrates the centre of the world – the point at which the three cosmic planes of heaven, earth, and hell are in contact and where communication between them is possible.⁴⁶

The structure of the sacred mountain space is existential⁴⁷ and mythical⁴⁸. Its existential space appearing as such creates unselfconscious patterns and structures of significance through the building of towns, villages, and houses, and the making of

⁴⁴ Relph, E., (1986). *Space and Place: Place and Placelessness*, London: Pion Limited. P.15

⁴⁵ Paritta Koanandakul, (2003). The Sacred World and the Secular World on Living in a Society, in *Chao Mae, Khun Phu, Chang Sor, Chang Forn and Other Stories about Rituals and Dramatic Performances* ed P. A. Koanandakul. Bangkok: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre. p.2

⁴⁶ Relph, E., 1986 *Space and Place: Place and Placelessness*, London: Pion Limited. P.16

⁴⁷ Ibid. P.12

⁴⁸ Yi Fu Tuan

in plan, the opposition of the sacred and the profane, and of the centre and the periphery.

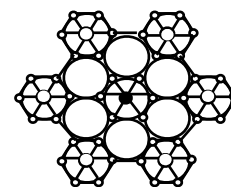
The ‘Mythical Space’ of the sacred mountain is an intellectual construct. It can be very elaborate. It is also a response of feelings and imagination to fundamental human needs. Mythical space is a conceptual extension of the familiar and workaday spaces given by direct experiences. It functions as a component in a world view or cosmology. The mythical space of the sacred mountain creates geographical myth. For instance, upper or the north is considered the sacred space, the middle is the human world, and below, the south or the base is deemed as hell. They are key elements in a complex system of beliefs that attempts to answer the questions of man’s place in nature or how human beings are related to the earth and the cosmos.



Mandala
(Figure from higherbalance.wordpress.com/.../)



Fengshui; Traditional Chinese world view
(Figure from absolutelyfengshui.com)



Spatial organization of lowland Classic Maya
(Figure from : Tuan, Y. F. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.)



Vastu Purusha Mandala; The energy grid with the energy body of the earth
(Figure from : Sashikala Anath. (1988). *The Penguin Guide to Vastu*. New Delhi : Penguin Books. p.92)



Lan Na (Northern Thailand) Zodiac
(Figure from : --, (2004). *The illustraes of Tripoom; in Lan Na and Khmer text*. Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department. Pic No. 88,89)

Figure 8 : Mythical conceptual spaces that origins to sacred space

The notion of mythical space might be relate to symbol or code or the knowledge about the origin of the earth, ocean and continents that the ancient natives created before developed into the cosmology. Human observe his surrounding natural environment and then create the mythical space. Natural environment have a direct impact to the mythical space of human in different area.⁴⁹ The mythical space of the mountainous highlander inspired from mountain, river, wind and stars such as the Maya cosmology, the Chinese fengshui, the Greek god and heros. At the low lying and the water front area such as India, Southeast Asia and East Asia, their mythical space concerned about mountain and water or land and ocean. Meanwhile, the water people such as Austronesia and Oceanic people created their mythical space from sea and sky.

The geography and its changing impact to sacred space, mythical space and cosmology in human notion. In India and Southeast Asia the notion about “Mountain as a sacred space” and the mythical space about mountain and water develop to the sacred cosmology that have sacred mountain situated as the sacred center. The cosmology that has mountain in the center encircled by alternated rings of oceans and continents might be formulated from mankind knowledge in the region with the sea alternating with land, in addition to land appearing and disappearing. So, it might be assume that, this cosmology is a sophisticated of mankind knowledge that represent as symbol though in a very abstract way⁵⁰.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

2.2.3 Mountain as a Sacred Symbol

Symbolism is the arts of saying something when there is nothing to be said. It is the study of the parts played in human affairs by languages and symbols of all kinds, and especially of their influences on thoughts. It is singled out for a special inquiry of the way in which symbols help us and hinder us in reflecting on things.⁵¹ This part will discuss the meanings of the mountain symbols and the ways in which they will be understood.

Symbols are instruments that stand for anything. The sacred mountain symbols have ‘meanings’ that inspire the sacred philosophies through observation of nature, appraising and interpreting it as a tectonic symbol. It has been used to assist the process of thinking and to record the wisdom of mankind.

⁴⁹ the idea was transpired from Sumet Jumsai. (1988). *Naga: Cultural Origins in Siam and the West Pacific*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.3-20

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ C.K.Ogden & I.A.Richards, 1985. *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and the Science of Symbolism*, London: Ark Paperbacks. P.9

To understand the meaning, the relation between ‘Thoughts’ and the ‘Symbol’ should be recognized. There are three interrelated factors involved whenever any statement is made, or understood. These factors are

- (a.) thought,
- (b.) symbol, and
- (c.) meaning.⁵²

In the case of the sacred mountain, the relations between a thought and a mountain symbol are causal. When we see the mountain symbol, we are compelled to perform an act of reference and to assume an attitude, which, according to circumstances, will be more or less similar to the act and the attitude of the creator⁵³ and our intellect.

The relations between the thought and the meaning are; (a.) direct when we see natural sacred mountain symbols, or (b.) indirect when we see the artificial mountains of the god (eg. Palaces and temples) in which case there may be a long chain of sign situations intervening between an object and its meaning: building – construction – function – artistic - style – belief – myth - referent (and it may also include cultures, politics, history, personal artistic styles, personifications, ... etc.).

Between the mountain symbol and the meaning there is also an indirect relation, which consists in its being used by someone to stand for the meaning and the primary step of human feelings when they see a natural mountain whose peak rises toward the sky. Humans view the mountain as the consecrated place.

The sacred mountain symbol has usage and emotive functions.

(a.) The usage function organizes and communicates references as well as conducts and organizes thoughts. It includes recording events and communicating fact⁵⁴ in place of the object. The sacred mountain symbol is perceived as a sign of the attitude of the creator to the receiver, as a sign of the sacred attitude to the meaning, as an instrument for the promotion of the purposes⁵⁵, and as a medium for laymen and the sacredness connection.

(b.) The emotive function occurs when the sacred mountain symbol has been used as an instrument for the promotion of purposes rather than as a mean of symbolizing references - we shall see how the intention of the creator may complicate the situation. The mountain symbol invites humans to attend and participate. It suggests that the perceiver is able to pass through this object to an encounter with the other world.⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid. p.10

⁵³ Ibid. p.10-11

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.8

⁵⁵ See Ibid. p.224

⁵⁶ Eliade, M., 1985. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, New York: Crossroad. P.xv

Worshiping the mountains or their artificial representations concerns thoughts and a symbolic adoration at the complex level. It is related to both the conceptual and the physical symbols that require a high level of intellect and wisdom for interpretation. However, the critical tension here is the interpretation without careful consideration. This will lead to wrong views and myths. For example, a villager hunted animals for their meat. Then he brought them up as farm animals and used them as a symbol of his group, family and ancestors. At this level, the respect is still directed at the ancestors, not the animals. However, as the use of symbolism grew steadily, the original idea about the symbols was gradually distorted. The animals were later perceived as sacred animals and eventually as deities or gods. Ancestral worshiping became animal worshiping.⁵⁷ This is a result of interpreting the symbols without true knowledge and careful consideration. The symbol becomes a hindrance to the right understanding of the symbol itself.

Since the mountain is the symbol of sacredness, it should always be understood as a link between the truths, but not as the end result. The interpretation of the mountain as a symbol should carry the true meaning that the mountain represents. Therefore, the symbol should be interpreted carefully with the right understanding in order to decipher the true meaning of that symbol.

2.2.4 Spatial dimensions of Sacred Mountain

The 'sacred' refers to a place and is being interpreted. The mountain is an instrument that stands for it. The mountain symbol has been used as the universal archetype to communicate thoughts, interpret sacred phenomena and occupy a peculiar place. It is capable of expressing the thoughts; the essential function of the symbol is precisely in disclosing the structures of the real inaccessible to empirical experience.⁵⁸ Certain characteristics shared by most sacred mountains around the world are;

(a.) The sacred mountains represent the fixed point or the centre. The structure of the sacred space is consistent and standardized. Man has always sought to fix his adobe at this point. (See figure 9 -A.)

⁵⁷ Smak, B., --. *The Intellects* , Bangkok: Raum San. P.90-91

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.4

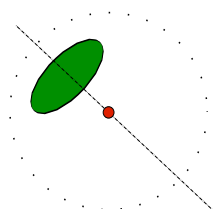


Figure 9-A

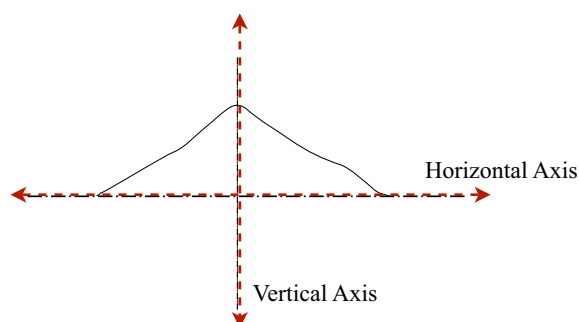


Figure 9-B

(b.) The fixed point creates the axis, or cosmic axis. And around this cosmic axis lies the world (our human world), hence the axis is located "in the middle, at the "navel of the earth"; it is the centre of the world. (See figure 9-B.) For instance, in a number of cultures we do in fact hear of such mountains, real or mythical, situated at the centre of the world such as Mount Meru in India, the Haraberezaiti in Iran, the mythical 'Mount of the Lands' in Mesopotamia and Mount Gerizim in Palestine which was called the navel of the earth.⁵⁹

(c.) The upper point of the axis usually constitutes the divine world while the lower point is perceived as the underworld or hell. Thus, it gives rise to the concept of the human world, heaven and hell. (See figure 9-C)

⁵⁹ Eliade, M., 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York A Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. P.38

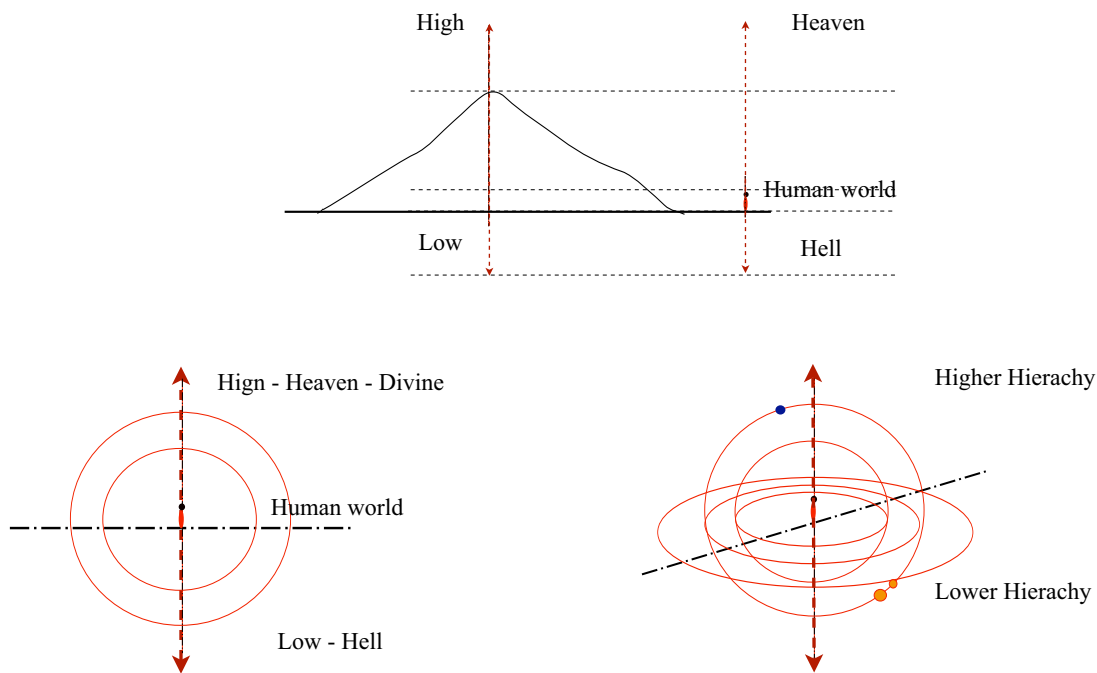


Figure 9-A,B,C

(d.) The vertical line on the axis opens a passage that links the three worlds. The sacred mountains make the communication between the three worlds possible. (See figure 9-C.)

(e.) The order of the world is created. The human world, the divine world and the underworld are arranged, with the axis remaining at the middle. (See figure 9-C.)

(f.) Later, the relation between the worlds is divided in vertical and horizontal axes. The system of this relation explains the association between humans and the whole world. When the mountain and the imaginary axis are brought in as a reference for everything, it helps humans understand their status and relationship with the surroundings. (See figure 9-D)

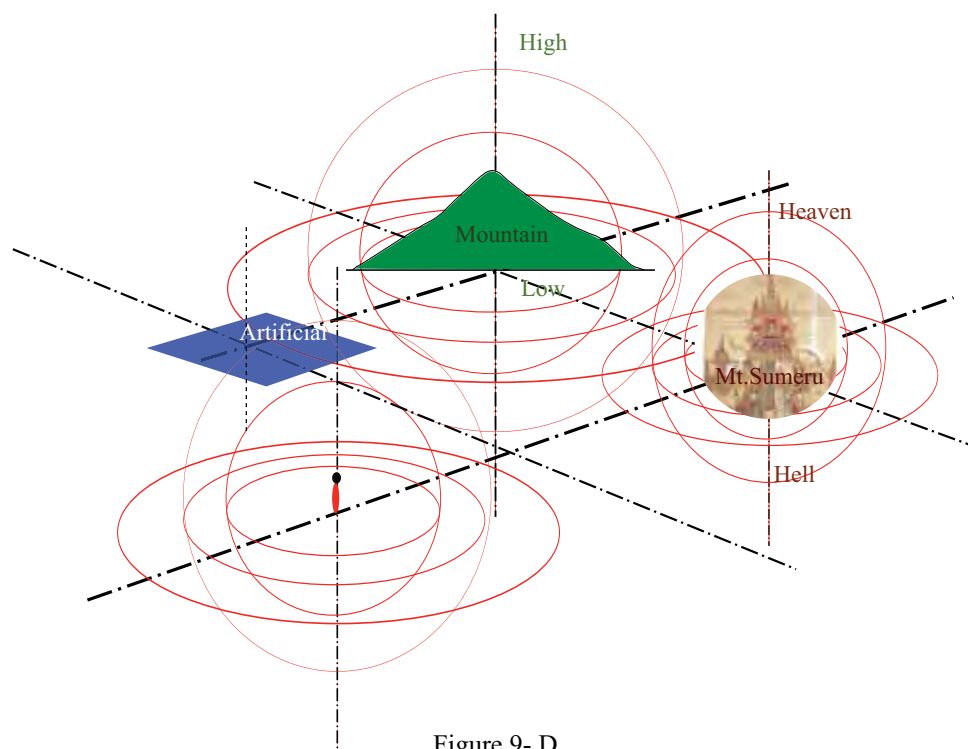


Figure 9- D

(g.) And when this space appears in the form of a sacred precinct such as a ceremonial house, a city and a world, we find the symbolism of the sacred mountains everywhere. Hence, the sacred mountain represents the microcosm in the macrocosm. (See figure 9-D)

2.3 Inspiration for the Image of Sacred Mountain

At the level of archaic societies, the sacred mountain is similar to all symbolism that is, or at least was, a religious symbolism. It reveals the modality of the real or the deep structure of the world. And in the spiritual horizon of primitive man, the real association between the sacred and the world is considered the creation of the Gods.⁶⁰

Humans tried to live in the presence of the sacred mountain because they desired an access to the ultimate reality and to the power of the sacred.⁶¹ However, man is not free to *choose* the sacred site. They have to seek for it and find it with the help of mysterious signs.⁶² A sign is asked, to put an end to the tension and the anxiety caused by the relativity and disorientation-in short, to reveal an absolute point of

⁶⁰ Eliade, M., 1985. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, New York: Crossroad. P.3

⁶¹ Eliade, M., 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York A Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. p.12

⁶² Ibid. p.28

support.⁶³ Since its peak is nearest to heaven, the mountain is viewed as representing the adobe of gods. This causes an evocation of the sacredness. Forms or figures of the mountains establish an orientation in the homogeneity of space.

The sacredness of mountains in general manifests itself in various ways.⁶⁴ Firstly, it is shown in its physical appearance - the high summit and the inaccessibility. Secondly, the mountains contain sacred sites or are associated with the lives and activities of important holy persons. Thirdly, mountains are known for their evocative beauty, commonly awaken in individuals a sense of wonder and awe that sets them apart as special places imbued with particular beauty and meaning.⁶⁵

Srisak Wallipodom in the book about the sacred mountain 'Geography and City Established' said that mountains are sacred in three ways. (a.) Natural sacred mountains generally have eminent shapes or natural phenomena. Examples are Mt Kilauea in Hawaii, Fujiyama Volcano and Sakurajima Volcano in Japan and Mount Agung in Bali, Indonesia. (b.) The mountain is a site of religious buildings, monuments, religious complex and historic structures such as Mount Athos in Greece. (c.) The mountain is a sacred cultural landscape such as the Everest region of Nepal, Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Australia and the Tai Shan range in China.

The sacred mountains were integrated into various myths and religious beliefs. In regions that have natural mountains, the highest peak, the strange form, or the uncontrollable natural phenomena are regarded as having a quality of a sacred mountain. In the plains and basin areas, manmade mountains or structures are built from the imagination to represent a sacred mountain.⁶⁶

2.3.1 Mountain as Sacred Medium

Semiology may be used to analyse the sacred mountains. It is a science of signs that attempts to explain a cycle of a sign in different stages from its origin, development, transformation, decline as well as extinction. Semiology studies a life cycle of a sign of a certain context.

Sign is made up to symbolically represent an object in a context of a text. It carries a meaning broader than what it appears and represents the reality. Sign can only be used in the context of a certain society but not the others, which may use other

⁶³ Ibid. p.27

⁶⁴ Myra Shackley. 2001. *Managing Sacred Site; Service Provision and Visitor Experience*, Continuum, London.

⁶⁵ UNESCO-MAB. (2006). *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*. Paris: UNESCO. p. 28

⁶⁶ Srisak Wanlipodom, (2000). Universal Concept of Sacred Mountain, in *Unorthodox Attitude: Geography and City Established* Bangkok Maung Boran.

signs. There are two components of a sign; namely, the signifier and the signified. In the case of a mountain, what we see as the mountain is a signifier while the mountain itself represents the reality that is greater and broader than what it appears physically.

In terms of a sacred mountain, the mountain itself may be considered as a symbol or a language⁶⁷ which, though conceptual, is nevertheless capable of expressing a coherent thought on existence and on the world.⁶⁸ which, though conceptual, is nevertheless capable of expressing a coherent thought on existence and on the world.⁶⁹ The sacred mountain contains the duality of its nature – the sacred power and the attitude, the intangible consecrated form and the tangible form, the meaning and the medium. This dissertation studies the key concept of the “Sacred Mountain” as the medium space where the power, being, or realm is understood by humans to be at the core of existence and to have a transformative effect on human lives and destinies.⁷⁰ This medium is created from the imagination of the intellectual creators who intend to materialise the concept of the sacredness. The sacred space is formed by the creators, who intend to pass down his ‘intuition’ to other people. Their goal is to bring people’s mind to experience the realisation by perceptions through wisdom and the right practice.

2.3.2 Creators as a Sacred Place Maker

The creators in this case are artists, architects, engineers, sculptors, poets, religious gurus or ones who create an aesthetic interpretation of reality, which allows the temporary suspension of the traditional sense of time and space. Their works are not simply to create things but to express the existential dimensions of the sacred world that manifest sacred phenomena that are grounded in and create an experience.

For the creators, the making of the sacred medium, whether they are in the arts, architecture, poems or the memorisation of the teachings, is a form of spiritual practice or meditation.⁷¹ They suspend the traditional perception of the sacred space by the act of "making," an act in which we share through participating in the environment of that

⁶⁷ See C.K.Ogden & I.A.Richards, 1985. *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and the Science of Symbolism*, London: Ark Paperbacks.

⁶⁸ Eliade, M., 1985. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, New York: Crossroad. p.3

⁶⁹ Eliade, M., 1985. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, New York: Crossroad. p.3

⁷⁰ Sacred. (2008). In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved October 01, 2008, from Encyclopedia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/515425/sacred>

⁷¹ Conclusion from the conversation with Ajan Somprasong Chaw-Na-Rai, artist and the creator of Wat Bhothikhun.

sacred work. During the moments of artistic creation, a creator fulfills the fundamental human instinct for transcendence.⁷²

In Eastern culture in the past, the names of the creators, architects, designers, founders of the holy places and sculptors were often not found. This is due to the belief that the sacred objects are not the work of these creators but, indeed, materialised through them from the sacred power. The creators with strong faith produced the objects with their intuition and self-less consciousness. Their duty is to create the sacred phenomena. The creator must have visions, an intuition, a communicative ability and a masterful skill in interpretation. The creator is only the person who makes the concept of the sacredness more accessible to others. The worlds of the creator merge - the personal, the aesthetic, the imaginative, the scholarly, and the spiritual. They translate their sacred experiences into concrete images.

2.3.3 The Creator's Interpretation of the Sacred to the Recipients Through the Sacred Mountain Symbol

There are two levels of interpretation concerning the *sacred mountain* symbol – the denotation and the connotation.⁷³ The sacred mountain is thus a meta-language that refers to something with another meaning. Therefore, it is necessary for the recipients to interpret the sacred object at two levels so that they can understand the message the creators are trying to convey. Since the object is created from an intuition, the sacred objects should be interpreted with the right understanding or cognitive knowledge with the experience of the intuition-based faith of the recipients as well.⁷⁴

2.3.4 The Recipient

To receive or read the codes of the symbols in sacred mountains, recipients should realise that the message that the sender intends to convey is not always specifically shown in an object created by the sender. Therefore, they should interpret both the object and the underlying context of the object in order to find the true meaning. Code is a highly intellectual form of a complex relationship between signs. This form is registered in our brain and mind and helps in acknowledging and interpreting different signs. And in a decoding process, the recipient and the sender do not necessarily carry the same codes. It is normal that the recipients misinterpret the

⁷² Eliade, M., 1985. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, New York: Crossroad. P.xi

⁷³ Barthes, R., 1990. *Mythologies*, New York: The Noonday Press. P.114 and italic by researcher

⁷⁴ Kirtikhacara, J., 2007. *Experiencing Angkor Vat : an Architectural Assessment*, Chiang Mai: Faculty of Architecture. P.36

message because they themselves also have a frame of reference that they use to create many codes.⁷⁵

To receive or read the sacred mountain, recipients can get through the individual inner sense or individual contemplation mind. It is a way to understand places through a natural tendency or intuition rather than from reasoning or observation. Ordinary human can attain sacred place through internal sense fields such as eyes, ears, nose, body and mind⁷⁶. These common sense fields are the internal factors. The external factors consist of (a) external sense-fields such as visible objects, sounds, smell, touch and mind-objects⁷⁷. Whenever the internal sense fields experience something, only one internal sense field can experience that object. Concentrate on one sense.

For example, when the eye sense field experiences an object, it causes an instance of 'seeing'. When the ear sense field experiences sounds, it causes an instance of 'hearing'⁷⁸. These particular experiences are called "consciousness"; it is a clear consciousness that experiences the object. Other external factors include (b) the Environment, (c) the physical conditions of a sacred architecture used as a medium and (d) the Interpreter. The last factor is uncontrollable factors such as individual intentions and habits. If all of these factors are happening in the right condition, it will help us gain a quality experience of sacred place.

However everyone is different and each one has own mind, in using the mountain symbol as a medium to communicate the message of the sacredness, there are four types of recipients, who are divided by their learning abilities;

- (1.) The high intellectual person: this group of recipients has the right views by their own. They have a high level of intellect and an ability to discern things and acquire the knowledge quickly.
- (2.) The intellectual person : this group of recipients has the right views by their own, they have a moderate level of intellect and an ability to learn things and acquire the knowledge gradually with some guidance.
- (3.) The less intellectual person : this group of recipients has the right views by their own, this group of recipients has a low level of intellect but possesses the qualities of perseverance and faith. They need a great deal of guidance and, with the help of their good qualities, will acquire the right knowledge in the future.
- (4.) The ignorant person : this group of recipients has the wrong views by their own,

⁷⁵ Holdcroft, D. (1991). *Saussure: Signs, System, and Arbitrariness*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. and Paul J. Thibault, (1997). *Re-Reading Saussure: The Dynamics of Signs in Social Life*, London: Routledge.

⁷⁶ Payutto , P. A., *Dictionary of Numerical Dhammas* , Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. P.202-203

⁷⁷ the tongue and taste are in sense-fields but more studies are needed.

⁷⁸ Payutto , P. A., *Dictionary of Numerical Dhammas*, Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. p.25

they is ignorant and devoid of faith and perseverance. Even when they have an opportunity to learn, they will not understand.

That means humans can be classified into two groups, according to their learning abilities; (a.) the intellects who can acquire the knowledge through their cognitive analysis⁷⁹and (b.) the majority who have a lower level of intellect and cannot acquire the knowledge without some assistance.⁸⁰

The sacred mountain is a medium that conveys the abstract meaning of the sacred to laymen, including the second groups of humans. It contains messages that will be sent through various levels of sub-instrumentation to people who have different levels of wisdom or knowledge. Through this medium, humans can understand the reality beyond what they experience through their senses. At the same time, while the sacred medium appeals to the enlightened persons, they become an object of doubt for humans who are still ignorant. Therefore, it depends on the wisdom of both the creators and the recipients.

2.4 Experiencing the Sacredness of the Mountain

The "mountain" symbol, like all symbols, is not just a creation of mind. Rather, it represents a distinct capacity within the mind to hold a distinct piece of information. However, it is worth looking into the issue of common cognitive symbol systems and finding out whether they could exist only within the individual mind or among other minds; whether any cognitive symbolism was defined by innate symbolism or by the influence of the environment around them.⁸¹

The relationships between sacred phenomena, space, mountain symbol and human perception--the fundamental trio of symbolism communication--are very complex. Creator conceptualizes his sacred experience, transforms sacred phenomena into symbolism, and the sacred symbol is produced. The information transmitted by the mountain symbol is perceived and translated by the recipient's intellect.

The recipient might comprehend the meaning of the sacred mountain symbol in three ways,

(a.) The mountain symbol is an empty signifier. In this way, the mountain is read or interpreted naturally with a clear mind as it is seen and understood without referring to any perception or referent.

⁷⁹ Cognitive learning process about perception, memory, introspection, imaginary

⁸⁰ Kirtikhacara, J., 2007. *Experiencing Angkor Vat : an Architectural Assessment*, Chiang Mai: Faculty of Architecture. P.35

⁸¹ "symbolism" Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbolism>"

(b.) The mountain symbol is a full signifier. In this case, the recipient distinguishes between the form of the mountain symbol and its meanings to uncover the real meaning.

(c.) The mountain symbol is a mythical signifier, which is interpreted as a complex of form and meanings. It is a dynamic pattern of reading that presents the structure of the symbol and helps translate semiotics into the analysis of ideology, thinking system and the way of thinking influenced by symbolism.⁸²

It might be complex, however, lies in each level of intellect. The production of the sacred mountain symbol could be affected by many factors that would result in different outcomes--such as the creator and recipient's view, perception, particular objectives, or different approach. All transformations from object to signs and from signs to the recipient's conception involve an interpretive process.⁸³

Experience means the knowledge or practical wisdom gained from what one has observed, encountered, or undergone.⁸⁴ It is a particular instance of personally encountering or undergoing something. It is the process or fact of personally observing, encountering, or undergoing something. In the philosophy field, experience is the totality of the cognitions given by perception; all that is perceived, understood, and remembered.⁸⁵ There are two types of Experience or the knowledge or practical wisdom which are the knowledge from thinking and the knowledge from intuition. Experience that human receive from sacred space is the intuitive knowledge or so-called spiritual experience. This experience comes to one so clear, so inviting, and so welcoming, like good hospitality. Our souls go deep into the sphere of the spirit.

Since ordinary people have a similar quality of sensory gates, it is believed that they are equally capable of experiencing the sacredness through their senses. Everyone can attain the sacred experience through their sense organs such as eyes, ears, nose, body (skin) and mind⁸⁶. These common sense doorways are the internal factors. The external factors directly related to the sacred experience include (a) objects of the sense doorways such as visible objects, sounds, smell, touch and mind-objects.⁸⁷ Each sense doorway is limited in what it can experience. For example, when the eye sense door experiences a visible object, it causes an instance of 'seeing'. When the ear sense

⁸² Barthes, R., 1990. *Mythologies*, New York: The Noonday Press.

⁸³ Thongchai, W. (1994). *Siam Mapped : A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

⁸⁴ *experience*. (n.d.). Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Retrieved June 11, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/experience>

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Payutto , P. A., *Dictionary of Numerical Dhammas* , Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. P. 202-203

⁸⁷ the tongue and taste are also parts of the sense-fields but more studies are needed.

door experiences sounds, it causes an instance of 'hearing'.⁸⁸ Each particular experience is called "consciousness"; it is a clear consciousness that experiences the object. Other external factors are (b) the environment, (c) the physical conditions of a sacred structure used as a medium and (d) the interpreter.

Individual intentions and intellect are the critical factors. If all of these factors happen in the right condition, it will help us gain a quality sacred experience.

The sacred experience involves the "manifestation of something of a wholly different order. It is a reality that does not belong to our world".⁸⁹The "experience of sacred space makes possible the "founding of the world": where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence.⁹⁰

The experience of sacred time will make it possible for religious man to periodically experience the cosmos as it was in principle, that is, at the mythical moment of creation.⁹¹

The sacred experience that results from experiencing the sacred mountain causes the cognitive process, involving perception, memory, introspection, imaginary and intuition; it is an instant moment of cognitive revelation without any reference or deduction.

Humans who understand the sacred mountain symbols not only "open" themselves to the objective world, but also succeed in leaving our unique condition and acceding to a comprehension of the universal. The initiate is defined as the one who contemplates the mountain symbol and understands its significance, or the one who hears the myth and perceives intuitively the unity of structure between humans and all the others. As we have already said, the mountain symbol makes a concrete object "explode" by disclosing dimensions which are not given in immediate experience. Likewise, the mountain symbol "explodes" a particular condition by revealing it as exemplary, i.e., indefinitely repeated in multiple and varied contexts. Consequently, to interpret the messages correctly is equivalent to gaining access to the sacred. To transform an individual experience by symbolism is equivalent to opening it to the spirit.⁹²

Chapter Summary

The sacred mountain is a medium that conveys the abstract meaning of the sacred to laymen who cannot acquire the sacred or the absolute truth without some

⁸⁹ Eliade, M., 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York A Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. P.11

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 63

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 65

⁹² Eliade, M., 1985. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, New York: Crossroad. P.13

assistance. Since its sacred nature, mountain is used as the symbol of sacred space in every culture around the world. As space, mountain is an abstract term for a complex set of ideas that interprets a position of a human and the relationship with the world. As the sacred symbol, worshiping the mountains or their artificial representations concerns thoughts and a symbolic adoration at the complex level. The mountain symbol contains messages that will be sent through various levels of sub-instrumentation which are natural, imaginary, and artificial. Through experience, these archetypical symbol help human to understand the sacred world that more elegantly than the familiar profane world and to realize one to be the same oneness with the whole nature.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

Chapter 3

Chronology of Mount Sumeru: Sacred Mountain in Thai Concept

Sacred Places in Thailand always focus on the sacred mountain named Mount Sumeru which is the key concept in every sacred space and place. It is also a significant foundation of social and cultural structure, as well as the core idea of Thai ideology, perceptions, knowledge, faiths and traditions. This chapter will explicate about sacred mountain in Thai context.

3.1 The Transfer of India's Sacred Mount Meru to Thailand's Mount Sumeru and the Belief of Sacred Mountain in Thailand

A belief about sacred mountain is the local belief on natural sacred mountain that is attached to the ghosts, the nature, the environment and the ancestors blended with the influence of Hindu Mount Meru and Buddhist Mount Sineru from India culture.

3.1.1 The Emerge of India's Sacred Mount Meru

A large number of summits in the Himalayas are named after the deities or served as a symbol of different beliefs such as the mountain range of the world guardians, the mountain range of worship, and the mountain range of fertility. People in India, Tibet, Nepal thought the Himalayas is a sacred mountain resided by many holy spirits and deities and this belief also emerge to China, Japan, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

Anthropologists use scientific findings to explain the origin of this belief resulting in continual movements of the earth near the Himalayas, which cause pressure between Little India (South Asia) and Eurasia. Because of the movements often trigger earthquakes and vibrations, people believe that it is a sacred place of spirits, angels and deities. These mythical gods were later personified.¹ They have

¹ A proof of the existence of god, who created and protected the world, refers to a discovery of pitch black stones scattering the Himalayas at 6,000 – 8,000 metres high. It is believed that they are drops of god's blood.

names, families, super natural powers, and characteristics. It becomes not only a mythology but also a theology that has been taught and passed on for generations²

This study assumed that the stories about the sacredness of the Himalayas are used by ancient people as a way to explain the relationship between the world and the universe. The knowledge about the world and the universe is likely to have existed before. The Himalayas³ were only used as a medium or a symbol to teach people to have a better understanding about the world and the universe.⁴ In semiotics, the use of the Himalayas as a symbol of the centre of the universe serves as a bridge that links the human world to the world of deities or between humans and gods. It is belief to locate at the center of the world and named Mount Meru. As a result, many high mountains in India are used as a symbol of the centre of the universe, including Mount Kailas, Mount Sagarmatha⁵ or Mount Chomolungma, Mount Gauri Shanker, Mount Annapurna, Mount Makalu and Mount Kangchenjunga. A number of mountains in other countries in Asia are also used as the symbol of sacred Mount Meru.

The idea about Mount Meru (or Sumeru or Sumeru) is derived from an ancient legend of Indo-Aryans whose identity can be traced back to ancient Indo-European Aryans. It is a story about how nature works and nature gods in particularly the Father of the Gods (Dyaus), the God of Sun (Suriya and Agni) and the Goddess of Dawn (Ushsa). At the beginning, these deities were simply natural phenomena. It shows an adaptation of an ideology to environment, or indigenous culture to local natural resources.⁶ This idea later became the foundation of Brahminism, which personifies natural phenomena as the acts of gods and goddesses.

Myth of Mount Meru in Puranas Scripture, an encyclopedia that is a collection of narratives of religion and history, are used as a medium to interpret the world and

² Pissnu Supa, (2007). *The Mystery of Himmapharn*, Bangkok : Amarin.

³ The origin of the cosmology in Asia may begin from a civilization around the Indus (Sindhu) River and the Mediterranean or the Mesopotamia because there was a trace of communication between Persians and Indians (around the Indus River) before the Aryan era. Hence, it is possible that the knowledge about cosmology in India may come from the Mesopotamia. However, the current study argues that the origin of cosmographic may indeed start in India. Another reason is that the Puranas Scripture (The Vedas text), which is a scripture of Brahminism practiced by the Aryans, existed before the emigration of the Aryans to India. Aryan arrived in India between 2000 and 1000 B.C.

⁴ Most ancient people believed that the Himalayas created an idea about the universe. They believed that the Himalayas is the centre of the world and the universe surrounded by other things. Humans used this concept to explain the events in the world.

⁵ Or Everest Summit, Chomolungma in Tibetan

⁶ Friedrich Max Muller, (2004). *Essay on Comparative Mythology (1856) in The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller*: Edited by His Wife. Volume 2, Boston: Adamant Media Corporation. p.175

the universe⁷, life⁸ and the celestial beings and gods⁹ in the part of Sarga – The creation of the universe, Pratisarga - Secondary creations, mostly re-creations after dissolution and Vamsa - Genealogy of gods and sages.¹⁰ Narratives of Mount Meru are often related to a sacred center regarded the prototype for sacred cities, temples and iconographies. It has been widely associated with Hindu and Buddhist art, literature, and legends.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร ส่วนวนิลขสิทธิ์

⁷ The myth of the origin of the universe (Cosmogony) and creation, the myth of the end of the world (Eschatology), the myth of Messianic and Millenarian and the myth of Time and Eternity. For example several myth are comprised of 4 Yugas (1.) Krita (Satya) Yuga, (2.)Treta Yuga, (3.) Dvapara Yuga and (4.) Kali Yuga)that last 4,320,000 years. After that, the concept about the cycle of the world became more complex and evolved into the cycle of time that alternates between the creation of the world and the end of the world.

⁸ The myth of rebirth and renewal is a concept about the cycle of the world, and nature and human beings. It refers to the reincarnation of everything in the universe like the change of the seasons or the change between day and night. It results from a transition between each cosmic cycle. This transition creates Initiation Ceremony or social transition ceremonies, such as hair-topknot-cutting ceremony for children (Khon Chuk Ceremony), cremation ceremony, coronation ceremony and other ceremonies that always take place at a certain time like New Year Ceremony and annual festivals.

⁹ Celestial beings and gods, which were initially worshiped as natural phenomena, were later personified. They became deities or highly spirit beings with unstable or multiple forms and deities with animal figures.

¹⁰ Puranas Scripture consisting of “Pancha Lakshana” or 5 subjects which are

- The creation of the universe (Sarga),
- Secondary creations, mostly re-creations after dissolution (Pratisarga),
- Genealogy of gods and sages (Vamsa),
- The creation of the human race and the first human beings (14 Manus who rule the world or Manvañtara), and
- Dynastic histories (Vamsanucaritam)

These narratives originate in ancient India and appear in the first Indian dictionary under “Amaragosa”, believed to be written during 550-750 AD

See Kussalasai Karuna & K. Ruang-U-Rai, (1994). *Parata Vichaya*, Bangkok: Siam. P. 179, 189.



Figure 10 : Mount Kailash, Kailash Range
(Figure from www.jyotirlinga.com/Amarnath_files/image023.jpg)



Figure 11 : India Architecture in the Mountain Form
(Figure by Waranan Sowannee)



Figure 12 : India decorative ornament which are inspired from sacred mountain belief.
(Figure by Waranan Sowannee)

The origin myth of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism religion speak of Kailash as the mythical Mount Meru, the axis mundi, the center and birthplace of the entire world. Indeed, Kailash is so deeply embedded in Asian mythology that it was perhaps a sacred place of another era, another civilization¹¹ as see in arts, literatures, and legends around asia particularly in India and Southeast Asia.

¹¹ Martin, G. (2007). *Sacred Earth; Places of Peace and Power*. New York: Sterling. p.193

3.1.2 South East Asia Mountain Worshiping

Religious evidence about mountain worshipping and sacred stones in ancient culture in Southeast Asia before the advent of Hinduism and Buddhism shows that there was a construction of a large stone monument as a symbol of some ceremony. For example, stone monuments of human figures and the Lingam are found in Malaysia in the State of Negeri Sembilan and northeastern part of Thailand. There is also evidence of superstition, ancestor and deity worshipping, spirit shrines on the mountains and legends about the two parallel worlds, such as a mountain and sea, birds and aquatic animals and a mountain man and a sea man.¹²

When Southeast Asia acquired Indian culture, it was likely to have been made through Brahmans and trades between kingdoms for two areas. Foreign cultures introduced to Southeast Asia are mostly about royalty, religious ceremonies, and coronation. Some Indian cultures embraced in Southeast Asia are Hinduism or Buddhism influenced monarchical forms of government, royal traditions, rules about an order of royal succession, the caste system, Code and Hindu law and Sanskrit language¹³ including the belief of sacred Meru Mountain.

Local people applied Indian culture to fit with their culture or blended with their own customs, whether they were derived from the origin¹⁴. Therefore, the social structure of local people in Southeast Asia was not dramatically changed by Indian cultural influence. For example, the caste system of Hinduism had little influence on local culture. Local people were able to maintain their ways of life because they were not “primitive” but moderately civilized.¹⁵ Indian influences were only seen as a cultural fertilizer that drove local culture to the top.

Ancient culture in Southeast Asia are often associated with the idealism about Mount Meru which also adapted in with their environment. Several mountains in this region are usually referred to as a symbol of this mythical mountain, including Mount Agung in Bali, Mount Semeru and Mount Merapi in Java, Indonesia, and Phu Kao in Lao. In the ancient kingdoms of Southeast Asia, the Funan also has a sacred mountain in Ba Phnom. Nearby in the Amravati principality of Champa Kingdom, the prominent Phu Khao Rung Maew is considered a holy mountain with a strategic location. In addition, people of Champa built a number of religious monuments that symbolise a mountain. For example, Myson in the old Panduranga state principality was built to relate to the large mountain, called ‘Linga Banpot’, whose protruding summit resembles a Linga - an emblem of generative power in Hinduism.

Some civilizations constructed a shrine on a mountaintop called ‘Phu Khao Viharn’ in order to enshrine sacred statues as a symbol of the divinity in the mountain.

¹² H.R. Van Heekeren, Bronze Keteltrommen and G.Coedes Les Etats Hindouises d’Indochine et d’Indonesie cited in Hall, D. G. E., 2006. *A History of South-East Asia*, Bangkok Toyota Foundation.p.9.

¹³ G.Coedes Les Etats Hindouises d’Indochine et d’Indonesie cited in Ibid.p.20.

¹⁴ Ibid.p.4.

¹⁵ George Coedes, Les Etats Hindouises d’Indochine et d’Indonesie cited in Ibid.p.4.

This is evident in a number of religious shrines in Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia, including Phnom Bakeng Temple, the Temple of Preah Vihear, Phnom Rung Temple and the Borobudur Temple, which is also the centre of the city. On the contrary, there were many religious complexes that were not built on the mountains but used the layout of the sacred mountain in their design. Stupas in Thailand and stone monuments in Cambodia are good examples in this case.

It should also be noted that much of the governmental system in Southeast Asia is based on the belief about the sacred mountain. Kings of several kingdom were believed to be an incarnation of God Shiva, who is the chief god of mountains. For instance, people in Funan held an inauguration ceremony of the Linga to pay respect to the ‘mountain god’ while ancient Javanese in Java Island, Indonesia, worshiped ‘Sailendra’ or the Lord of the Mountain. In Thailand, people believed that the kings are an incarnation of God Indra, who inhabits in Tavatimsa Heaven¹⁶ on the peak of Mount Sumeru.

3.1.3 The Impression of Sacred Mount Sumeru in Thailand

During the early period of Thai society, the belief on sacred mountain is attached to the ghosts, the nature, the environment and the ancestors such as the legendary histories of Doi Luang Chiang Dao, Doi Suthep, and Doi Kham in northern Thailand. After local people who settling in the Thai kingdom were influenced by Indian culture, particularly Buddhism, they were arrange themselves as Buddhist society which associated with India. The belief on local sacred mountain was blended with the Myth of Mount Meru and adjusted to Myth of Thai sacred mountain named Mount Sumeru which is different to the original myth of Mount Meru from India and the other areas that also got the influence from India culture.

Concisely, a belief about sacred mountain in Thailand comprise three belief which as (1.) the local belief, (2.) India’s Mount Meru Myth, (3.) belief of Mount Sumeru in Tai and Thai thought. The belief about sacred mountain has been passed on from a primitive society to a period when humans started to establish a state or a kingdom. This is a significant period for the foundation of Thai social and cultural structure, as well as the core idea of Thai ideology, perceptions, knowledge, faiths and traditions.

The belief about Mount Sumeru of Thai and Tai people began since the early period of Thai society with the myth about the originally is attached to “Ghost”, nature and ancestors. Some Tai group, such as “Tai A-Hom”, developed this idea to apply to an outlook on the universe. Other Tai groups settling in the Thai kingdom were influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, which were seen as the Great Tradition or the

¹⁶ Tavatimsa Heaven ; or Dao-wa-dung (ดาวดึงส์) in Thai, is an important world of devas in Buddhist cosmology. It is primarily the name of the second heaven in Buddhist cosmology, and secondarily used of devas who dwell there.

Official Tradition. Subsequently, this belief emerged in small communities and was later developed into a state level. Some Tai groups positioned themselves as a Buddhist society that has connection with India and Sri Lanka. They embraced and passed on Indian and Sri Lankan ancient ideologies, including the myth about Mount Sumeru, as their own.

For example, in an ancient religious text of Tai A-Hom group, there was a reference to a sacred mountain named “Gone Pha Puak Hua Muang” (ก้อนผาเผือกหัวเมือง). It was variously described as a White Mountain in the north of the world that bridges the sky and the earth; “Pha Puak, Pha Luang and Pha Kum” (ผาเผือก, ผาหลวง และ ผาคำ); a belief about a mountain king who served as a liaison between the sky (celestial beings) and the earth (people in the kingdom)¹⁷. It also referred to a belief about an auspicious location of a sacred city that requires a co-existence of a mountain and a waterway. As for Tai Dam group, a mountain near the city was considered an ancestral cemetery. For Shan or Tai Yai group in Shan State, Mount Sumeru was known as “Doi Sao Muang” (ดอยเสาเมือง). Additionally, the Tai Neau group called Mount Sumeru as “Doi Gor Fa” (ดอยก่อฟ้า).¹⁸

After developed into Buddhist state, Mount Sumeru is referred in some ancient Buddhist scriptures that are respected in Thailand. For instance Phra Sarata Sangkaha (พระสารัตถสังคหะ), Loku Pati (โลกุปัตติ), Lok Banyad (โลกบัญญัติ)¹⁹, Loka Tipakasan (โลกที่ปกสาร), Chakrawala Tipani (จักรวาลทิปนี)²⁰, ArunaWadee Sutta (อรุณวดีสูตร)²¹, Sattasuriya Sutta (สัตตสุริยสูตร)²², an exegesis of Sattasuriya Sutta (อรรถกถาสัตตสุริยสูตร)²³, and an exegesis of Nemiracha Jataka (อรรถกถาเนมิราช)²⁴. All scriptures describe Mount Sumeru as a sacred mountain at the center of the complete physical metaphysical and spiritual universes.

¹⁷ See Rni Lertleamsai, (2001). *Fah - Kwan - Muang : Tai Traditional cosmology, Study from Tai A-Hom' Scriptures*, Bangkok: Vi-Thi-Tat. p.123-126.

¹⁸ See Ibid. p. 153.

¹⁹ PhraSatthaThamKosaDera(พระสังฆธรรมโฆษณเถระ), (1985). Lok Banyad (โลกบัญญัติ) Bangkok: The National Library.

²⁰ PhraSiriMankalajara (พระสิริมังคลาจารย์), (2005). Chakrawala Tipani (จักรวาลทิปนี) , Bangkok: The National Library, The Fine Art Department.

²¹ Kawi Sangmani, ArunaWadee Sutta: Re-inspect and Analysis Study, p. 155-156 Cited in Niyada, L., 1995. *Traibhumpharuang: The References Study*, Bangkok : Mea Kam Pang.p.102. , TheFineArtDepartment, (1990)., Lohku Pati , ArunaWadee Sutta, Pathom Mul, Pathom Kab and Multantri (โลกุปัตติ อรุณวดีสูตร ปฐมมูล ปฐมกัม และมูลตันไตรง), Bangkok: The National Library., and Mala, K., 2005. *Lanna' Worldview through ArunaWadee Sutta'*. Bangkok: Pinganathee .

²² The Translated of Phra Sutta and Exegesis, Ang Kuchtura Nikaya, Sattaka-Atthaka-Navaka Nibat, Sattasuriya Sutta (พระสูตรและอรรถกถาแปล อังคุตตรนิกาย สัตตก-อัฐก-นวกนิบาต, สัตตสุริยสูตร), p. 214-219. cited in Niyada, L., 1995. *Traibhumpharuang: The References Study*, Bangkok Mea Kam Pang . p.102.

²³ The Translated of Phra Sutta and Exegesis, Manoroj Puranee, Atthakatha Ang Kuchtura Nikaya, Satta Nikaya and the exegesis of Sattasuriya Sutta (พระสูตรและอรรถกถาแปล, มโนรปุรณิ อรรถกถาอังคุตตรนิกาย สัตตกนิกาย, อรรถกถาสุริยสูตร), p. 219-222.cited in Ibid. p.102.

²⁴ Prachaow Worawongter Kromluang Chinawornsiriwat Somdet Phrasangarajchaow (พระเจ้าวรวงศ์เธอ กรมหลวงชินวราวุฒินมเด็จพระสังฆราชเจ้า) (translate), Mahanibat Chadok Totsachat - Chinaworn Version (มหานิบาตชาติทศชาติ - ฉบับชินวรา), Book 1 Nemiraj Chadok (เนมิราชชาติ) 4th , p. 154-155. Cited in Ibid. p.102.

Additionally, the idea about Mount Sumeru in Thailand is believed to come from Tripikata or Traibhumikatha (ไตรภูมิภคคา) or locally known as Tri Phum Phra Ruang (ไตรภูมิพระร่วง). It was believed to be written in 1345 AD. by King Lithai (พระยาสิทธิไชย) of Phra Ruang (พระร่วง)²⁵ Dynasty who ruled Sukhothai Kingdom from 1347 to 1376 AD. However, it was later found that there was a reference to Mount Sumeru and the myth of the origin in other documents and ancient Buddhist scriptures. These documents are reference texts used by King Lithai when he wrote Tri Phum Phra Ruang. Therefore, it can be concluded that the belief about Mount Sumeru had existed²⁶ in Thai society along with the belief about the world, hells, heavens and Nirvana²⁷ (or Nibbana, นิพพาน), which might be known before Tri Phum Phra Ruang was written.²⁸

The emergence of the notion of the sacred Mountain is the result of the social interaction between the Siamese kingdom and foreign cultures, particularly the adoption of Hinduism and Buddhism. It brings about changes by the (a.) assimilation (b.) adaptation and (c.) adoption. These shape the development of Thai culture and society.²⁹

3.1.4 Mount Sumeru and Traibhumikatha or Tri Phum Phra Ruang

In Thailand, the notion about Mount Sumeru is believed to come from Tribhumikatha. Tribhumikatha or Traibhum or Tri Phum Phra Ruang which is perhaps the first book of Siamese. It was written in 1345 AD by King Lithai of Phra Ruang Dynasty who ruled Sukhothai Kingdom between 1346 and 1374. It aimed to teach people about morality and encourage them to conform to Buddhist ethics. It is a

²⁵ Tribhum Phra Ruang or Tribhumikatha is a Buddhist literature written by King Lithai of Phra Ruang Dynasty of Sukhothai Kingdom (It is worth noting that Sukhothai was ruled by six kings from Phra Ruang Dynasty.) King Lithai or Phra Mahathammara I authored this manuscript when he was the heir and governor of Srisatchanalai City. Tribhum Phra Ruang differs from other pieces of Tribhum literature like Tribhum Lakkawinichai, which is written in later period by Phraya Thammapreecha during the reign of King Rama I. Many stories in this literature are inspired by Tribhumikatha. see (1992). Triphoom Lokvinicaikatha ed. Phraya Thammaphecha, Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department.

²⁶ In Tai language, words that mean Mount Sumeru and the belief about Mount Sumeru are; Pha Luang (mentioned during a royal ceremony in the early period of Ayutthaya Kingdom) refers to Mount Sumeru; Chao Pha Luang refers to God Shiva; Pha Sam Sao refers to Trikood Mountain (the Three-Peak Mountain); Pha Dum refers to KalaKood Mountain (the Black Mountain); Pha Puak refers to Mount Kailasa (the White-Silver Mountain); Pha Hom refers to Mount Kantthamat (the Perfume Mountain); Ruen Indra refers to Wiman Phaichayon (a residence of Indra God); Fachara Rang Hok Klong refers to Chakama Pajorn Heaven (Six planes of heavens); Si Puang Phee refers to Thao Chatu Lokabal (the Guardian of the four continents); Khun Hong Thong Khao Si refers to Brahma God (Brahma God riding the Swan); snake and mermaid refers to Naga; Wua Puak (white Ox) refers to Ko Nonthi (a vehicle of God Shiva) see detail in Jitra, B., 2004. *Ong Karn Chang Nam and New perspective about Thai (Cha Phra Ya Basin) History*, Bangkok: Fah Deaw Kan. p.48

²⁷ A transcendent state in which there is neither suffering, desire, nor sense of self, and the subject is released from the effects of karma and samsara. It represents the final goal of Buddhism.

²⁸ PhraRajworamunee(พระราชวรมุนี), 1983. *The Influence of Triphoom Phra Ruang to Thai Social*, Bangkok: Thammasart University. p.44, p.40-51.

²⁹ Transpired from Jitra Phumisak, (2004). *Ong Karn Chang Nam and New perspective about Thai (Cha Phra Ya Basin) History*, Bangkok: Fah Deaw Kan.

guideline for social conducts, wisdom and the governmental system. It was believed that the power of Buddhism will bring peace and stability to the kingdom.³⁰ The concept about Mount Sumeru in Tribhumikatha demonstrates the desire of human beings to know where they are in the universe.³¹

Traibhumikatha devoted to Mount Sumeru in the second chapter that supposed about 'The Mountain and the Oceans of Book Nine, The Book of Nature.'³² It describes the configuration, figure and dimension of Mount Sumeru.

Even though there is only one chapter (Chapter 2: 'The Mountain and the Oceans of Book Nine, The Book of Nature'³³) in the Tribhumikatha that is describe about Mount Sumeru, almost all of the stories in the scripture use this holy mountain as a vital point of reference in the cosmology in explaining the arrangement of the various worlds within the universe, how those worlds come into existence, how they pass away as well as the animal kingdom and the celestial bodies. By referring to Mount Sumeru as the centre of the universe, it helps humans to clearly understand their status and relationship with other beings in the universe.³⁴ King Lithai specifically elaborated on Tribhum or the Three Worlds³⁵ in order to show that the ideal world could be achieved when its citizens behaved ethically.

The principle of Mount Sumeru embodies the people's paradigm. It is in fact a strikingly social work in many ways both religious and political philosophy as well as righteousness, justice, loving kindness, compassion and other virtues all should share in the social.

³⁰ Tribhumikatha is not written for aesthetic reasons like classic literature. Indeed it serves as a holy scripture 'Phra Katatham' that helps spread the ideas about Buddhism and as a law that governs the kingdom. By using the power of religious faith and Buddhist morals, it brings peace to the society. See Pissnu Suppanimitr , (2007). *The Mystery of Himmaparn*, Bangkok: Amarin.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Lithai, K., (1890-1919). Traibhumikatha, in *Traibhumikatha : the story of the three planes of existence* ed. t. T. N. T. f. A. o. A. Literatures Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group.P.374-378

³³ Ibid.P.374-378

³⁴ See Ibid. Chapter Four; The Garuda of Book Two; The Animal Kingdom p.85, p.115 --- Chapter Two; The Land of Demon of Book Four; The Domain of Asura p.137 --- Chapter Four; The Delivery of part one; Childbirth in Book five; Humanity p.141,143 --- Chapter Two; The Race of Man in part two; the Four Quarters of the World of Book five; Humanity p.177 --- Chapter Four ; A Grand Conquest in Part Three; The Universal King of Book five; Humanity p.203 --- Chapter Eight; The Noblest of Elephants in Part Three; The Universal King of Book five; Humanity p.307,309, 317, 327--- Chapter Two; Tayatimsa Heaven of Book Six; Lesser God and Angels p. 369 --- Chapter Two; The Six-Colored Halo of Book Eight; Incorporeality p. 381, 383, 385, 391 --- Chapter Three, The Celestial Bodies, p.389 Chapter Four; The Season and The Month, and p.393 --- Chapter Five; Day and Night p.413 --- Chapter One; The Destructive Forces, Chapter two; The End of the World, p.419, Chapter Three; The Great Fire and p.421 in part one; The Destruction of Book Ten; The Book of Ages p.429 --- Chapter one; The Great Wind and Chapter two; A New World, and p.433 in part two; A New Universe of Book of Book Ten; The Book of Ages p.447 --- Chapter one; The Treasure of Nibbana, and p. 455 --- Chapter three; The Methods of Gaining Nibbana of Book Eleven; Nibbana

³⁵ See the beginning of Ibid.

3.2 Sacred Mount Sumeru and Thai Sacred Culture

People in general often think that “Thai sacred culture” is related to Buddhism. It is probably because the majority of Thai populations are Buddhists. This also includes the concept of Mount Sumeru, which is understood to be a part of Buddhism. According to the study, the Thai sacred culture is actually derived from a combination of local beliefs. Buddhism was later linked to these beliefs until it became the centre of the sacred culture in Thailand. Thai Buddhism is different from the original concept of Buddhism and Buddhism practiced in other countries. It was influenced by the principle of Mount Sumeru. It results in the emergence of Thai sacred culture, which, in this case, will be called “Thai Buddhist culture”. This part will clarify characteristics of Thai Buddhism and the principle of Mount Sumeru in Thai sacred culture.

Thai Buddhism

Buddhism in Thai society differs from the ideal concept of Buddhism, which mainly concerns the teachings about the reality (Dhamma) aimed at eradicating all defilements and the freedom of Samsara or the endless cycle of sufferings. Even though Thai Buddhists in general accept the ideal concept of Buddhism, their practice is totally contradictory. Indeed, Thai Buddhism is incorporated in magico-animism and appears to be more preoccupied with the ceremonial side.

“Thai Buddhism” focuses on the guidelines for daily life of people for the development of right views. It is closely related to daily routines of people in families and communities concerned in an attempt to encourage them to live their lives according to Buddhist teachings,³⁶ rather than study the core teachings or Dhamma. There are three levels of Thai Buddhism.

High level – Buddhist monks and laymen who study Buddha’s teachings extensively

General level – Buddhist laymen who have some knowledge about Buddhism and practice Buddhist teachings in daily life occasionally (e.g. praying and visiting the temples)

Local level – Syncretistic Buddhism practiced by laymen who tend to have animist worldviews and lean towards superstitious beliefs.

³⁶ Nithi, E. (2001). *Buddism in Thai Social Change*. Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation. p.112



Figure 13 : Buddhist Thais' behaviours

Thai Buddhism can be defined as a form of “Super Naturalism”, which is a condition or a quality of existence outside the known experience of man or caused by forces beyond those of nature.³⁷ Thai Buddhism has been blended with animism and superstition, which give an inanimate object or abstract idea human traits and qualities as an explanation to create the relationship of Buddhist teachings, superstitious beliefs, ghosts, and Deva.

³⁷ --, (2003). Supernaturalism, in The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language --: Houghton Mifflin Company. .

Thai Buddhism has individual and social dimensions.³⁸For individuals, it is intended to encourage people to be mindful of their ways of living and try to develop Buddhist wisdom, based on their capability, in order to achieve the supramandane state of mind and be free from Samsara or attain nirvana. When people have right views about the reality and are mindful of their thinking and actions, they can understand the interconnectedness of all matters, leading to the goal of Thai Buddhism – a peaceful society.

At social dimension, Thai Buddhism serves to lay out the social relationship and the structure of the surroundings that are suitable to people to develop Buddhist wisdom.³⁹This type of surroundings helps to make people aware of their consciousness, the environment and the nature of sufferings in Samsara. People will learn to realise that everything is interconnected and they are all simply a microcosm within a macrocosm. With that perspective in mind, people will behave in a way that is agreeable to the system of oneness, have compassion towards other people and help each other.^{40,41}

บทวิทยานิพนธ์ปริญญาโท สาขาวิชาศึกษาศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ

³⁸ Many western academics comment that Buddhism lacks social dimension but focuses on the achievement of individuals, for example; M.Webber.

See more detail about this topic in Webber, M. (1958). *Religion of India : The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* New York: The Free Press. p.206, 213.,

Bardwell, L. S. (1972). Sinhalese Buddhism and the Dilemmas of Reinterpretation. In Smith (Ed.), *The Two Wheels of Dhamma : Essays on the Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon*. Pennsylvania: American Academy of Religion. p. 106. ,

Richard, G. (1988). *Theravada Buddhism : A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. London Routledge & Kegan Paul. p. 30., and

Winston, L. K. (1995). "Judeo-Christian and Buddhist Justice,". *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2(75).

However, there is a new perception about the relationship between Buddhism and society. It argues that Buddhist teachings can help to solve social problems such as the Engaged Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh or Buddadasa Bhiku.

See --. (2009). Engaged Buddhism. Retrieved 19 March, 2009, from <http://www.naropa.edu/>

Bernard Glassman, Harvard Divinity School lecture (January 20, 1997) Cited in Christopher, S. Q. (2000)., *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Boston: : Wisdom Publications. p. 7.,

Christopher, S. Q. (2000). *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Boston: : Wisdom Publications. p. 1, 5, 6-7, 36, 40.,

DalaiLama. (1996). Cultivating Altruism In K. Arnold (Ed.), *Engaged Buddhist Reader*. Berkeley Parallax Press.p. 3-4.,

Kenneth, K. (1996). "Engaged Buddhism " In K. Arnold (Ed.), *Engaged Buddhist Reader*. Berkeley Parallax Press. p. 66. and

ThichNhatHanh. (1993). *Call Me By My True Names* Berkeley: Parallax Press.p.19.

This perception is not new in Thai society. Actually, it has existed in Thailand for centuries and has been adapted, at different periods, to changed conditions in society. Owing to the paradigm shift from the sacred to the secular, however, Buddhism is no longer able to offer satisfactory solutions to people in modern society.

³⁹ Pra Maha Somboon Wuttikaro. (2008). Concepts and the Movement of Socially Engaged Buddhism. *Midnight University* (1355).

⁴⁰ Payutto , P. A. (2002). Listen to Dharma. Nakorn Patom: Wat Nyanavesakawan.

⁴¹ Thai scholars who interpret Buddhism in sociology dimension are Buddadasa Bhiku (พุทธทาสภิกขุ), P.A. Pyutto (พระธรรมปิฎก ป.อ.ปยุตฺโต), Phra Paisan Visalo (พระไพศาล วิสาโล) and Dr.Pravet Vasi (นพ.ประเวศ วะสี).

Sacred Mountain and Thai Paradigm

Paradigm is a collection of rationalized practices that organize thoughts by applying different methodologies, including classification, integration and the management of relationship between different beliefs. A social paradigm during a particular period that gives meanings or explanations acceptable to a society...⁴² whenever the paradigm fails to explain the events in the new context, the paradigm shift will occur. It is the centerpiece of the principle. It can also be a rational system that explains values and gives meaning to an ideology of the way people in a the society live – a society that has been built and accumulated to reflect an attempt to express the spirituality of human beings and their adjustments to the relationship between the society and the nature under the conditions and the context during that time.⁴³

Thai people perceive that Thai paradigm is influenced by Buddhism. The teachings in Buddhism are used to explain every aspect of Thai society such as the philosophy of Thai political system, social relationship, architecture and literature as if the behaviours (actions, emotions, thoughts, feelings etc.) of Thai people in the past were completely dominated by Buddhist thinking .⁴⁴ However, the researcher suggests that Buddhism is not likely to represent every aspect of the thinking system of Thai society as Nithi Eawsriwongse said, “It is true that religion is important, however, religion cannot control human behaviours on every breath...the explanation that the thinking system of a society originates from the teachings of a main religion of that society is a very doubtful explanation.”⁴⁵

⁴² Anan Ganchanapan. (2006). *Thais' Order of Thought* . In G. Anan (Ed.), *Thais' Order of Thought: Concept and Methodologies*. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund. P.5

⁴³ Ibid. P.2

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.2

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.4

Elements of Thai Paradigm

Thai society is a combination of two sub-paradigms; which are ‘the Sacred’ and ‘the Profane’. They are inseparable in Thai society. (See Diagram)

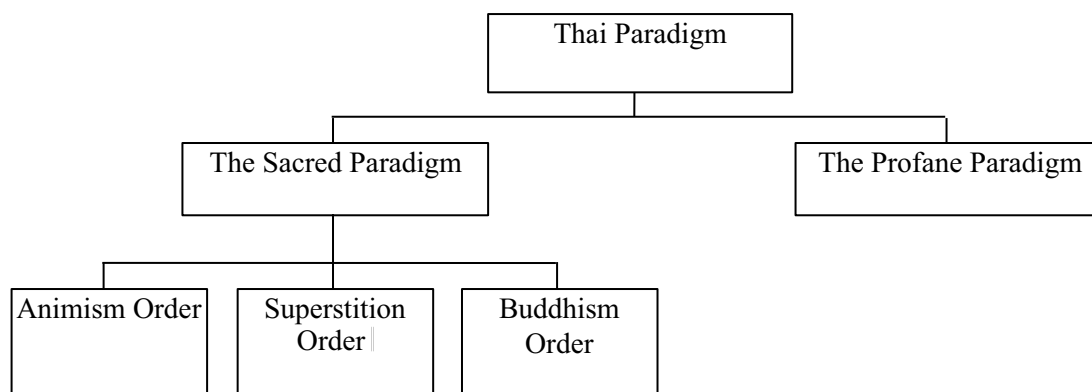


Diagram 6 Elements of Thai Paradigm

There are three schools of thought about sacredness; namely animism, superstition⁴⁶ and Buddhism.

(a.) Animism is the belief in the power of nature that is beyond human control. Thai animism appears in a form of “the spirits” such as spirits of the source of water, forest spirits, house spirits, town spirits and temple spirits. The terms ‘spirit’ in the past was actually not referred to a spirit of a deceased person but a social rule⁴⁷ that keep a society in order. These spirits often reside in public places in order to look after public properties and guard against invaders or exploiters. Animism acts as a religion that controls everybody in society to behave within an ethical frame.

In Thai context, the animism order that is the doctrine that all natural objects and the universe itself have souls and the superstition order that is an irrational belief arising from ignorance or fear are paradigms because of by the explanation of the animism and the superstition, everything also related in the systematic arrangement.

(b.) The superstitious order is a widely held but unjustified belief in supernatural causation leading to certain consequences of an action. Superstition can be an exploitation of beliefs for someone’s benefits or precepts intended to regulate

⁴⁶ See the more explanations of animism, superstition in Srisak, W., (2007). *Chatucham Phenomena and Thais live*, in *Conversation with Anthropology Seminar*, Bangkok: Princess Maha Chari Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre

⁴⁷ Nithi, E. (2001). *Buddism in Thai Social Change*. Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation. p.27

behaviors. Thai superstition is in a form of rituals or practice that is understood to create a desired results and often tends to an exploitative act on someone's beliefs.

(c.) The Buddhism order - Thai people generally perceive that The Buddhism order has influenced Thai paradigm. Buddhism has been accepted in Thailand for a long time and adapted to a way of life, behaviours and a social structure of Thai people. Thai Buddhism focuses on the development of wisdom of people according to their capacity. It is also used as a tool to regulate the society from an individual level (e.g. morals) to a community level (e.g. rituals, customs and culture).

Both animism superstition and Buddhism are not the doctrine that blends together easily. It requires an interpretation. However, the interpretation always changes. As a result, the interpretation is not derived directly from the religious teachings but depends on historical conditions. The animism and the superstition are interpreted in a way that connects with Buddhism, which results in the Thai way of "the Sacred Paradigm." When it is combined with (a) "the Profane Paradigm", which originates from the mix of cultures and the way of life of people from different ethnicities (Tais, Thais, Khmers, Laotians, Chinese etc), and (b) the external thinking systems such as science that are interpreted in a way that connects with the main "the Sacred Paradigm". As a result, the present "Thai Paradigm" is created.

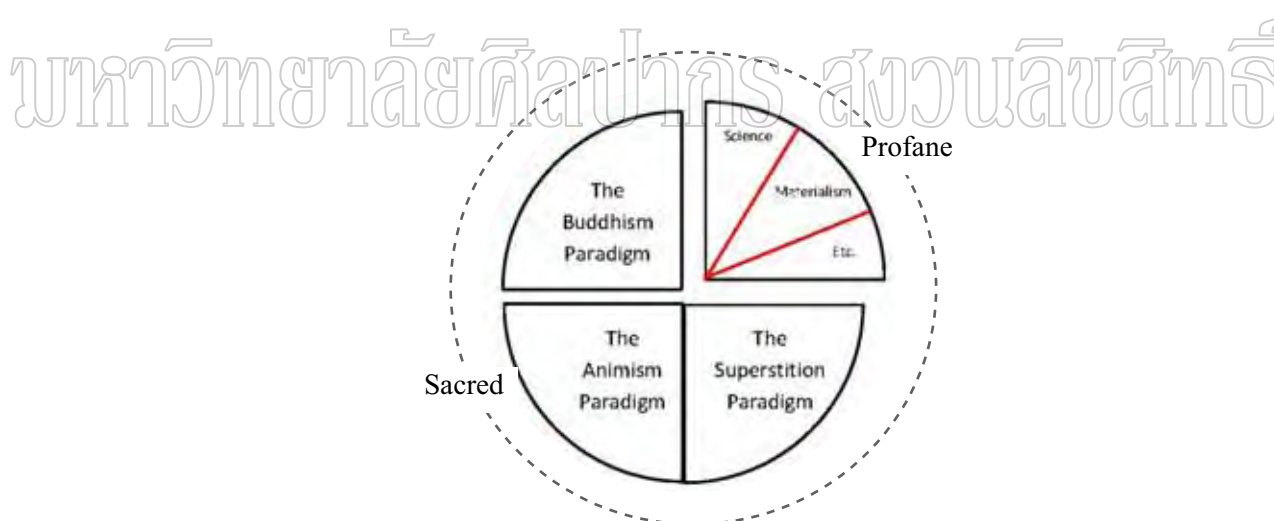


Diagram 7 : The Combination of Thai Paradigm

The Principle of Mount Sumeru in Thai Paradigm and Thai Sacred Culture

The characteristics of Thai sacred culture and Thai paradigm made it easy for the principle of Mount Sumeru to blend in well in Thai society and eventually became an important component of Thai Buddhism. Ironically, there are a lot of people who put greater emphasis on the principle of Mount Sumeru than Buddhist teachings. The

roles of the principle of Mount Sumeru in Thai sacred culture and Thai paradigm can be divided into three stages.

(a.) The convergence of the principle of Mount Sumeru and local culture stage; Before the advent of the principle of Mount Sumeru, ancient people who settled in Thailand practice animism such as ghosts, forest and mountain spirits, ancestors' spirits and mythical creatures. This belief was related to natural resources such as water, forests and mountains, which are considered public properties of their communities. When the stories about Mount Sumeru spread to this area, they blended in well with local beliefs. Additionally, the native people were able to adapt new ideas to suit their beliefs and social values. With these qualities, the principle of Mount Sumeru and Buddhism were seamlessly incorporated into local culture.

(b.) The emergence of the new paradigm stage; The stories about Mount Sumeru were accepted into local culture so well that they were transformed into the principle of Mount Sumeru. It later became a social paradigm that provided people with an explanation about the world and their surroundings. It appeared in several important aspects of Thai people such as the town plan, the layout of Buddhist sacred structures, literature (e.g. Tri Phum Phra Ruang) and the political and social guidelines for rulers and commoners.

Furthermore, the principle of Mount Sumeru played a critical role in shaping Thai sacred culture, the way of thinking, and history. It influenced Thai people's imagination and creation. For example, the knowledge about positions and geographical locations of the kingdoms such as Ayutthaya and the early Rattanakosin was based on the cosmology that had Mount Sumeru as the centre. It was shown in the drawing of a map of Ayutthaya and its surrounding areas, which resembled an island in the Jambudvipa continent. The principle of Mount Sumeru in this period was based on belief and faith and supported by logical explanation in terms of supernatural and magical power.

(c.) The transformation stage; At this stage, even though the perception about Mount Sumeru remained, it went through a transformation in order to catch up with current affairs of the real world, rather than understand the absolute reality.⁴⁸ The significance of rituals and customs gradually diminished. In stead, it focuses on religions that are founded on real experiences. People were more confident about their intellect and concentrate on the success in the secular world more than the sacred world.

It should also be noted that each region or area may not go through these changes at the same pace. For example, the change in the principle of Mount Sumeru may differ in some areas whose local culture is firmly preserved. People in some areas may apply the Mount Sumeru principle and sacred mountain concepts in Buddhist

⁴⁸ Nithi Ieaw-sriwongse 1989: 215 cited in Patcharaporn Changkaew. (1987). *Buddhism and the Emergence of the Modern Thai State in the Reigns of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh*. Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. p.11

sanctuaries only while they continue to practice animism in their daily lives. This means that some regions such as some parts of northern and northeastern Thailand are still at the early or second stage. For people who live in Bangkok or near big cities, their perception about Mount Sumeru is replaced by scientific notions, modern cosmology and geography. There is also a group of monks and Buddhist laymen who are influenced by the Buddhist school of Dhammayut, which revolutionises traditional practice of Thai Buddhism by concentrating on Buddha's teachings in the Tipitaka. This group of people is interested in the reality that can be experienced and believes in reasonable thinking. They believe that human beings have potential to understand Buddha's teachings without the help of Buddhist commentaries or other means of communication.⁴⁹The school of Dhammayut re-established the concept of reality and the sacred world with a new explanation about human and corresponded with the concept founded in the reign of King Rama IV. This concept is consistent with traditional beliefs and scientific notions about the world. It can be explained in the aspects of the sacred world and the profane world without creating conflicts between the religion and the state.

Even though the belief in the principle of Mount Sumeru declines substantially, it does not totally disappear from Thai society. The sacred and the profane worlds still co-exist in modern society. Laymen are persons who are interested in the success in worldly matters while monks are persons whose goal is to attain highest Dhamma wisdom. People, who believe in the material world, reasonable thinking, reality-based experience and human potential, often have contempt for people who believe in the principle of Mount Sumeru. However, they are hesitant to abandon or confront some beliefs such as the principle of Mount Sumeru, heavens and hell, the round of rebirth and karma. People who do not agree with these beliefs still cannot find a solid argument to counter the beliefs that have co-existed in Thai society for a long time.

The study about the principle of Mount Sumeru in Thai paradigm and sacred culture helps us to understand the purpose of religion in relation to Thais' ways of thinking and other relevant events in Thai society, particularly the objectives of sacred places. Based on this study, it can be concluded that Thai society and sacred culture have been independent and never absolutely dominated by external influences. It is because a society, which is dominated by external influences so much that it loses its independence and characteristics, is unable to produce and create its own wisdom or cultural heritage.⁵⁰This is not the case for Thai sacred culture.

Apparently, the principle of Mount Sumeru played a critical role in developing the structure of Thai culture in the past. Even though modern Thai society has given it a new meaning, its influence on sacred places and culture in Thailand remains and will certainly continue in future.

⁴⁹ Analysed from King Mongkut. (1966). *Royal Writings and Royal Guidance*. Bangkok: Chuan Pim.

⁵⁰ Anan Ganchanapan. (2006). *Thais' Order of Thought*. In G. Anan (Ed.), *Thais' Order of Thought: Concept and Methodologies*. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund. p.2-3

3.3 Cosmology of Mount Sumeru

Cosmology is a branch of philosophy and metaphysics that seeks the truth about the world and the universe. It is the study of the universe at large, involving different fields of knowledge, including science, philosophy, religion and art. Nowadays, cosmology is generally defined as the study of the universe through scientific observations, particularly physics and astrophysics.

This study deals mainly with the explanation of cosmology in the context of sacred space in Buddhism. Therefore, in this case, cosmology means the study of the earth, the universe, or the galaxies as a totality of all phenomena in space and time⁵¹. It concentrates on the study of the various components and the relations of all phenomena in the universe, and includes an attempt to explain the origin of the universe and its own predictions of the future.

Using cosmology to search for the truth about the cosmos leads to knowledge about the world and the universe, which is so-called “Kati Jakrawan” or the principle of the universe. Kati means principle, way, model or method. Jakrawan means the perimeter, gathering or surrounding areas of the earth (ปริมาตร, ประชุม, หมู่ บริเวณโดยรอบของโลก)⁵². In Thailand, cosmology is sometimes known as the principle of the universe, and it studies the universe in its totality. Often, it is called the Triphum principle of the universe if it focuses on the study of the three worlds or any concept from Triphum Phra Ruang literature. In Buddhist studies, it is called Buddhist cosmology or the Buddhist principle of the universe.

Since this study is about the sacred mountain and since Mount Sumeru is accepted in Thailand as the sacred mountain that holds together all elements in the cosmos, the principle of the universe in this study will centre around Mount Sumeru.

Thus, in this case, the Thai Kati Jakrawan will be called “*the Cosmology of Mount Sumeru*”, which is a belief that Mount Sumeru is the centre of the universe. Also, the words “*the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru*” will be regarded as a principle in terms of ‘belief’ while the words “*Mount Sumeru Cosmology*” will be used to explain the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru in the cosmological study.

The principle of Mount Sumeru in Thailand originates from a blend of Hindu and Buddhist principles, coupled with other local beliefs about the sacredness of nature. Mount Sumeru Cosmology in “Thai Buddhism” develop into the Buddhological space. It is the space where the particular locality of space and the universal land of the Buddha are tied together, apparently becoming a Buddhological geography which does not necessarily correspond to the terrestrial earth we know. The value of Buddhological geography does not lie in the accuracy of its description of the earth's

⁵¹ Rawee Pavilai. (2000). *World Vision, Bio-Vision : The Comparison of Science and Buddhism*. Bangkok : SahaDhammic. p.25

⁵² The Royal Institute, Dictionary of the Royal Institute 1982. Bangkok: Auksorn Jareonthad. Page 219

surface, but in its representation of spiritual reality transmitted through the story⁵³. That explains how the Thai cosmology of Mount Sumeru differs from cosmologies in India, Cambodia and other countries in Southeast Asia. This includes the difference in cosmic symbols such as Mount Sumeru, continents, mountains and oceans. These symbols are given different meanings in “Triphum”, covering different planes of existence of heavens, hells and humans. Each plane consists of several minor realms. In Thai context, the cosmology of Mount Sumeru is the sacred topography with the following elements.



Figure 14 : The Cosmology of Mount Sumeru in Thai concepts
(Figure by Kriengkrai. Kersiri)

Mount Sumeru

Mount *Sumeru* is 84,000 yojana⁵⁴ high, it goes 84,000 yojana under water, and is 84,000 yojana thick. The base of the mountain is round, with a circumference of 252,000 yojana. It is located on the Trikuta Range (เขตรัฐกูฏ). On The summit of Mount *Sumeru* is Lord Indra’ s palace.⁵⁵ This palace, the *Vaijayanta Prasada* (ไพชยนต์ปราสาท), is in the heart of Tavatimsa (Traitrimsa, ดาวดึงส์), the City of the Thirty-Three, and is 10,000 yojana wide. Beneath *Mount Sumeru* is the land of the asuras, which is 10,000 yojana across. It is enclosed by a mountain range with three peaks which support the base of the royal Mount *Sumeru* like trivet stones a cooking pot. This three peaked range is called the *Trikuta Range*: each of the peak s is 4,000 yojana high. The domain of the asuras is in the vales between the peaks and under the base of the *Trikuta Range*.

⁵³ Frank E. Reynolds cited in Thongchai, W. (1994). *Siam Mapped : A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press. p.22

⁵⁴ 1 yojana is approximately 16 kilometer

⁵⁵ Lithai, K. (1890-1919). *Traibhumikatha : the story of the three planes of existence* (the Thai National Team for Anthology of Asean Literatures ed.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group. P.375-379.



Figure 15 : Illustrations of Mount Sumeru in Thai concept
(Figure from Kriengkrai Kerdsiri and -.(1985), *The Fine Arts in Triphum Concept*, Silpakorn Journal, 28th Issue 2, p.1-8)

Triphum

Phum means space, place or land. Space in the Triphum was the qualitative manifestation of imagined existence; that is the plane of consciousness. Triphum means the three planes of existence where all sentient beings wander in a round of rebirths; namely the sensual world (กามภุมมิ -- Kamar Phum), the corporeal world (รูปภุมมิ -- Rupa Phum), and the incorporeal world (อรุภุมมิ -- Arupa Phum).

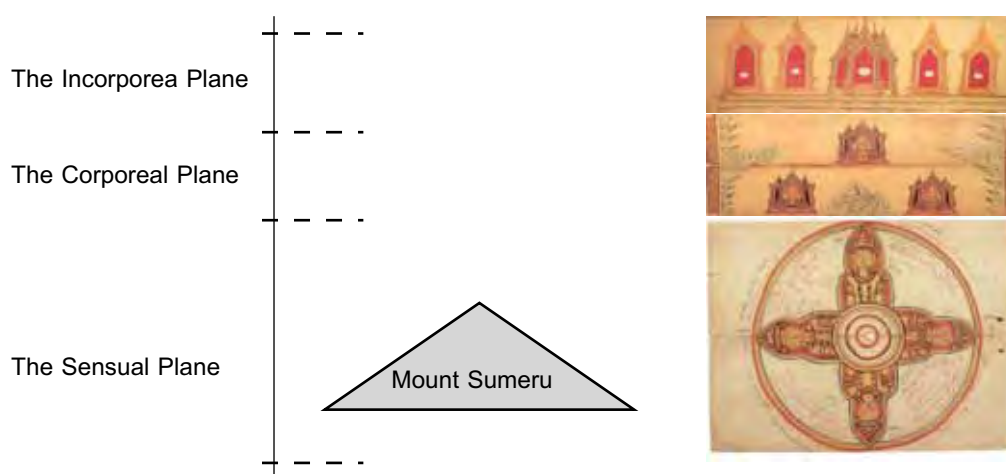


Figure 16: The Position of Triphum or the Three Planes of Existence and Mount Sumeru
(Figure from -.(1985), *The Fine Arts in Triphum Concept*, Silpakorn Journal, 28th Issue 2, p. 1-8)

In the sensuous world, there are eleven realms.

1. The hell realm
2. The Tiracchanu realm (ติริจฉานภูมิ) or the animal realm ⁵⁶
3. The Pretu realm (เปรตภูมิ) or the realm of miserable spirits
4. The Asura realm (อสูรกายภูมิ) or the realm of demons.
The first four realms are the worlds of suffering or Abaya Phum or Thukati Phum (อบายภูมิ, ทุคคตติภูมิ).
5. The human realm (มนุษยภูมิ)
The rest is the heaven realms, starting from
6. The Catumaharajika realm (จาตุมหาราชิกา) or the heaven of the four great guardian kings
7. The Tavatimsa realm (ดาวดึงส์) or the heaven of thirty -three deities
8. The Yama realm (ยามา) or the heaven free of all difficulties
9. The Tusita realm (ตูลิตา) or the heaven of pure delight and gaiety
10. The Nimmanarati realm (นิมมานนรดี) or the heaven of deities who delight in creations
11. The Paranimmitavasavatti realm (ปรนิมมิตวสวัตตี) or the heaven of deities whose pleasures are fulfilled by the acts of other deities.

Collectively, these seven realms, from the human to the Paranimmitavasavatti realms (ปรนิมมิตวสวัตตี), are considered the pleasant realm. All eleven realms are grouped within the sensual world. ⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Animals, of which there are many diverse kinds, all move about with their chest turned to face downwards, no matter whether they have no feet at all, are two - footed, four - footed or multi - footed. Some animal is general being and some being is the noblest as the kingly lion, the supreme elephants, the garuda, the naka, the noble goose.

See Lithai, K. (1890-1919). *Traibhumikatha : the story of the three planes of existence* (the Thai National Team for Anthology of Asean Literatures ed.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group. p.76-93.

⁵⁷ Lithai, K. (1890-1919). *Traibhumikatha : the story of the three planes of existence* (the Thai National Team for Anthology of Asean Literatures ed.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group. p.22-23

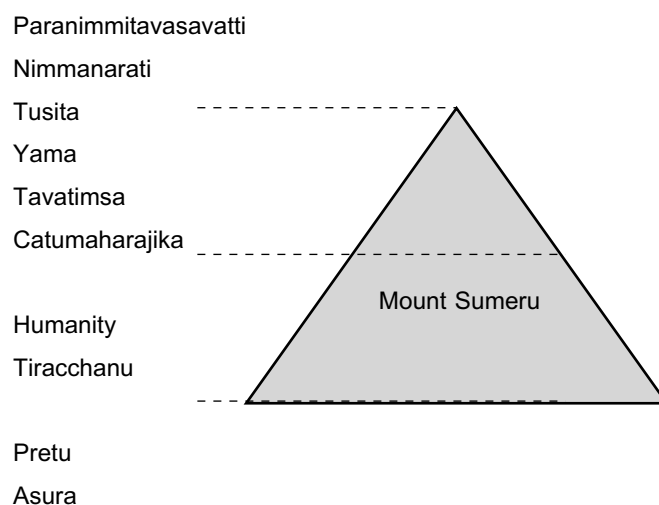


Figure 17 : The Position of the Sensuous World and Mount Sumeru

There are sixteen realms in the corporeal world or Rupa Phum (รูปภูมิ). The first three realms are called the realm of the first deep trance or jhana (ปฐมฌานภูมิ).

1. The realm of Brahma-parisajja (พรหมปารีสัจจาภูมิ): the realm of Brahma's retinue
2. The realm of Brahma-purohita (พรหมปโรหิตาภูมิ): the realm of Brahma ministers
3. The realm of Maha Brahma (มหาพรหมภูมิ): the realm of the Great Brahma

The following three realms are the *realm of the second jhanu* (ทุติยฌาน).

4. The realm of Paritabha (ปริตตภูมิ): the realm of Minor Luster
5. The realm of Appamanabha (อัปมาณาภูมิ): the realm of Infinite Luster
6. The realm of Abhussara (อาภัสสราภูมิ): the realm of Radiant Luster

The three realms below are of the *third jhana* (ตติยฌานภูมิ).

7. The realm of Parittasubha (ปริตตาสภาภูมิ): the realm of Minor Aura
8. The realm of Appumanasubha (อัปมานาสภาภูมิ): the realm of Infinite Aura
9. The realm of Subhakinha (สุภากิณหาภูมิ): the realm of Steady Aura

The remaining seven realms are grouped as the *realm of the fourth jhana* (จตุตถฌานภูมิ).

10. The realm of Vehupphala (เวหัพผลภูมิ): the realm of Great Reward or the Brahmas who enjoy great rewards
11. The realm of Asannasatta Brahmas (อสังขณีสัตตตภูมิ): the realm of Mindless Beings or the Brahmas who are without the senses
12. The realm of Aviha (อวิหาภูมิ): the Durable realm or the Brahmas who forever enjoy their possession.
13. The realm of Atuppa (อตัปปาภูมิ): the Serene realm or the serene Brahmas

14. The realm of Sudussa (สุทัสสาภูมิ): the Beautiful realm or the Brahmas who possess a pleasant vision
15. The realm of Sudassa (สุทัสสีภูมิ): the Clear-sighted realm or the Brahmas who possess a clear vision
16. The realm of Alanittha (อภินิฏฐาภูมิ): the Highest realm or the Brahmas who reign supreme

The last five realms from *Aviha* (อวิหาภูมิ) to *Akanittha* (อภินิฏฐาภูมิ) are known as the five pure realms (ปัญจสุทธาวาส). All sixteen realms together constitute the corporeal world.

In the incorporeal world or Arupa Phum (อรุปรภูมิ), there are four realms

1. The realm of Infinite Space or *Akasanancayatana* (อากาสนัญญายตนภูมิ)
2. The realm of infinite Consciousness or *Vinnananacayatana* (วิญญานัญญายตนภูมิ)
3. The realm of Nothingness or *Akincannayatana* (อากิญจัญญายตนภูมิ)
4. The realm of Neither Perception nor Non-perception or *Nevasannanasannayatana* (เนวสัญญานา สัญญายตนภูมิ)

All thirty-one realms (11 realms of the sensuous world, 16 realms of the corporeal world and 4 realms of the incorporeal world) constitute “The Three Planes of Existence”. They represent the space and time in the spiritual dimension.

The differences between these planes are classified by time and the types of physical or non-physical space. To help the readers who are human beings of this Human realm to understand the length of time of bliss and suffering in other realms, the sacred space and time as defined in the Human realm will be used for this explanation. Therefore, in the context of Triphum, the meaning of ‘Space’ could be defined as spiritual space.

At the same time, to show how it differs from sacred space, physical space is shown through a comparison to human forms. For example, the deities in the heavens still possess the body of a human being, but it is more refined. They live a rather comfortable life in a beautiful castle. By contrast, those who are born in the realm of demons or the Pretu realm have odd shapes such as the disproportionately tall Pretu being with large hands and a needle-hole mouth who live in an unpleasant environment. Details of these realms are given to make humans aware of the danger of wrongdoings and unwholesome acts so that they strive for good deeds in order to be born in the pleasant realms. The analogy of human forms helps them to understand the spiritual dimension.

The Mountains and the Oceans (Sithandorn Samut)

Within Mount Sumeru, there are four continents (or islands) where human beings reside. These continents are separated by seven rings of mountains and oceans

that together encircle Mount Sumeru.⁵⁸ These mountains are, arranged from the innermost, the Yugundhara range (ยูกุลธรร), the Isindhara range (อิสินธรร), the Karavika range (กรวิก), the Suddasana (สุทัสนะ), the Nemindhara range (เนมินธรร), the Vidantara range (วินันตกะ), and the Assakanna range (อัสสกันณะ). They all have a ring shape with the upper parts rising above the water – the lower parts are under the water. Each mountain is half the size of the one before it.⁵⁹



Figure 18 : Illustration of The Mountains and the Oceans (Sithandorn Samut)
(Figure from Woralun Boonyasurat and illustrate by Sayaporn Apornthip)

The Four Continents: The Human Realm

มหาวทยาลัยคัลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์



Figure 19 : Illustration of the Four Continents of Human Realm (Figure from -.(1985), *The*

⁵⁸ Setting Royal *Sumeru* apart is a vast body of water called the *Sidantara* Ocean. This ocean encircles the mountain like a moat. It is 84,000 yojana wide and 84,000 yojana deep.

See Lithai, K. (1890-1919). *Traibhumikatha : the story of the three planes of existence* (the Thai National Team for Anthology of Asean Literatures ed.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group. p.

⁵⁹ See Lithai, K. (1890-1919). *Traibhumikatha : the story of the three planes of existence* (the Thai National Team for Anthology of Asean Literatures ed.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group. p.

Fine Arts in Triphum Concept, Silpakorn Journal, 28th Issue 2 and illustrate by Sayaporn Apornthip)

The Human Realm or Manusa Phum consists of four races of humans, who live in the four continents surrounding Mount Sumeru. These continents are the northern continent of Uttarakuru (อุตตรกुरु), the eastern continent of Purvavideha (บูรพวิเทหะ), the western continent of Aparagodaniya (อมรโคยาน) and the southern continent of Jambudvipa (ชมพูทวีป). Humans of each continent differ in physical appearance, personality and longevity. The cosmology of Mount Sumeru states that we, human beings, live in the southern continent of Jambudvipa. Humans born on this continent have the least accumulation of morality. The environment here is unpredictable. Life in Jambudvipa can be pleasant and unpleasant, depending on our accumulation of good and bad karma, while humans in the other three continents live in pleasant environments due to their good karma.

It should be noted that the Thai cosmology of Mount Sumeru seems to pay special attention to the Uttarakuru continent. It is described as a blissful and fertile society where people live happily. On this continent emphasis is laid on persuading people in Jambudvipa, like us, to realize the value of virtue so that we strive for good deeds such as those in the Uttarakuru.

The positions of these continents indicate the directions of the universe, which merge with human instinct and consciousness. The four directions of the four continents help humans determine their position in the universe and replicate the cosmic system in their sacred space.

The space between the universes is the location of the hell realms. Altogether it forms countless numbers of universes or the great universe.

In addition, the cosmology of Mount Sumeru comprises other components. For instance, the Himmajaan (หิมพานต์) forest, which is located on the north of Jambudvipa, is the place where various types of mythical animals live. Other components include the river that runs to the earth from the southern part of the summit of Mount Sumeru, the sun and the moon that orbits Mount Sumeru causing days, nights and seasons, the thousands of islands that surround the four continents, Phraya Chakrabhadhirach (พระยาจักรพรรดิราช) or the ruler of the universe, and so on. Some of the components are original. Some were added to suit the taste, perspectives and beliefs of Thais. These components are used when Mount Sumeru is replicated in the sacred space. Some of them become the main characteristics of the sacred space such as Mount Sumeru, the four continents and Sithandorn Samut (สีทันดรสมุทร) or the oceans between the mountains. Some are only decorative like the mythical creatures in the Himmajaan forest. It depends on the creator to choose the components to be included in the sacred space. However, the indispensable component of the sacred space is Mount Sumeru.

When the cosmic system is replicated in the sacred space, the cosmology of Mount Sumeru in a Thai context dictates that the components of the sacred topography must have the ‘systematic’ relation. That means Mount Sumeru must be connected with other surrounding components. Mount Sumeru is important because it is a part of the whole system and also a central point that keeps other components together.

When the cosmic system is duplicated in *Buddhist sacred places*, the cosmology of Mount Sumeru becomes the Buddhist cosmography in which Lord Buddha is the focal part, rather than Mount Sumeru. Mount Sumeru cosmology becomes a medium used in explaining Buddha’s teachings. It is a vital part that has contributed to the continuity of Buddhism in Thailand. The symbols that stand for various elements of Mount Sumeru such as the continents, the mountains and the oceans are then used to interpret the teachings of Buddhism.



Figure 20 : Khod Nak (ขุดนาค) which is the symbol of water spiraling from Mount Sumeru be duplicated in Buddhist Arts (Drawing by Sayaporn Apornthip)

For example, Khod Nak (ขดนาค), which was originally the symbol of water spiraling from Mount Sumeru, is given a new meaning as the serpent king Muchilinda (พระยามุขลินทร์) who twisted his body in a circle to form a seat for Lord Buddha and used his head to shelter him from heavy rains. Also, the interpretation of heavens changes. Whereas the word ‘heavens’ normally stands for different states of virtuous consciousness, it is now linked with Maitreya (พระศรีอริยเมตตรัย) or the future Buddha, who now lives in the Tusita realm (ตูลีตา). There are also stories about deities from different realms who listened to Buddha’s teachings.

In a Thai context, the terms Mount Sumeru cosmology and Buddhist cosmography are used interchangeably. The sacred space - whether it is a natural sacred place, or the result of urban planning, or palaces and religious buildings connected with sacred rituals, the sovereign realm of a king, or arts and crafts - is related to Mount Sumeru Cosmology. Thus, it can be said that everything in Thai culture is dominated by the sacredness of Mount Sumeru.

3.4 The Transformational Powers of Sacred Mount Sumeru into Sacred Places

The sacred power of mountain can metamorphose from one form into another. The transformational powers of sacred mountain induce the object, place or person becomes the unity of the sacred power. In Thailand, the sacred Mount Sumeru is transformed to various shapes. According to Myth of Thai sacred mountain linked to the belief on local sacred mountain blended with the Myth of Mount Meru. The transformational power of Sacred Mount Sumeru in Thailand can be organized into four types, namely

- (1.) The Natural Mountain,
- (2.) The Artificial Mountain,
- (3.) The Imaginary Mountain, and
- (4.) The Secular Mythical Mountain

These symbolic mountains serve a ‘Bridge to connect abstract meaning on sacred power and common people or a medium to interpret the abstract meaning in Thai Buddhism to more accessible for the layman who has different levels of intellect.

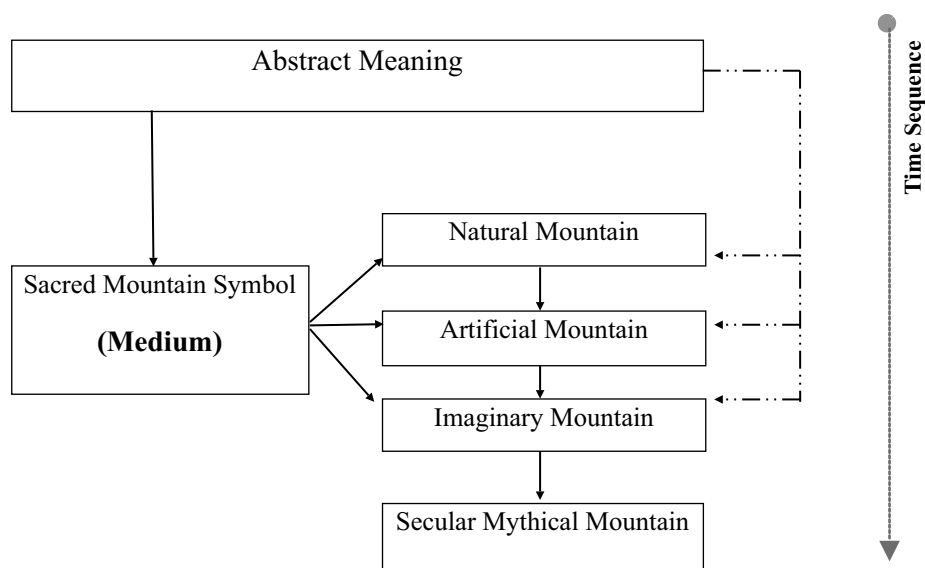


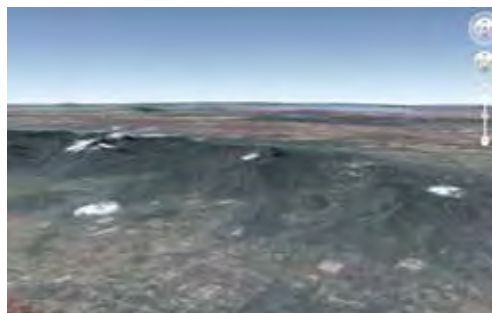
Diagram 8 : The Transformations of Sacred Mountains

The followings are examples of sacred mountain in each character;

(a.) A natural sacred mountain extracts from nature (mountain range, mount, hill, stone, or mound). Natural Sacred Mountains generally are significance shape or have natural phenomena. The sacredness of natural mountain is the reaction of human mind to natural phenomena. Its sacred power come from it is a symbol of Mount Sumeru. A natural sacred mountain in Thailand such as Doi Luang Chiang Dao in Chiang Mai, Kao Luang in Sukhothai and the others as show in the following illustration.



Khao Kichakut, Chantaburi province (เขาคิชกูฏ จ.จันทบุรี)



Kao Luang in Sukhothai province (เขาลอง จ.สุโขทัย)



Doi Luang Chiang Dao, Chiang Mai province (ดอยหลวงเชียงดาว จ.เชียงใหม่)



Phu Tok, Nongkhai province (ภูตอก จ.หนองคาย)

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สาขาวิชาศิลปกรรมศาสตร์

Figure 21 : Examples of Sacred Natural Mountain in Thailand.

(b.) An artificial Mountain imitates a natural mountain form and connotes to a sacred Mount Sumeru.



Figure by Woratun Boonyasura



www.alittlebuddha.com/Pics%20of%

Figure 22 : An artificial Mountain imitates a natural mountain form

(c.) An imaginary mountain is developed from the natural mountain forms into others forms which are still symbolized to a mountain. An imaginary mountain might

be divided into two characters which are tangible imaginary mountain, and intangible imaginary mountain.

(c.1) Tangible imaginary mountain transposes the physical element of Mount Sumeru into the others physical forms which can be perceive by the senses such as architecture⁶⁰, urban plan, city, palace, a decorative ornament, a painting, a craft.

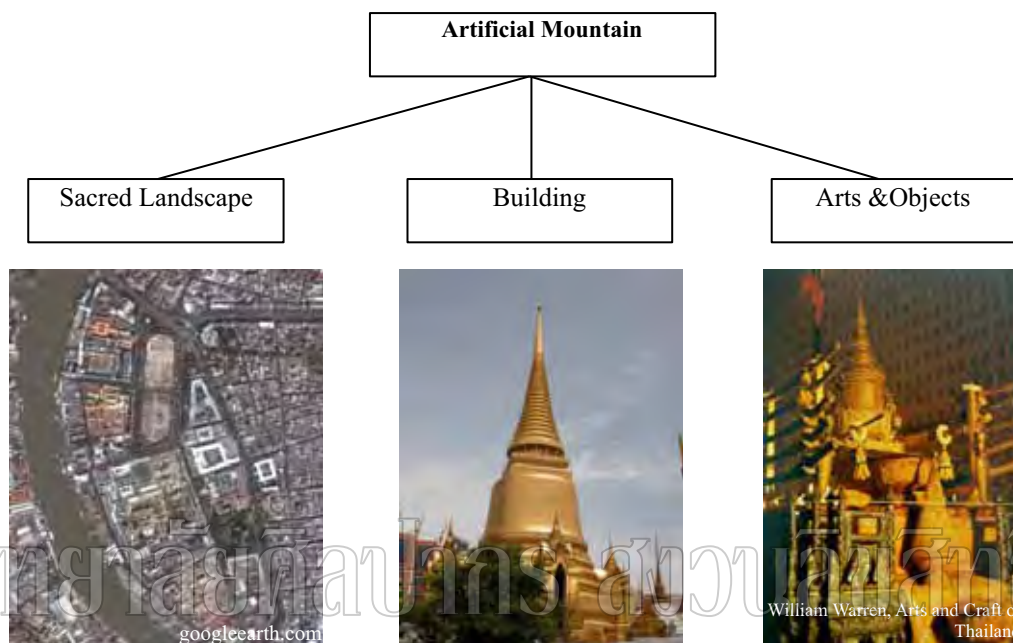


Figure 23 : Artificial Sacred Mountain rendering

(c.2) Intangible imaginary mountain manifest the physical element of Mount Sumeru into the others forms, the significance of which cannot be judged by any sort of figuring or calculating but can be feel, for instance; power of the Divine King and his cosmological government, the sacred law from sacred mountain belief.

⁶⁰ Architecture that refers to Mount Sumeru is frequently called symbolic mountain, however, they are categorized as tangible imaginary mountain in this study.

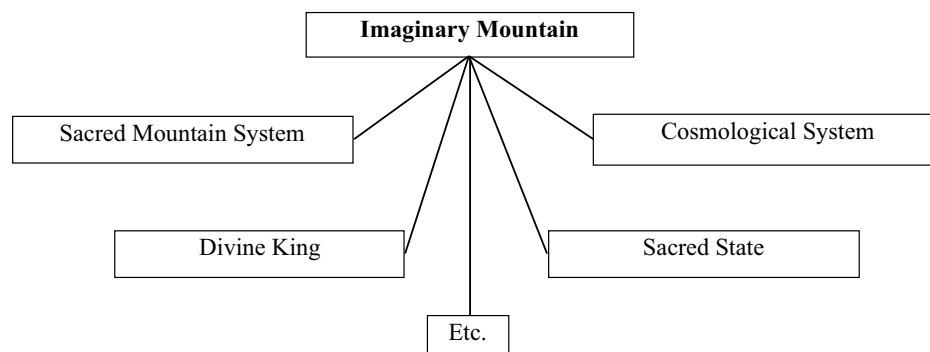


Figure 24 : Imaginary sacred mountain rendering

Imaginary mountain in Thai context is praxis that translates an ideology into action. Both tangible imaginary mountain and Intangible imaginary mountain reflect the significant of Mount Sumeru that is the symbol to interpret sacred power. Imaginary mountain appear as the exclusively mountain symbol that only refer to Mount Sumeru, the complex of symbolism that refer to Mount Sumeru and its surrounded environment, and the system of symbolism that refer to cosmology of Mount Sumeru.

Although the imaginary mountain contains abstract meaning but it is often unknown to ordinary people. Sacred Mountain currently transforms into the other form that based on the secular world.

(d.) A secular mythical mountain; the last desacralization is the sacred mountain symbols with non of meanings. The mountain symbols has been used but without linking with sacred meanings.

However, the symbol used to represent the holy mountain is changeable depending on times and places. It can go back and forth from natural mountains to artificial mountains to imaginary mountains, and vice versa.

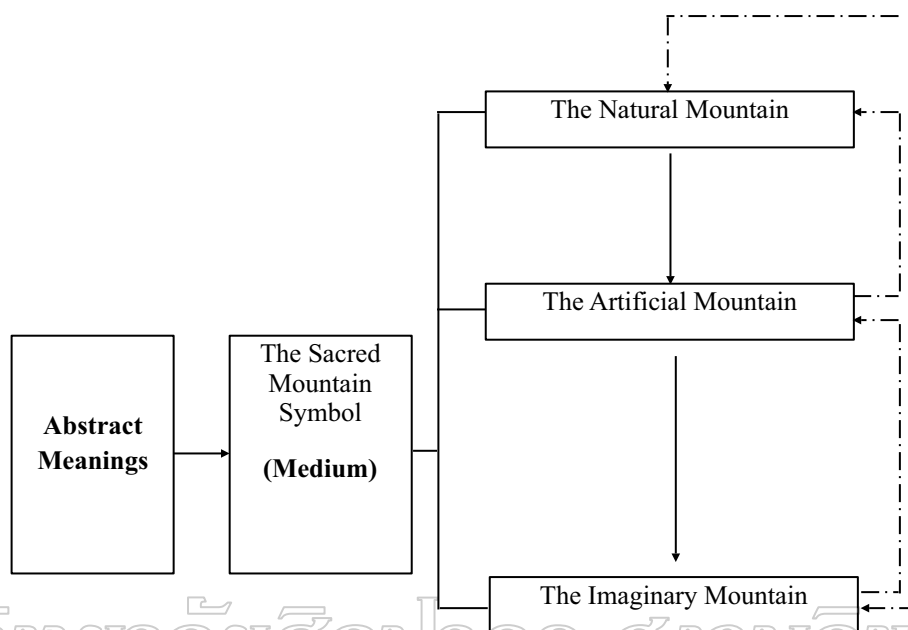


Diagram 9 Changing Sequence of the Sacred Mountain Symbol

The mountain may change to new symbolic forms but its meaning remains the same. The sacred power only manifests itself in another object.⁶¹ It is a way to transfer (move from one place to another) and transform (change from one form or medium into another) the sacred power. For example, the sacred mountain can take a symbolic or an imaginary form of structures, ceremonies or even persons. The demolition of the sacred symbols does not diminish its sacredness. It is only a change of form.

This sacred power is different from the secular power.⁶² It is not a kind of oppression or manipulation through the development of discipline (la normalization) as proposed in 'the Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison' by Michel Foucault, who argues that discipline (la discipline) is used as an important mechanism to control the public to perform their duty within the same forms. This kind of

⁶¹ Eliade, M., 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York A Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. p.10

⁶² Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Karl Marx, Foucault

discipline starts from individual social interactions at micro-sociological level⁶³ to macro-sociological level.

All kinds of power have their origin.⁶⁴ The sacred nature of mountain originates from the natural power. However, when its evolution reaches a certain state, the sacred power becomes so anonymous that humans no longer know the power of nature.

The sacred natural mountain creates the big current of power that flows laterally. On the other hand, an artificial mountain, an imaginary mountain, and a secular mythical mountain indicate a circulation of natural power in all directions, permeating every level of the society. Without the beginning and the end, they turn into a kind of 'structure' that controls and produces things in the culture.

The transformation, the transfer and even the pulverization of the sacred power of the mountain are some of the factors in the 'structure' of the power that may return to support that power.⁶⁵ Currently, the symbol of natural mountain shifts to the secular mythical mountain - the last desacralisation that laymen perceive a symbol without knowing about its meanings. Subsequently, the mountain symbols may have been used but not associated with the sacred meanings. This is because people do not have the knowledge about the power of nature any longer.

The natural power that once resided in the sacred mountain is now replaced by the profane power, which is expressed in the name of modern society, democracy, capitalism and equal rights. These give rise to the ideas of identity and individualism among humans. Indeed, these ideas are only illusions created by the network of the profane power. Individuals only perform their roles in different positions in the aforementioned network. In modern Thai society, the profane power is spread across the country. This profane power at the mundane level slowly starts to take control of time, space, the way of thinking and the body of Thai populace. It instills the efficiency and the surrender of independent thinking in Thai people. Actually, the transfer into the new power system, which is generally known as the 'development' or the steps to freedom, is probably an attempt to push humans to fall under the mundane control. As a result, humans cannot escape the law of dependent origination.

In addition, the transformational powers of Mount Sumeru in Thai context reflect the transformation of the associations, the positions and the social procedure of Thai people. This concept is not static but changes through time. The concept of the

⁶³ Foucault, M., (1975). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Random House. Foucault did not refer to the word 'discipline' in terms of rules for individuals but used it for a mechanism that trains people to serve or work for those who have an economic advantage in the society.

⁶⁴ Foucault, M., (1975). Les Corps Dociles, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House.

⁶⁵ The ideas were transpired from Foucault, M., (1975). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House.

sacred mountain may remain in Thai society but it serves a secular purpose rather than looks into its absolute meanings. These changes are a paradigm shift from the sacredness to the profaneness that connotes the desacralisation of the sacred world and the Thai sacred paradigm. However, the transformation, the transfer and even the pulverisation of the sacred power of the mountain may return to support that power.

Chapter Summary

The belief about Mount Sumeru is a factor that determines the identity of Thai people. It is so deeply ingrained in their subconscious that it unconsciously determines cultural life of the society. It is a culture and iconography that bind us together in social behaviours. The myth of Mount Sumeru still has a significant role in modern society, as reflected in a pattern of social interaction. This is because it has been a code of conduct for spiritual and interactive experiences of Thai ancestors for centuries.

The sacred Mount Sumeru in Thai context is used in explaining, demonstrating and telling religious stories and the philosophy. It is employed as a tool in teaching morality and ethics in order to persuade people to understand the values of wholesome acts, behave ethically, practice patience towards evil thoughts and be ashamed of unwholesomeness and its karmic results. Examples of peaceful and thriving kingdoms around Mount Sumeru where their citizens perform ethical conducts are used in an attempt to encourage people to do good deeds. Nevertheless, the true concept of this sacred mountain is often not clearly understood. This is because people fail to recognize its essence. Generally, they tend to pay attention to the stories about Mount Sumeru rather than examine the messages behind these stories. One big obstacle is the way people nowadays think as the value system, the knowledge, the goals, the principle and the power system change.

In the next chapters, the sacred mountain will be presented as the main factor that shapes the way of thinking of Thai people, leading to the building of space and place, both in terms of sacredness and profaneness.

Chapter 4

Manifestations of Sacred Mountain into Thai Sacred places

This chapter interprets the principle of Mount Sumeru as it appeared in Thai sacred places. The dissertation divides Thai Sacred places into four categories. They are, 4.1, sacred places in nature, 4.2, sacred ritual places, 4.3, sacred states and sacred cities, and 4.4, sacred architecture. The order followed in the explanation shows the relation between (a.) the size of the sacred place and the physical area it covers (the exposition will start from the larger space to the smaller space) and (b.) the public awareness of the principle, from wider to narrower levels ranging from social and national awareness to community and individual awareness.

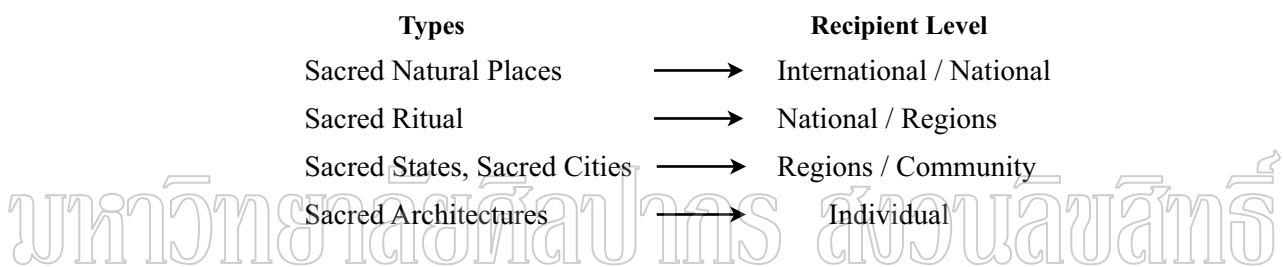


Diagram 10 : Classification of types of places and the recipient groups

4.1 Sacred Mountain and Sacred Places in Nature

4.1.1 Sacred Places in Nature, in Thailand

A belief in the sacred power of nature has been prevalent in Thai society for a very long time. Indeed, the worship of mountains, caves, rocks, sources of water, trees and legendary creatures existed before the time of Buddha. The concept of sacred places in nature was particularly strong among indigenous people. Each community believed in ghosts or spirits that lived among them in their natural surroundings. There were various legends, folklore and fables about mythical creatures living in the mountains, caves and waterways. As their belief in the sacred power of nature became blended with Buddhism, these local legends were adapted to suit Buddhist teachings. Local ghosts became ghosts that practised and protected Buddhism. For example, Pu Sae and Ya Sae (ปู่และย่าและ) - the ghosts of the sacred mountains of Doi Suthep (ดอยสุเทพ) and Doi Kham (ดอยคำ) in the Lanna Kingdom - were converted from human-eating demons to demons who practised Buddha's teachings. Other mountains, caves, rocks, springs and rivers, trees and local fantasy animals were all absorbed in this idea

and became sacred places and entities in Buddhism. For instance, the Legend of the Buddha's Journey (Tamnan Phrachao Liab Lok -- ตำนานพระเจ้าเลียบโลก) was a religious work that gave an account of Buddha's journey to some places in nature situated in northern Thailand. These places later became holy places. Another example concerns Naga (the Serpent King - พญานาค) that was transformed from a local mythical animal to an animal that was a Buddhist and a protector of religious places. This story is well known in the north-eastern region of Thailand.

Such sacred places in nature show that human society in ancient times was closely connected with nature. This is because people believed that nature had special powers over them. This belief led to the tradition that Thais treat nature with respect and live in harmony with their natural surroundings. Sacred natural phenomena in Thailand can be categorised into mountains, caves, rocks, springs and rivers, trees and odd-looking animals. Each sacred place in nature varies in its physical characteristics and spatial dimensions. It can be a single rock, a mountain range, a small pond or the entire course of a river.

The levels of sacredness also differ. Some places are recognised at the national level, such as Doi Luang Chiang Dao (ดอยหลวงเชียงดาว). This place is the origin of the legend of Chao Luang Kham Daeng (เจ้าหลวงคำแดง) who is highly revered in the north of Thailand and in Burma. Other sacred places in nature are well respected within the region, such as Doi Suthep and Doi Kham in the north, Phu Thok (ภูตอก), Phu Phra Baht (ภูพระบาท) and Nong Harn (หนองหาร) in the northeastern region, Khao Luang of Nakhon Sithammarat Province (เขาลอง จ.นครศรีธรรมราช) in the south and Khao Kichakut (เขาคิชฌกูฏ) on the eastern coast.

Sacred places in nature recognised at the provincial level include Khao Luang in Sukhothai Province (เขาลอง จังหวัดสุโขทัย) and Khao Samokraeng in Pitsanulok Province (เขาสมอแครง จังหวัดพิษณุโลก). These mountains and their surroundings were compared to Mount Sumeru and its topography, and then became sacred places. Some natural sources of water are still highly regarded because of their sacredness, like the Mahachai stream of Khao Mahachai (ห้วยเขมมหาชัย). In Nakhon Sithammarat Province, the water in the Nagarach stream (ห้วยนาคราช) flows out of a rock whose shape resembles the body of the Serpent King or Naga (พระยานาคราช). The stream, which has water all year round, was believed to contain holy water, and that water was then used in religious ceremonies. Also, the water in the pond of Chao Khun Thao (สระน้ำเจ้าคุณเฒ่า) at the Khao Bangsai Temple (วัดเขาบางทราย), Chonburi Province (จังหวัดชลบุรี), comes from the stream that runs through all three summits of Putthabat Mountain (เขาพระพุทธรบาท) and some sacred places. The crater of the ancient volcano of Doi Kamor, Lumphun Province (ดอยชะม้อ จังหวัดลำพูน), became a sacred pond revered by local people. For purposes of the ceremony to cleanse the Hariphunchai stupa

(พระธาตุหริภุญชัย), holy water from the pond is fetched and mixed with water from the royal palace. In addition, in the past Thai Kings always used the water from this pond, together with Puttha Pisek water (น้ำพุทธรักษา) during the coronation ceremony.

4.1.2 Significance of Sacred Mountain in Sacred Places in Nature

The principle of Mount Sumeru as it appeared in the natural sacred place depicted the relationship between numerous elements, with Mount Sumeru as the centre. In Thailand, all this is referred to as the “Mount Sumeru system”. Mount Sumeru was applied symbolically in the sanctification of nature. A mountain was chosen to symbolise Mount Sumeru and represented the centre in the ecological system.

Sacred Mountains

Due to their characteristic soaring peaks rising to the sky, mountains were believed to represent the sacred world. Thais believed that mountains were the residence of supernatural entities, the protectors of the forests and mountains or ghosts of the water sources. Examples in this case are the natural sources of water in the Phnom Dongrak Range of Khao Luang, Doi Luang Chiang Dao and Doi Suthep. Later when Hinduism was adopted, the mountains became symbols of Mount Sumeru. Religious structures were gradually erected on the summits in order to symbolise Mount Sumeru. After the arrival of Buddhism, these mountains changed again to become sacred places for Buddhists.

Additionally, caves in the mountains were sacred places. Situated in serene surroundings, these caves were used as the residence of monks and pilgrims. Aided by the elevated location and the pristine environment, they exude a feeling of detachment and seclusion, and a spiritual elevation far beyond the secular lowlands. They may also create an impression of being close to spiritual beings and provide a ‘vision’, thus inducing enlightenment. Therefore, mountains and caves were places that helped monks and pilgrims incline towards unification with nature, experience purification and go through higher stages of contemplation.

The System of Sacred Mountains and Sacred Sources of Water

There was a connection between sacred places in nature, such as mountains and sources of water. It was believed that a mountain, and particularly the summit, was the most significant and sacred place. Springs, which are generally the source of rivers, often originate in high-lying areas such as mountains. Thus, when a mountain was associated with a sacred place believed to be the centre of the universe, it followed that any stream or river flowing from that mountain is would also be sacred.

When the springs and the streams became part of the sacred place, it made people respect and revere their sacred power. Hence, rules were set up to control the way the water was used. The places where the streams or the rivers originated were of paramount importance. The water from these sites was used in religious ceremonies. As the streams ran into low-lying areas, the water would be kept in a man-made pond or well near a sacred place. People could use the water only after it had flowed out of the holy area. The water left over from drinking and cooking would be used for other purposes in the households, before flowing into other waterways where it was used for farming and livestock.



Figure 25 : Muang Fai in Northern Thailand : one part in the system of sacred mountains and sacred sources of water (Figure from Seapsak Sanyakitikun, www.oknation.net/blog/print.php?id=319324 and Waranan Sowannee)



Prasat Muang Tam



Ta Muan Tom

Figure 26 : Tra Pang in Sukothai and Barai of Khmer temple are kinds of the system of sacred mountains and sacred sources of water (figure by Waranan Sowannee)

When a stream was regarded as sacred, people were obliged to use it with care. This resulted in the emergence of public utilities and an emphasis on public health. For example, people could only consume water from the well or Barai,¹ where the water had come directly from its source and was clean because it had never been used before. A rule prohibiting taking livestock to use the water at its source or at the well was evidently intended to prevent the spread of disease ².



Figure 27 : The system of sacred mountains, sacred sources of water and caste-based rule that continue practice in everyday life in India (figure by Norathep Arunmanee) and Bali (figure by Waranan Sowannee). It is belief that this way of life was be happened in Thai culture also.

Furthermore, water management became a part of the administrative system. For instance, there was a caste-based rule about the use of sacred water in India and Bali. There, certain areas, where people used water from a sacred place, would be designated for a particular group of people according to their social class, such as

¹Srisak W. (2008). The seminar on supernatural power in ancient water management. AncientCity.

² ibid

monks and the ruling class. This kind of rule might have existed in the Siamese kingdoms in bygone times.

The System of Sacred Mountains and Sacred Water

Besides mountains, the areas in the plains where water was found were also regarded as sacred places, for example, Nong Lom Swamp (หนองหล่ม) in the north of the country and some sacred swamps in the north-eastern region. Originally these swamps were holy areas, according to folk stories about sacred animals (Naga and white creatures, for example) or the legend of Daeng Nang Ai Cliff (Pha Daeng Nang Ai - ตำนานผาแดงนางไอ่) in north-eastern Thailand. These stories were exploited to control people during the early period when the kingdom was just founded. As in the case of towns in the north-eastern part of Thailand, there were similar stories about the source of water in the northern region, where the site of the underground water (น้ำซับ) was called Nong Lom. The ground where the water sprung up was believed to be Naga's hole. For example, Nong Lom in Chiang Saen District was believed to be the location of a fallen city mentioned in local folklore about a sunken city destroyed by Naga. The amount of water in this Nong Lom can increase or decrease, depending on the time of year. Water resources attracted human settlement and contributed to the establishment of local communities and later a kingdom.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

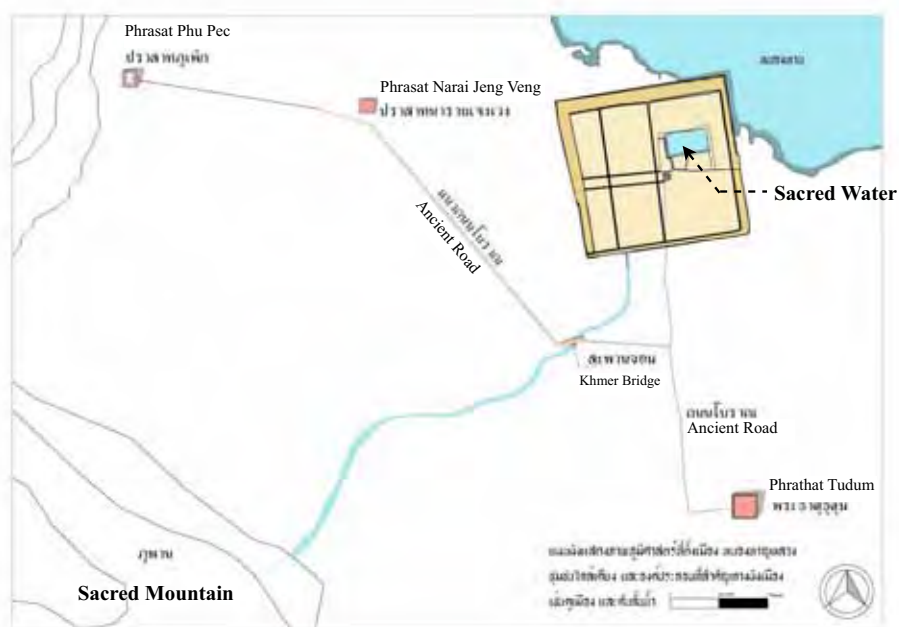


Figure 28 : Sacred mountains, sacred water and human settlement of Muang Nong Han Luang or current Sakonnakorn Province (figure from Taweepong Nawanuch, Telling the Old Stories of Muang Sakonnakorn)

When local beliefs merged with Buddhism, mountains, springs and other natural sources of water became part of the Buddhist's Mount Sumeru system. As a result, temples and religious shrines were built on mountain tops as a symbol of Mount Sumeru. Phrathat Doi Kham (พระธาตุดอยคำ) and Phrathat Doi Suthep (พระธาตุดอยสุเทพ) are good examples of this. Examples of religious structures erected near the source of underground water and swamps include Phrathat Sheang Chum (พระธาตุเชิงชุม) and Phra Borom Thad Chaiya (พระบรมธาตุไชยา).



Phra Barommthath Chaiya, Surajthani Province



Phra Tan Dong Rang, Nakornpatom Province



Phrathat Cheang Chum, Sakonnakorn Province

Figure 29 : The source of underground water and swamps and Buddhist sacred place (figure by Waranan Sowanee)

At the same time, some rivers represented water from Mount Sumeru. There were several important natural sources providing water that was considered holy and thus used in auspicious ceremonies. For example, the holy water used in the bathing ceremony (Murathapisek ceremony) in the Ayutthaya period came from Kade Pond (สระเกษ), Kaew Pond (สระแก้ว), Khongka Pond (สระคงคา) and Yamana Pond (สระยมนา) in the province of Suphanburi (แขวงเมืองสุพรรณบุรี). In addition to these ponds, holy water from five rivers was used in royal ceremonies in the Rattanakosin period. These were the Bangpakong River (แม่น้ำบางปะกง) which flowed into the Phra Ajarn Pond (บึงพระอาจารย์), Nakhon Nayok Province (จังหวัดนครนายก); the sacred water from the Pasak River (แม่น้ำป่าสัก) in Tharab Sub-district (ตำบลท่าราบ), Saraburi Province (จังหวัดสระบุรี);

the Chao Phraya River (แม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา) in a section of Bang Kaew Sub-district (ตำบลบางแก้ว), Angthong Province (จังหวัดอ่างทอง); the Ratchaburi River (แม่น้ำราชบุรี) in a section of Daowadung Sub-district (ตำบลดาวดึงส์), Samutsakhon Province (จังหวัดสมุทรสงคราม), and the Petchaburi River (แม่น้ำเพชรบุรี) in a section of Thachai Sub-district (ตำบลท่าไชย), Petchaburi Province (จังหวัดเพชรบุรี). These five rivers are called Benja Sutha Khongka (เบญจสุทธคงคา), which is derived from Pancha Maha Nathi (the five sacred rivers -- ปัญจมหานที) on the Jambudvipa continent or India – water from these rivers is still used in various ceremonies. The royal ceremony celebrating the current king's 72nd birthday on 5 December 1999 involved the use of sacred water taken from its source in every province, such as Nong Nadune (หนองนาตุน) in Mahasarakham Province (จังหวัดมหาสารคาม), the hot springs in Raksawarin Park (สวนรักษะวาริน) in Ranong Province (จังหวัดระนอง) and Sasonghong (สระสองห้อง) in Pitsanulok Province (จังหวัดพิษณุโลก).

Some big communities had a man-made pool that served as a public reservoir; for example, the Hindu-influenced Barais (บาราย) in north-eastern Thailand, dams (Seed-phong -- สรีดภงต์) and ponds (Traphang -- ตระพัง) in Sukhothai, and the pools in front of some important temples in Ayutthaya. These dams, ponds, pools and Barais were usually located in religious places and represented a kind of irrigation system under the Mount Sumeru-system. The religious shrine represented Mount Sumeru while the Barai was seen as the Si-thundorn Ocean or the four sacred ponds that encircled Mount Sumeru. Indeed, the Barai served as a reservoir of drinking water, for use during the dry season. However, when these Barais and pools were connected with the principle of Mount Sumeru, the result was a waterworks system that helped remind people to use this natural resource carefully. The water in these sacred pools was granted for drinking and cooking while the water that ran out of the pools was for bathing. When the water flowed into other natural streams of water, it was used for other purposes. Livestock were only allowed to use the water *at the edge of these natural streams* in order to manage water quality.³

In Thailand, the tradition of having a pool in a religious place could have been derived from the Barais in the Khmer Kingdom. It symbolised the fertility and the prosperity of the state. Like those Barais in Cambodia, the water in the sacred pools in the Thai Kingdom was used solely for drinking and cooking but not for domestic animals. Thai farmers also did not use the water from the pools for agriculture. They collected water from other sources and built dykes around their rice fields to retain rainwater in the rainy season.⁴

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

The Sacred Mountain System and the Management of Natural Resources

Wherever a mountain became the centre of an area, the surroundings were also transformed into a sacred place. The area closer to the mountain top tended to be more sacred than the area further away. This led to the zoning of areas for spiritual beings. For example, the high-ranking deities were believed to reside on the summit. Next in line were the forest and mountain spirits and Phi Ton Nam, who lived further away from the mountain top. The spirits of ancestors inhabited the area near the village. The nearby forest, which was used by the community, was the residence of forest ghosts, low-level divinities, deities of protection (Theparak -- เทพารักษ์) and nymphs.

Each sacred area had different levels of sacredness for different purposes. This gave rise to customs and rules controlling the use of the land. For instance, the mountain and its summit were designated as religious sites. Next followed the sacred or forbidden forests, to which the locals were denied access. The locals were, however, allowed to use the public forest, which was located near their village. Their homes were designated as the least sacred place. This kind of belief is still prevalent in rural areas such as Doi Luang Chiang Dao as well as in hill tribe villages and in some rural communities in the north-eastern region.

Traditional societies have assigned a special status to natural sites that they consider sacred on the basis that deities and spirits reside there, or that they are shrines dedicated to ancestors or that they are protected spiritual sites intended for contemplation, meditation and even purification of the inner self. The sacredness of a particular site distinguishes it from the adjoining non-sacred areas that generally make up the bulk of the land area; hence a sacred site can be a relatively small area of land.⁵

4.1.3 Values of Sacred Mountain in Natural Sacred Place

Sacred mountains are places where natural and cultural diversity can reinforce each other.⁶ Even today, they are highly regarded for their cultural and natural values as described below.

⁵ Schaaf, T. (2006). Linking cultural and biological diversity: the UNESCO-MAB approach. In UNESCO-MAB (Ed.), *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*. Paris: UNESCO. p.12

⁶ See UNESCO-MAB. (2006). *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*. Paris: UNESCO.

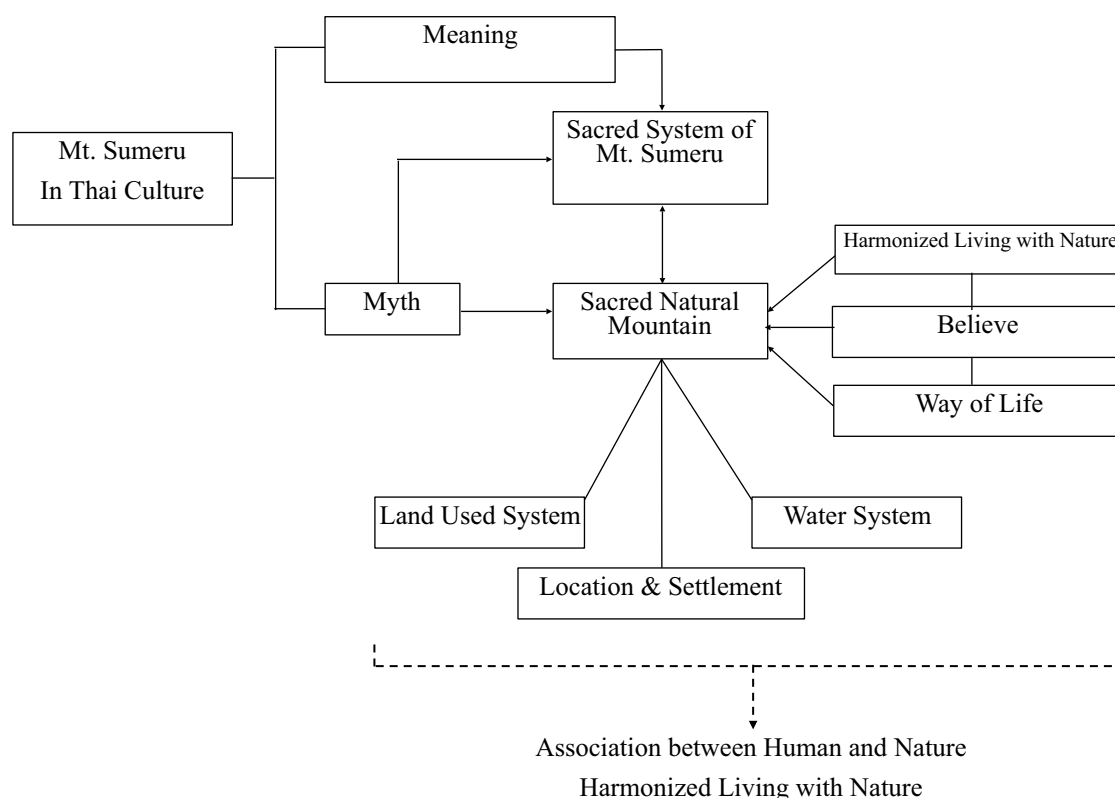


Diagram 11 : Sequence of Natural Sacred Mountain Rendering

Cultural Value

Cultural values of the sacred mountain system embrace a human connection with our predecessors and enhance an awareness of the past which is essential to the maintenance of the purpose of life for most human beings.⁷ In ancient times, the sacred mountain system gave rise to the establishment of communities and kingdoms. Their survival depended on social relationships and cultural space and was influenced by their natural surroundings, to which they had to adapt. Members of both the community and the state had to adapt to their surroundings. Later, all this became part of their life-style, and the basis of their legends, traditions and ceremonies. Eventually, it turned into a culture that indicated a close relationship between nature and people and their way of life.

The sacred mountain system consisted of a set of customs and rules about the management of the surrounding areas, totally integrated with the belief systems of the indigenous population. Later when the community was more developed, the sacred mountain system was explained by way of personification, and by using the natural surroundings to help expound the close relationship between nature and people.

⁷ Lowenthal cited in Lennon, J., Egloff, B., Davey, A., & Taylor, K. (1999). *Conserving Cultural Values in Natural Areas*. Canberra: University of Canberra

Natural Value

Sacred sites in nature are places where biological and cultural diversity can reinforce each other.⁸ A sacred mountain is a place of biological diversity. From a scientific point of view, mountains offer a whole variety of different vegetation zones and animal habitats which differ in altitudes and exposure. Mountains as ‘islands’ towering over lowlands are often important centres of endemism and biological ‘hotspots with high ecological value.’⁹ Currently, almost all sacred mountains in Thailand are national parks, including Doi Inthanon (ดอยอินทนนท์) National Park in Chiang Mai Province, Phu Phan (ภูพาน) National Park in Sakon Nakhon and Kalasin Province, Phu Kaw-Phu Phan Kam (ภูเก้า-ภูพานคำ) National Park in Khonkaen Province, Khao Luang National Park in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, Ramkhamheng - Khao Luang National Park in Sukothai Province, Doi Khuntan National Park in Lamphun and Lampang Province, Doi Suthep - Doi Pui (ดอยสุเทพ - ดอยปุย) National Park in Chiang Mai Province, Khao Kitchakook (เขาคิชฌกูฏ) National Park in Chanthaburi Province, Khao Pu - Khao - Ya National Park : Trang, Patalung and Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. Some of them display diverse and unique ecological systems such as Chiang Dao (เชียงใหม่) National Park in Chiang Mai Province.

When a mountain was identified as a sacred site, its natural resources became a part of the system of the sacred mountain of Sumeru, resulting in the emergence of rules to manage the use of land and water, and farming. These rules had so much influence on the behaviour and interaction of people within the society that they, along with the traditional beliefs, became part of the sacred cultural system.

Sacred natural mountains in Thailand are places where natural and cultural diversity can reinforce each other.¹⁰ The sacred natural mountain can be categorized as the sacred cultural landscape which is the expression of traditional beliefs and land management systems of local communities. Understanding the links between nature and culture is important for safeguarding both natural and cultural diversity as it helps to bring culture and nature closer together in a comprehensive approach.¹¹

⁸ See UNESCO-MAB. (2006). *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*. Paris: UNESCO.

⁹ Schaaf, T. (2006). Linking cultural and biological diversity: the UNESCO-MAB approach. In UNESCO-MAB (Ed.), *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*. Paris: UNESCO. p.13

¹⁰ See UNESCO-MAB. (2006). *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*. Paris: UNESCO.

¹¹ UNESCO-MAB. (2006). *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*. Paris: UNESCO. p. 11

4.1.4 The present Sacred Mountain and Natural Sacred Place

The notion of nature being sacred indicates an acceptance of supernatural power. It also implies that nature owns and controls all common property. This belief is evidenced in ghost or spirit worshipping ceremonies, which aim to show people's acceptance to such power. These ceremonies are noticeable throughout Thailand. Spirit worshipping ceremonies, for example, are common in the northern and the north-eastern regions while the southerners believe that forests, rivers and canals belong to God or Allah (human beings are only users of these natural resources). In central Thailand, it is believed that everything is public property. For instance, the old Thai law named 'Tra Samduang' (กฎหมายตราสามดวง) gives ultimate power over the entire kingdom to the king. All property in the state belongs to the king. People are allowed to use it but have no right of ownership. This kind of natural resource management is a tradition, called 'Jareet' in Thai. To reinforce the tradition, there must be a higher power, which is respected by the public. In ancient times, when democracy was unknown in the Siamese kingdom, it was the supernatural power, or the principle of the sacred mountain, that gave rise to the system governing society.

Nowadays, there is a change in the way people perceive the sacredness of nature. The mountain is considered sacred when it is home to Phra That (พระธาตุ) or Buddhist shrines. This perception is the result of a long association between nature worship and Buddhism, coupled with a change in people's lifestyle and attitudes. In this study, it was found that mountains are no longer considered sacred. Human beings seem to have taken control of nature, be it mountains, forests or sources of water. The principle of Mount Sumeru has been eroded by modern irrigation systems without fully understanding their impact on nature and culture, leading to many problems.

Nowadays, many of the old sacred places have changed from being spiritual centres to being places catering to worldly desires, or simply to being tourist attractions. The sacred summit of Doi Luang Chiang Dao, for example, is now a place where mountain-climbing competitions are held. Chiang Dao cave has become a tourist attraction. It now can be accessed by road and there is a plan to build a cable-car to carry tourists to the summit. In Sukhothai Province, Khao Luang has been transformed from a sacred mountain to a national park, welcoming tourists who seek recreational activities. The holy pond of Nong Harn in Sakhon Nakhon Province is now a part of a public park. Dams (Seed-phong), ponds (Traphang), pools and Barais in Sukhothai that once contained holy water from Khao Luang, are used by locals during the Loi Krathong festival.

These changes may lead in the wrong direction or the right direction but at least they show that the lifestyle, the thinking, the perspectives and the paradigms of people nowadays are totally different from those of people in the past. The relationship between nature and people has largely been lost. The old belief of the power of nature over people has been reversed to a belief that people can manipulate nature. Nowadays many people tend to look at nature as something separate from them, as a commodity

to be used for their own material gain, and as something whose interests are subordinate to their own. Consequently, the idea that human beings are part of nature, everything is a microcosm of the macrocosm no longer applies.

4.2 Sacred Mountain and Ritual

Ritual is an established form of ceremony. It is an act or series of acts repeated regularly in a set and precise manner¹². In Thai culture, the Mount Sumeru principle always appears in various kinds of rituals ranging from complex and mystifying royal ceremonies to local rites performed by villagers. These rituals can be influenced by different faiths, including Buddhism, Hinduism and animism. They can be held for both auspicious and inauspicious events. The function of a ritual is to establish a connection with the other world and then to communicate with it. The connection between the three cosmic stages is discernible from the name of the ritual or the name of the place where it is performed.¹³ The cosmogonic value lies in the form and direction that the ritual takes, and in the construction of sacred space. This is because the place where the ritual is held is a fixed point and a centre that is projected as the point at which the world was created.

Rituals help maintain the structure of the social system. They can spiritually unify people of different ages, gender and social class and assist them in dealing with change during difficult times such as illness, dangers and hazards, such as those attached to long journeys and wars. These rituals are part and parcel of the traditional social system.¹⁴ In a complex society, rituals can be a reflection of differences and conflicts between those in power and various other groups of people. They can also provide the inspiration that leads to social revolution or to a change in the status of a group¹⁵.

For purposes of this dissertation, ritual is regarded as a merger between the philosophy and the practice of helping people from all walks of life to gain wisdom - depending on their intellect - and fulfil their desires. The rituals relating to different stages of life from birth to death bring people to the realization that life is nothing but suffering and striving for survival. Life is suffering because nothing is permanent. Everyone has to confront birth, aging, sickness, death, happiness, unhappiness, praise, criticism, and the acquisition and loss of possessions and position. Ritual is a religious

¹² ritual. (2009). Based on definition in *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved June 23, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ritual>

¹³ Eliade, M., 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York A Harvest Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p. 27-29.

¹⁴ Meanings of ritual summary from B. Malinowski, A.R. Radcliffe Brown, and Victor Turner. See more details in Bronislaw Malinowski. *Magic, Science and Religion*, MA: Beacon. 1948. A.R. Radcliffe Brown. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. London: Cohen & West. 1952. and Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York : Cornell University Press.1969.

¹⁵ See more details in J. Comaroff. *Body of power, Spirit of Resistance: the Cultural and History of a South African people*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1985.

puzzle that helps people of low intellect to realise the impermanence of life and round of rebirth and to understand that people can be released from the chain of suffering only at the end of the cycle of rebirth.

4.2.1 Sacred Ritual in Thailand

In Thailand, there is a variety of sacred rituals performed throughout the year. They can be divided into royal rituals and local rituals. According to historical evidence, royal rituals in Thailand were originally derived from Hinduism. Hinduism, however, only reached this country after passing through the Khmer civilization. The Khmers modified the Hindu rituals to fit in with their own beliefs. When Thais adopted these modified rituals, they in turn also changed them to suit their way of thinking. In royal rituals, the king served as a link between humans and the sacred power of the gods. The king was highly regarded as the creator and the facilitator of public services that would guarantee the prosperity of the kingdom.¹⁶ Thus, royal rituals were aimed at generating wealth for the state which would, in turn, contribute to social and spiritual peace and goodwill. In the case of ordinary people, rituals brought about social interaction in the community, provided moral support, and encouraged good social order and harmonious co-existence.

Both royal and local rituals can be classified under (a.) Life Rituals such as wedding ceremonies and funerals (b.) Seasonal Rituals such as the Thavatha Tosamat Ceremony (monthly rituals - พระราชพิธีสิบสองเดือน) and the Royal Ploughing Ceremony (พระราชพิธีพืชมงคลจรดพระนังคัลแรกนาขวัญ). (c.) Status-Changing Rituals such as coronations, the Tham Kwan Doun (ทำขวัญเดือน) ceremony and the Khon Juk (โขนจุก) ceremony. (See Appendix: List of Thai Rituals, Ceremonies)

The purpose of sacred rituals is to reinforce the notion of the ongoing rounds of rebirth of the world, nature and human beings. Sacred rituals see everything in the world and the universe as a cycle of life and rebirth, for example, the cycle of night and day and the cycle of the seasons. These concurrent cycles are interconnected. Thus the cycle of rebirth in the sky – involving the sun, the moon and the stars – connects with the cycle of the seasons, and both connect with the life cycle of plants. These cycles are then related to human life through, for example, agricultural ceremonies, fertility ceremonies, New Year ceremonies, and seasonal ceremonies such as the Thava-tha Tosamat Ceremony (monthly rituals) (พระราชพิธีทวาทศมาส) and the Royal Ploughing Ceremony (พระราชพิธีพืชมงคลจรดพระนังคัลแรกนาขวัญ). The rituals thus teach that that everything has a recurrent cycle of existence or round of rebirth.

¹⁶ D.G.E. Hall. (2006). *A History of South-East Asia*, Chanwit Kasetsiri (Ed), Bangkok: The Foundation for the promotion of Social Sciences and the Humanities Textbooks Project, p.138.

The idea behind people participating in rituals is that human life goes through different stages, from birth to death. Each stage, which occurs when the time is ripe, marks the start of a new cycle or rebirth. There are thus a series of rituals dealing with different aspects of the cycle of life. For example, these rituals include the Tham Kwan Doun ceremony (baby welcoming ceremony--พิธีทำขวัญเดือน), the Khon Juk ceremony (hair-cutting ceremony for children--พิธีโกนจุก), the ordination ceremony for monks, the wedding ceremony and the funeral. Some ceremonies, such as a coronation, relate to a change in the status of people. Some are tied to the concept of reincarnation or rebirth. For instance, the Bhramin ceremony called ‘Phi Thi Krob Kru’ (พิธีครอบครุ) involves the use of the “Yat Yo Pa Weet” (ยัชโยปวีต) string to mark a rebirth or a new life. The Bhramin word “Tawicha” (ทวิชะ) means a person who is born twice, or reborn.¹⁷ The Naga tug-of-war ceremony or ‘Phi Thi Chak Nak Dukdumban’ (พิธีชกนาคตีกลด่าบรรพและกวนเกษียรสมุทร) - which is based on one episode of the Hindu epic called the Churning of the Ocean of Milk - imitates the origin of the universe, signalling a transition to a new era after the collapse of the kingdom.

4.2.2 Significance of Sacred Mountain in Thai Ritual

The symbols of the sacred mountain found in rituals can take the form of tangible objects such as the lay out, positions of the arts objects, decorations, the reactions of the participants, shared activities, incidents as well as the utilisation of the sacred area. The symbols used in sacred rituals are Mount Sumeru, the residence of the gods at the top of Mount Sumeru, the water from Mount Sumeru, the Four Continents, mystical animals on the worldly plane, Sithundorn Ocean and the wall of the universe. They are still related to the idea of microcosm and macrocosm. Even though they are not the essence of the rituals, they serve as a medium that makes people aware of their status, duty, rights and proper behaviour in society.

An elaborate reproduction of the Mount Sumeru system is evident in most royal ceremonies. The reproduction does not depict only Mount Sumeru but the entire universe. This much is shown in the location, layout and axis, and in other elements connected with the ceremonial area, including all artifacts, tools, accessories, and even people.

¹⁷ Satiane-koket and Nakpratheep, Friends’ Cults ,cited in Ranee Lertleumsai. (2001), *Fah-Kwan-Muang, Original Views of Thais on the Uniniverse: A-Hom Ancient Thai Book*, Bangkok: Vitheetthat Project. p 60.



Figure 30 : Mount Sumeru in royal and local Thai Ritual

A particular place of sacred ritual is usually held on the open area in front of the Royal Palace. Nowadays, in the present Rattanakosin era, the sacred rituals are usually held on a piece of land called Sanam Luang, in front of the Grand Palace in Bangkok. This area, just to the north of the Grand Palace, is well-known as the royal ceremonial area. An inspection of a ceremonial plan reveals a replica in miniature of the universe. For example, Mount Sumeru – regarded as the centre of the universe – is positioned in Sanam Luang. The Grand Place represents the Jambudvipa Continent, which is to the south of Mount Sumeru. The royal ceremonies which take place on the basis of such a plan are Phi Thi Chak Nak Dukdumban (พิธีชัคนาคติกตำบรرف) and Phra Ratcha Phithi Oak-phrameru (พระราชพิธีออกพระเมรุ).

In addition, some royal ceremonies focus on the main spiritual element of the ritual. The Bathing Ceremony (พระราชพิธีลงทรง), for example, involves the construction of a symbol of Mount Sumeru in the middle of the Chao Phraya River to show the

importance of holy water. It implies that the holy water flowing from Mount Sumeru nourishes the world. This holy water supports all life forms in the world and possesses a quality that can transform and uplift people spiritually.

A miniature reproduction of the topography of Mount Sumeru is often seen in royal ceremonies. Examples of ceremonies of this kind are Phra Ratcha Phithi Oak-phrameru (พระราชพิธีออกพระเมรุ) and Phra Raja Phithi Sokhan¹⁸ (พระราชพิธีโสกันต์)- the latter concerns the transmission of the status of the king's children to higher positions or high-ranking Devas.



Figure 31 : the cosmological model of Mount Sumeru in Phra Raja Phithi Sokhan (พระราชพิธีโสกันต์)

In Phra Raja Phithi Sokhan, there is the cosmological model of Mount Sumeru system or Mount Kailas in Brahman. On the top of Mount Sumeru consisted of the pavilion or a “busbok”(บุษบก -- a small replica of a mondop) that enshrined an image of Shiva that represent the king of the universe. Surrounding the mount consisted of various cosmological symbol, four busbok at the corner represent the four continents, water signifies the holy water from Mount Sumeru, fabulous animals, birds, and trees signifies the Himmapan (หิมพานต์) forest.

The prince was dressed his hair into five knots after the cosmography: the top middle knot signified Mount Sumeru and four signified the four continents. The king then cut the hair knots and poured

¹⁸ Historical evidence shows that a grand reproduction of Mount Sumeru was staged for Prince Chao Fa Maha Vachi Runahit during the Phra Racha Phithi Sogun ceremony in 1890 A.D.

lustral water. Thereafter he was led to bathe at the Mount Krailas. The prince received his official name engraved upon a golden leaf, crown as well as regalia that all signified Mount Sumeru cosmology and represent the new status as the son of the king of Mount Sumeru.

Apart from to the topographical plan, various elements that feature in the ceremonies come from the *principle of Mount Sumeru*. These include artefacts, accessories, the reaction of participants, shared activities and incidents. Examples of these elements are costumes, ornaments, royal vehicles, personal possessions of the king, representations of decorated mythical animals from the Himmapaan forest from the Himmapaan forest, and the nine-level royal parasol (Phra Maha Sawedha Chat), which symbolises kingship. The ceremonies focus on small elements of the grand ritual. They attempt to make people acknowledge and accept their place, duty and rights in society. They also unify people of the same origin, revitalise moral support and demonstrate the rebirth of galaxies and the great universe.

In local rituals, the symbols of the universe and Mount Sumeru are made from natural materials such as trees, banana leaves, paper and woven bamboo. Lay people pay a lot of attention to the making of these symbols, which are indispensable in some important rituals. The symbols take the form of paper parasols and banana leaf parasols - used to represent the basic Mount Sumeru system i.e. the mountain and the ocean. The water or the holy water (Nam Phra Phutta Mon) signifies the water from Mount Sumeru. The clockwise procession (Deuan Prataksin) around a stupa or an ordination hall in a temple symbolises the course of water that flows around Mount Sumeru – it is also a sign of birth and growth. The procession itself shows respect for the east which, according to Buddhism, is an auspicious direction. In some ceremonies, such as the funeral ceremony, people carry the coffin anti-clockwise around the crematorium, indicating a return to the summit of Mount Sumeru.

4.2.3 Values of Sacred Mountain in Sacred Ritual

All sacred ritual in Thai culture must have some elements, decorations, arts, craft from some parts of Mount Sumeru. It can be said that there is no ritual in Thai culture that is not related to the Mount Sumeru principle. In these rituals or ceremonies, Mount Sumeru is often represented by different types of symbols.

The symbols of Mount Sumeru that are used in rituals are to be found at all levels of society. A variety of items, from rural craftwork in an ordinary house to works of art in a royal palace (regalia, ceremonial offering, decorative headwear, etc.), contain such symbols. This behavior is not meant to be appreciated in a worldly sense but is rather intended to serve as a link with the spiritual world. In the same way, rituals are created to lift people from the mundane world to the celestial kingdom, in

the process giving them a complete explanation about the universe and showing them that everything becomes unified into one.¹⁹

Social Dimension: From a social perspective, sacred rituals in Thailand are a reflection of religious faith, of social principles with an underlying message, and of the social class system.²⁰ The rituals, with their symbols of Mount Sumeru, are intended to demonstrate, amongst other things, the repeated rounds of rebirth. They are also intended to guide society towards social and spiritual reform.

Community Dimension: From a more restricted community perspective, the rituals, with their symbols of Mount Sumeru bring about a sense of belonging and the realisation of unity through a common ancestry and a common destiny. The symbols in themselves may not help ordinary people gain the high levels of wisdom that would lead to an understanding of ultimate truth. However, the symbolic, understandable rituals²¹ and other means, such as legends and fables about Mount Sumeru, may help them realise the truth about Samsara (the rounds of rebirth) and encourage them to aspire to the highest levels of wisdom, as in the ending of those legends and fables.

Community life is manifested in customs, ceremonies, games and different kinds of traditional beliefs, according to their ethnicity. Local rituals depict life in a community. As intimated above, rituals and their symbols are crucial to the existence of the society²² and helpful in encouraging people to uphold proper standards of morality.

Individual Dimension: To the casual onlooker, the participants in rituals may appear obsessed with superstition. However, religious ceremonies can prove beneficial when they are performed with the right attitude and with constant mindfulness. They can be regarded as a way of practicing ‘right mindfulness,’ because they focus on the present moment. That could ultimately lead to a proper understanding of life and the interconnectedness of the universe²³ or - if performed with respect, humility and selflessness – it could at least help the participants to train their minds in the right direction.

¹⁹ Paraphrased from John Len. (2005). *The Living Tree: Art and the Sacred*, UK: Green Books.

²⁰ Paritta Koanandakul, (2003). The Sacred World and the Secular World on Living in a Society, in *Chao Mae, Khun Phu, Chang Sor, Chang Forn and Other Stories about Rituals and Dramatic Performances* ed P. A. Koanandakul. Bangkok: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre.

²¹ John Fox, founder of Welfare State International. See more details in *Engineers of the Imagination*, ed. Tony Coult and Baz Kershaw (Methuen, 1983) cited in John, L. (2005). *The Living Tree* (K. Sodsai, Trans.). Bangkok: Foundation For Children Publishing House.

²² Emile Durkheim cited in Paritta Koanandakul, (2003). The Sacred World and the Secular World on Living in a Society, in *Chao Mae, Khun Phu, Chang Sor, Chang Forn and Other Stories about Rituals and Dramatic Performances* ed P. A. Koanandakul. Bangkok: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre.

²³ Paraphrased from John, L. (2005). *The Living Tree* (K. Sodsai, Trans.). Bangkok: Foundation For Children Publishing House.

4.2.4 Sacred Mountain in Sacred Ritual in the Present

Although a number of rituals imply a belief in supernatural power,²⁴ they contain the essence of Buddhist teachings, which focuses on understanding the three principles or the three gems in Buddhism (the Buddha, Dhamma or his teachings, and Sangha or the monastic order), rather than on profiting from higher powers. Through the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru system, these rituals also offer an explanation about the interrelationship between nature, the world and the universe.

A factor that is crucial to the continued existence of rituals is the belief that they will bring happiness to the families of practitioners, and to their communities, and that they will ensure fertile land, protect community members from natural disasters and bring about good health.²⁵ Then again, the fact that modern life is not affected by the vicissitudes of nature as it was before, could well spell the end of rituals. Agricultural production no longer relies entirely on nature, nor entirely on human or animal labour, but rather depends heavily on machines. It is not affected by the changes of season nor by the fertility of the land, but the capital. For modern-day local people, capital is a pre-requisite for sustainable agriculture. Many would argue that rituals are no longer needed, and that it is capital and possessions that should rather be worshipped.²⁶

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

²⁴ Saichon Wannarat, (1982) p.100-102 cited in Patcharaporn C. (1987). *Buddhism and the Emergence of the Modern Thai State in the Reigns of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh*. Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. p.12

²⁵ See Panya Suriyasang, & Napapond Montong (2005). *The Research Project of Rice Rituals: focusing on the study on community rituals in Koptakian Sub-district, Cheang Kab District, Surin Province, Phase 1*. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund. Document No. RDG 47E0005. pp.91-96

²⁶ See Panya Suriyasang, & Napapond Montong (2005). *The Research Project of Rice Rituals: focusing on the study on community rituals in Koptakian Sub-district, Cheang Kab District, Surin Province, Phase 1*. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund. Document No. RDG 47E0005. pp.91-96,

Thongsuk Thatinchan, Supat Thawanna, & (2003). Project to reinforce capacity in communities through the use of traditions: *Case Study of Ban Pa Pai Sub-district, Doi Saket District, Chiang Mai Province*. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund. Document No. RDG44N0061. p.100-102, and

Pathipan, A. (2004). *Appropriate Festivals and Rituals in Modern Times: Case Study of Aka Community, Ban San Chareon Kaw, Wawi Sub-district, Mae Saruay District, Chiang Rai Province*. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund. Document No. RDG47N0059. p.45-58, 156-162



The ritual of Jatukam (จตุคามรุ่น "รอยลัดฟ้ามาเหนือเมฆ") consecrate ritual (Figure by Krabi Public Relations Office)



The ritual of Jatukam consecrate ritual (Figure from Matchon Newspaper 2007/07/17)



Ritual at Khao Kichakut (เขาคิชกูฏ) (Figure from Blog_ <http://chitasangvaro.multiply.com/photosalbum77#1>)

Figure 32 : The principle of Mount Sumeru in secular material possessions in Thailand at the present day

Nowadays, some rituals are still practised but they have been extensively modified and mixed with ceremonies from other areas. These rituals are costly and devoid of their real essence. Nobody seems to know the real significance of the system of the universe and the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru, in rituals. These rituals thus tend to focus on form and not substance. The objective of the rituals has changed from helping people to gain wisdom and understand the truth about nature, to helping people achieve worldly happiness, unwholesome ambitions and material gain. The rituals have thus, in effect, become materialistically orientated worshipping ceremonies. These altered objectives essentially bolster the egos of the participants and are not related to the true essence of the rituals. Several royal ceremonies are still held to show that the king can be compared to a deity, the god Vishnu, the god Indra, Buddha, a noble man, a creator of life and a guardian of the world. Ordinary people are not in a position to assume these roles. However, this is not a matter of concern for many people, nowadays. Most of them perform the rituals hoping to gain wealth or material possessions. As intimated above, the majority of local rituals do not aim at

creating an awareness of unification but concentrate on promoting tourism, business and financial benefits.

These days many rituals performed only affirm people's ignorance about reality. It is possible that most labour under an illusion about the ultimate truth. Such ignorance and wrong views would certainly preclude them from knowing the real intention of sacred rituals and the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru.

4.3 Sacred Mountain and Sacred State

The capital city is the political, economic and cultural centre of the kingdom. The capital cities in Thailand are not only the seat of government but also their kingdom's sacred centre. This sacredness results from the city being founded on the cosmology of Mount Sumeru. Thus, the capital was established as the universe. The king is perceived to be the ruler of the universe, which consists of minor universes or colonies with city plans, architecture, houses, tools, artifacts, natural resources, mountains, trees, rivers, people and animals. All of these are components of a sacred city.

— According to the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru, the course of human life is related to the power of nature, which is influenced by the power of the universe, positions and stars. *This power can bring happiness and prosperity, or disaster, to human beings. This depends on the ability of a person or a group or a government to manage their life or activities – as the case may be – in harmony with the universe*²⁷. According to the Thai way of thinking, harmony between the state and the universe could be brought about by fashioning the state as a microcosm of the universe.

Then the state becomes the universe in miniature with 'Mount Sumeru' as the capital. In the beginning, natural mountains were often chosen as a representation of Mount Sumeru, which meant that the capital city might be located geographically in the middle of the specific kingdom, or elsewhere, as long as it was strategically near the centre of the sacred place.

In Southeast Asia, this characteristic is evident in cities like Phra Nakhon City, Yasotharapura City in Cambodia, and Srikaset City (formerly known as Prae City) in Burma.

Yasotharapura City, in particular, is a fine example. It is square-shaped, two-and-a-half miles long on each side, and features a sandstone hill called Phnom Bakeng at the heart of the city. One of the scriptures found in the stone temple on the summit of the hill states that Mount Sumeru is "as beautiful as the king of mountains".

Angkor Thom is another example. King Jayavarman VII, the founder of Angkor Thom city, was a Buddhist of the Mahayana school. Hence, the city was built as a Buddhist kingdom in accordance with Mahayana ideals. The Bayon temple at the

²⁷ Heine-Gelden, R. (1968). *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*. New York Cornell University.

centre of the city symbolised the “mountain” and it became the Buddhist sanctuary where the big statue of Amitabha Buddha was enshrined. The faces previously carved around its stupas were probably refashioned to depict the likeness of Awalokiteswara Bodhisattwa (พระโพธิสัตว์อวโลกิเตศวร). Built to face one of the four points of compass, the city wall was surrounded by a moat and accessed by a causeway. According to local belief, the city moat represented the ocean while the stone temple of Bayon represented Mount Sumeru. Strategically, the moat served as the city’s defence. The representation of the world realm in Angkor Thom city shows in sculpted stone statues of divinities and demons lining both sides of the causeway (a row of divinities on the left and a row of demons (or Asura) on the right).²⁸ Based on the mythology of the Churning of the Ocean²⁹, they both hold the serpent king Naga, who wraps himself around the mountain, on the opposite ends. These statues imply that the moat is the symbol of the ocean and the Bayon temple represents Mount Sumeru.

The governmental structure of the sacred state also appeared to agree with the different planes of existence inherent in the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru. This is shown in the number and positions of its colonial outposts. Architecturally, the physical arrangement of the city is modelled on the structure of the universe, displaying different layers of the universe and its overlapping galaxies. It also depicts ceremonies involving the establishment of the kingdom, the state, the capital city and other elements, including human beings. These are parts of the cosmic and sacred system according to the principle of Mount Sumeru.

²⁸ Heine-Gelden, R. (1968). *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*. New York Cornell University.

²⁹ According to the old mythology, demons use Mount Mandara as a churning tool. However, in the Southeast Asian version, Mount Mandara was often interpreted as Mount Sumeru.



Vastu Purusha Mandala

(Figure from : Sashikala Anath. (1988). *The Penguin Guide to Vastu*. New Delhi : Penguin Books. p.92)



Figure 33. Mandala and the Layout of Sacred City (Figure from Vitul Leawrungreang)

Another example of the sacred state that adopted this principle is the Burmese kingdom. Both the capital and the entire kingdom of the Burmese are a replica of the heaven realm of the God Indra. For instance, Srikaset (ศรีเกษตฺร), formerly known as Prea city, was the capital of the Pyu ethnic group. The city was built to replicate the “Suthat” (สุทฺถตฺน) city of the God Indra on the summit of Mount Sumeru. A golden palace was once situated in the middle of the city and surrounded by 32 gates. The city ruins indicate that there was an attempt to build the city in a circular shape but the line did not meet. Each of the 32 city gates faced its outpost or colonial kingdom – it was tradition to have 32 governors in 32 colonial cities ruled by one king whose administration was based in the centre of the kingdom. The 32 governors and the king correspond with the 32 divinities who live on Mount Sumeru and have the God Indra as ruler.

Other Burmese cities after this period had a square shape, rather than a round shape, and kept the same principle. Mandalay, for example, was the last capital with this characteristic. Founded by King Mindon in 1847, its innermost city had a square wall surrounded by a moat, with each side facing one of the four points of the compass. Each side of the city wall had three gates, altogether twelve gates, to represent the twelve animal zodiac signs. Located at the middle of the inner city, the royal palace with its seven-tiered roof and throne hall was the symbol of Mount Sumeru. The worldly roles of the Burmese kings are known through custom and

architecture For example, the king was duty bound to have four wives and four concubines, whose royal names were “the royal wife of the northern palace”, “the royal wife of the western palace”, “the royal wife of the southern palace”, “the royal wife of the north-eastern palace”, “the royal wife of the north-western palace” and so on - based on the four cardinal points and the four secondary directions. The sites of the royal residences of these wives, encircling the main palace, indicate the status of the king as the centre of the universe and a representation of the God Indra. All of these things indicate an intention to create a replica of heaven where the heavenly mountain is surrounded by a scattering of stars.

4.3.1 Sacred State in Thailand

Attitudes towards the state and the monarchy in Thailand are anchored in the Buddhist principle of Mount Sumeru. The oldest Buddhist scripture about the state and the kingdom’s administration appeared in the Sutta Canon, Akkanya Sutta Commentary, Tika Nikaya³⁰. This later became a source of reference for other pieces of religious literature, including the Triphum from which the principle of Mount Sumeru in Thailand originated.³¹

The adoption of the principle of Mount Sumeru in the founding of Thai capitals most likely came from the Khmers (Cambodians) who obtained it from India. Thais, however, did not fully embrace this ideal and neither did the Khmers, who blended it with their local customs. For Thais, the principle of Mount Sumeru was adapted to suit their culture, ways of thinking and, particularly, flexible life-styles. There is evidence of this in the structure of the old cities in Thailand, which differ from those in Cambodia. Other principles concerning the layout of the city - adopted from Burma, Mons and Sri Lanka - have also been modified in this manner. Therefore, these ideals of foreign kingdoms were only partially accepted, and then fused with local attitudes of Thai people towards the sacred space. This resulted in the emergence of the Thai version of the principle for the establishment of the sacred city.

Sacred Settlement

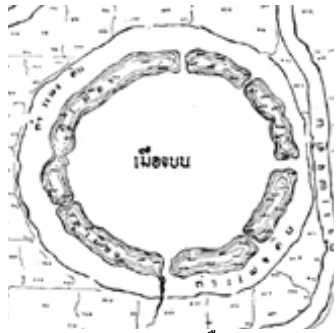
Archeological finds from various areas in northeastern Thailand show that villages were built on a circular plan or round village. This is similar to the circular plan evident in the round –shaped city of the Pyu in Burma, and in some cities in India and Tibet that have a sacred centre. However, in terms of its functionality, this circular-shaped city plan might have been the most practical option and, in this case, it could have been inherited for many generations until it eventually became the sacred

³⁰ The Sutta Pitaka, Vol. 3, Digha Nikaya, Patika Vagga – 4 Akkanya Sutta.

³¹ See the details in Chapter 3.1

form. It can be said that, geographically, the mountains serve as a natural protection and are the source of natural resources. In a circular-shaped city, every area is an equal distance from the centre, providing good coverage for the protection of the city. The moat collected water from the mountain for the community within the city. The structures in the city were arranged in a hierarchical order, starting from the sacred place at the centre followed by the royal palace, the residences of the ruling class, the homes of commoners with a scattering of religious shrines in-between, farms and rice fields for villagers at the edge of the forest, and the forest at the end of the city, which was also the forbidden area.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์



Muang Bon (เมืองบน)



Muang Supanburi (เมืองสุพรรณบุรี)



Muang U-Thong
(อุทัย)



Muang Srithep (เมืองศรีเทพ)



Muang Lampoon (ลำพูน)



Pimai (พิมาย)



Muang Nong Han Luang (เมืองหนองหารหลวง)

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

Figure 34 : Ancient Sacred Settlement in Thailand in circular, oval and rectangular shape (www.sujitwongthes.com/2009/04/kokmaiden290409/, http://www.sakonnakhon.go.th/tour/nhonghan.htm) and Srisak Wanlipodom. (1997). Thai Cities. Bangkok: Muang Boran

This town planning model was passed on for generations, and it became traditional to use it when building a new city. Later it was combined with the principle of Mount Sumeru, resulting in the adopted model for the establishment of the sacred city.

Sacred Cities

After the town planning model had become so popular that it was combined with the principle of the sacred city, it gave rise to other forms of town planning, for example, the conch-shaped cities in Lumphun province, the city of Kelang Nakhon and Prae province, and the square-shaped cities in Chiang Mai province and Sukhothai province.

Sacred State

Later, when the Khmer kingdom began to lose power, other kingdoms like the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya and the Burmese state of Bagan (Pagan) established themselves as regional centres. The Ayutthaya kingdom brought with it the traditional plan for the construction of the capital city, along with the royal ceremonies from formerly glorious kingdoms like the Khmer, Dvaravati and Lawo kingdoms, and adapted them to accord with local custom at that time. As a result, it created its own jurisdictional system and principles based on the sacred centre of the kingdom.

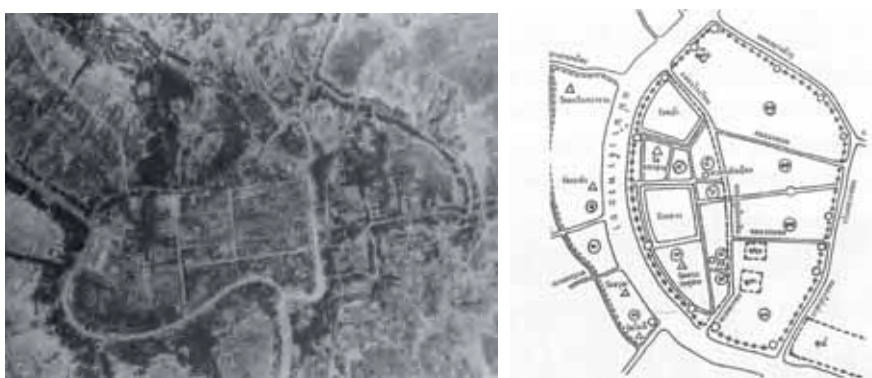


Figure 35 : Sacred State of Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin

During that time, Ayutthaya's prosperity was well known in countries like China and India, as well as in Europe³². Its city plan depicted an island in the middle of the river. The city included temples, and also palaces, which were the focal point of the city according to the principle of Mount Sumeru. The middle of the city, which represented Mount Sumeru, was the most sacred place. It was the area where the royal palace was located. Protected by a rectangular wall, the royal palace comprised a group of wooden stilt houses used as the king's residence, as offices, and for royal ceremonies. Next to the main section of the royal palace were the secondary areas. For example, the area on the eastern side was the residence of the heir to the throne while the section on the western side was the dwelling place of other members of the royal family. The southern part of the royal palace was reserved for government officials – residents in this area were comparable to people living in the Jambudvipa continent to the south of Mount Sumeru.

It should be noted that the principle of Mount Sumeru was fairly flexible during the Ayutthaya period. This can be seen in the city plan and the positions of the structures, which were probably more functional than strictly following the rules. However, the principle of Mount Sumeru dominated much of the Ayutthaya period and lasted until the early Rattanakosin era. Much of present-day knowledge relating to the location and the geographical characteristics of the two kingdoms was derived from this principle.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

³² A piece of old evidence that confirms the recognition of the Ayutthaya Kingdom by Europeans can be seen in a world map by an Italian man named Bernard Sylvanus. The map was published in 1512 A.D., which is during the reign of King Ramathibodi II. The name that identifies the location of Ayutthaya, appears in Latin as "Aurea Regio", which means "the Golden Land" (แผ่นดินทอง). The kingdom was always mentioned in maps and journals of Europeans. For example, a world map published in Europe during the 20th – 21st century B.C. (15th – 16th century A.D.), shows the location of the Siamese Kingdom with Ayutthaya as the capital. The gold painted area was stated in Latin as "Aurea Chersonesus", which means "the Golden Peninsula" (แหลมทอง). Ayutthaya was given different names such as Iudia, Odia (โอเดีย), Ayothia (อโยเชีย) and Yuthaya (ยูทยา), according to the pronunciation of each country.



Ayutthaya area and other cities (Pechaburi, Pran, Thalang, Nokhon Srithammarat, Parid, Thawai, Pataleebut , [and] etc). They are islands that are accessible by water transport.



An old map showing the location of the city. The Jambudvipa continent is in the middle. The square around it is the city and its surrounding islands. The land is aided by water and wind.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

Figure 36 : Ancient Map of Cities under the influence of Mount Sumeru cosmology (--, (2009), Triphum Album : Ayadaya and Thonburi Version, Bangkok: --, picture 38, 54)

This knowledge relates, for example, to the way in which town plan was drawn up, showing the city of Ayutthaya and the nearby areas as islands in the middle of the water surrounding the Jambudvipa continent. (See Figure 40) The same principle is also found in the cities of Lumphun and Chiang Mai in northern Thailand where local people believed their cities were oceanic islands. It is also evidenced in their old tradition that involves sending items to their relatives in Burma by floating them down the river.

Divine King

The quality of the sacred state is most apparent when the principle of Mount Sumeru results in God-king and Buddha-king systems of government. In these systems, the king is perceived as the ‘divinity’ or ‘Deva’, the ‘enlightened human’ or ‘Buddha’, the “ruler of life” and the “Chakra Bhadisorn” or universal monarch”³³.

³³ Chitr Phumisak. (2004). Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p. 28.

In the God-king system of government, the king attempts to establish himself as a ‘divinity’.³⁴ Presumably, this system, which had been adopted in Thai kingdoms for centuries, was influenced by the Khmer royalty. King Jayavarman II of the Khmer kingdom and a Brahman priest named Sivakaiwan conducted a religious ritual known as the rite of the “Devaraja”. The rite ensconced the king as the supreme ruler of the land who unified the country. This ritual might be derived from the Silendra dynasty in Java, Indonesia.

Devaraja is one of the religious ceremonies aimed at worshipping the supreme god, Shiva. Its purpose is to declare the king as “Chakravartin” or “universal monarch” who reigns supreme in the world. Later, when Mahayana Buddhism spread to the Khmer empire during the reign of King Jayavarman VII, the Devaraja devotees converted to “Buddharaja”³⁵ or the Buddharaj order, which established the king as Buddha³⁶. The rise of Mahayanistic in Cambodia brought about no great reaction against the cult of the Royal God (Devaraja).³⁷ At that time, the Khmer empire was the most powerful in the region and ruled several states (including Mon, Dvaravati, Malay and Tambaling³⁸ in the south, the Mekhong basin area up to Chiang Saen,³⁹ the Chao Phraya basin area up to the Pagan Kingdom and the Karahi state in the eastern Malay peninsula, and the Champa kingdom⁴⁰ in the west. Consequently, it helped spread the Devaraja and Buddharaj cults over Southeast Asia.

The God-king and the Buddha-king communities first arrived in the Suvarnnbhumi state (the present area of Thailand) and their presence there became conspicuous at the beginning of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, when its capital was strategically founded in a well-chosen location based on the principles of the God-king system.⁴¹ The two communities, which were influenced by the principle of Mount

³⁴ Chitr Phumisak. (2004). *Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River*, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p. 14

³⁵ D.G.E. Hall. (2006). *A History of South-East Asia*, Chanwit Kasetsiri (Ed), Bangkok: The Foundation for the promotion of Social Sciences and the Humanities Textbooks Project, p.124.

Chitr Phumisak. (2004). *Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River*, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p. 14, 20.

³⁶ See more details in Chitr Phumisak. (2004). *Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River*, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p. 14.

³⁷ H.G.Quaritch Wales.(1992). *Siamese State Ceremonies*, --: Curzon Press. p.30.

³⁸ The Annals of Chiang Mai (พงศาวดารเชียงใหม่) cited in D.G.E. Hall. (2006). *A History of South-East Asia*, Chanwit Kasetsiri (Ed), Bangkok: The Foundation for the promotion of Social Sciences and the Humanities Textbooks Project, p.117.

³⁹ In Jayavarman I, see more details in the Local Annals and Jitr Phumisak. (2001). *The Linguistic Backgrounds of Thai, Lao and Khmer and the Characteristics of Nationalist Society (complete issue) with an addition of information about the Khmer Ethnicity* (5th ed.). Bangkok: Siam.

⁴⁰ The Annals of Song Dynasty (พงศาวดารราชวงศ์ซ้อง) cited in D.G.E. Hall. (2006). *A History of South-East Asia*, Chanwit Kasetsiri (Ed), Bangkok: The Foundation for the promotion of Social Sciences and the Humanities Textbooks Project, p.117.

⁴¹ Chitr Phumisak. (2004). *Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River*, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p.23, 24.

Sumeru, dominated various aspects of royal affairs of the Ayutthaya dynasty, from the names of the capital and the name of the king to the laws. The god kings of the Ayutthaya dynasty also formed their cosmological governments that consisted of a number of government officials with assigned roles in compliance with the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru. Some of the government positions known in this era were ‘Chatusadom 4’ or the four ministers, which were the same as the four great devas (deities) in the heaven realm of Catummaharajika (the protectors of the four cardinal points in Buddhist cosmology⁴²). The two groups were a primary reference of the Thai administration until the Rattanakosin period. During the reign of King Rama V, for instance, twelve ministries were set up to coincide with the 12 deities of the 12 signs of the zodiac stated in the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru.

The Buddha-king system started to play a greater role in the Ayutthaya period when the kings tried to compare themselves to Buddha. This is evidenced in their names such as “Phrabat Somdet Phrachao-ramathibodi Srisuthi-Vongsa-Ongkaburisodom Barom-Chakra-Bhatdirat Tripuwanathibes-Barombopith Phrabarom-Buddha-Chaoyuhua”⁴³ and the name “Somdet Borombopith-Phrabuddha-Chaoyuhua (สมเด็จพระบรมพิตรพระพุทธเจ้าอยู่หัว) ⁴⁴”, in which the phrase ‘*Phrabuddha-Chaoyuhua*’ (พระพุทธเจ้าอยู่หัว) was used until the Rattanakosin period. Additionally, this practice included the making of Buddha statues in the king’s costumes, which became a tradition in the Ayutthaya and the Rattanakosin dynasties. Examples of the Buddha statues made in this style are Phra Buddhayodfa-Chulalok (พระพุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลก) and Phra Buddha Loetla Nabhalai (พระพุทธเลิศหล้านภาลัย), which were commissioned by King Rama III in honor of King Rama I and II. The same tradition was also held in the Khmer empire, in which King Suryavarman II was established as Phra Borom-Pitsanulok⁴⁵ while the Chaya-Buddha-Mahanart statue⁴⁶ was built during the reign of King Jayavarman VII.

⁴² Heine-Gelden, R. (1968). *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*. New York : Cornell University.

⁴³ Miscellaneous laws (กฎหมายลักษณะเบ็ดเสร็จ) 1343 A.D. from Chitr Phumisak. (2004). *Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River*, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p. 23, 25.

⁴⁴ Slave laws (กฎหมายลักษณะทาส) 1347 A.D. from Chitr Phumisak. (2004). *Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River*, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p.25.

⁴⁵ Chitr Phumisak. (2004). *Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River*, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p. 25.

⁴⁶ King Jayavarman VII had 23 Buddha statues made to resemble his face. One of them was enshrined in the central tower of Angkor Thom. The rest were sent to 22 important colonial cities for religious worship. Some of the cities are in the Thai Kingdom, including Wimaipura (Pimai) Lawothayapura (Lawo) Suwannapura (Suphanburi), Chayarachpuri (Ratchaburi) and Wacharapura (Petchaburi).



Figure 37 : The Buddha-king.
(figure by Waranan Sowanee, Illustrate by Sayaporn Arpornthip)

In addition to the establishment of the Buddha kings, there is the position of the heir to the throne, the prince named “Somdet Phrachao Norbuddhangkul Suriyawongwse” (สมเด็จพระเจ้าหน่อพุทธางกูรสุริยวงศ์) or “Somdet Norbuddhachao” (สมเด็จพระเจ้าหน่อพุทธเจ้า), which means the direct kin of Lord Buddha or the children of the Buddha king.⁴⁷ Indeed, The God-king and the Buddha-king communities were just a part of the feudal system in the Ayutthaya kingdom. There is no evidence of them in the Sukhothai, Lanna and Lanchang kingdoms. The Sukhothai kingdom perceived their kings as a father or “Phokhun” (พ่อขุน) while the last two kingdoms respected their kings as “Phaya” (พญา) and “Chao Chiwit” (เจ้าชีวิต - the owner of lives). In Ayutthaya, the kings performed every role, including “Deva” (deity), “Buddha”, “Rajadhirach” (ราชาธิราช), “Chao Chiwit” and “Chakra Bhadisorn” (จักรพรรดิศร) or universal monarch.⁴⁸

In Thai culture, the kings are not identified with a particular god when they assume the status of a deity. A study of symbols on royal buildings reveals that the king is compared to the god Indra, who rules Trirung City and resides in Phai Chayon Grand Palace on the summit of Mount Sumeru. The king sits on a throne, which is a symbol of Mount Sumeru. He wears the Phra Maha Pichai Mongkut Crown, a symbol of the universe, to imply that he is the god Shiva and the god Vishnu in a reincarnation

⁴⁷ Chitr Phumisak. (2004). Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p. 25.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 28.

of the god Narai.⁴⁹At the same time, the king's regalia consists of Phrasaeng Vala Thulum and Phrasaeng Tri – both of them are the swords of the god Shiva - and the discus of the god Narai. He also wears Phrabaht Sheung Ngon Shoes, which are a symbol of King Rama.⁵⁰Furthermore, the king's full name implies that he is a reincarnation of gods such as Vishnu or Indra or perhaps even a reincarnation of Buddha.⁵¹.

The Buddha-king system reached its peak during the Ayutthaya period and its dominance filtered down to the current era of Rattanakosin,⁵² which implies its continued influence on the Thai system of government nowadays. Thus, the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru still plays an important role in relation to perceptions about the state. This will remain the position in Thailand, just as the monarchy will remain there, for as long as Thai people have faith in the King's virtues and are unconditionally loyal to him, who is compared to the ruler of Mount Sumeru.

4.3.2 Significance and Values of Sacred Mountain in the Sacred State

The cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru dominated the way of thinking about rulership in several kingdoms, such as Lanna, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Rattanakosin, and even the southern state of Nakhon Srithammarat, and their colonial outposts. These outposts were considered as states in the universe that had the sacred Mount Sumeru as their centre. The ruler of these states, according to the principle of the God-king group (Chakrabhatdhirat) was the king who was the central figure for other states and of the universe.

The quality of the sacred state is identified by the location, the city plan, the architecture, the establishment system of the capital, the number of colonial cities, the monarchy, the administration and the virtue of its citizens. The duty of the sacred state was shown in the actions of the king and the behaviour of its citizens.

⁴⁹ Sumet Jumsai. (1996). *Water: Origin of Thai Culture*. Bangkok: ASA. p.42

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.46

⁵¹ The names of the kings who established themselves and were established as Buddha are “Phra Bat Somdet Phrarama Thibodee Sriwisutthi Suriwongse Ongka Burisodom Barom Chakrapadirat Tripuwanat-thibet Barombopit Phrabarom Buddha Chao Youhua” (พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้ารามาริบัติ ศรีวิสุทธิสุริวงษองคบุรีโสดม บรมจักรพรรดิราช ตริภูวานาธิเบศบรมบพิตร พระบรมพุทธเจ้าอยู่หัว), “Somedet Barombopit Phra Buddha Chao Youhua” (สมเด็จพระบรมบพิตรพระพุทธเจ้าอยู่หัว), Phra Bat Somdet Phra Buddha Yod Fa Chula Lok (พระบาทสมเด็จพระพุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลกมหาราช) and Phra Bat Somdet Phra Buddha Loetla Nabhalai (พระบาทสมเด็จพระพุทธเลิศหล้านภาลัย)

⁵² Chitr Phumisak. (2004). *Ongkarnchangnam Literature and new angles on Thai history in the central plain of the Chao Phraya River*, Bangkok: Fahdiawgun, p. 28.

Sacred Mountain in the Establishment of the City and in Town Planning

The inclusion of Mount Sumeru structures in royal ceremonies and government institutions was an attempt to replicate the cosmology of Mount Sumeru, especially when creating cities and doing town planning, with the aim of sanctifying the state. The principle of Mount Sumeru was therefore vital to the establishment of cities in Southeast Asia. It can be said that the establishment of all ancient cities in Thailand was based on this principle, which was still evident until the Rattanakosin era.

Town planning during the Rattanakosin period still followed the idea of the sacred state but it was more flexible as regards the sacred location and the city's defence system. This was because the kingdom was often at war. Topographically, the Rattanakosin city (Bangkok) is not in close proximity to the mountain, which is an essential element of the sacred location. Instead, the river became a strategic element in establishing the city. Bangkok is actually encircled by the Chao Phraya River, with the royal palace as its centre. Many canals were also dug to make the royal palace and the city look like Mount Sumeru, which is surrounded by water. Besides, the town plan based defence positioning on the military practice called "Naknam", which viewed the Naga serpent as the mountain surrounded by the rivers.

The full name of the city of Rattanakosin city means the city of angels built by the god Vishanukarm.⁵³ The central area of the inner city is the palace grounds, which feature two groups of residences; namely Phra Maha Prasat and Phra Maha Monthian. Next to the palace grounds in the south are the residential areas of the queen and the princesses. The north-eastern part has been set aside for the chapel royal which contains the Emerald Buddha statue. The northern area is a large ground, which is connected to a vast open area called Sanamluang or the Royal Grounds. It is the starting point of travel for various events, including the royal procession (พยุหยาตราทางสถลมารค),⁵⁴ while Sanamluang is used as the royal ceremonial grounds. Located in the east is "Sanamchai" (สนามไชย), sometimes called "Sanam Nachakrawat" (สนามหน้าจักรวรรดิ),⁵⁵ which is also used during royal ceremonies. The southern part is the residential area of senior government officials and courtiers. The western facade faces the Chao Phraya River.

⁵³ Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Ayuthaya Mahadilok Phop Nopparat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Piman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit (กรุงเทพมหานคร อมรรัตนโกสินทร์ มหินทรายุธยามหาดิลกภพ นพรัตนราชธานีบูรีรมย์ อุดมราชนิเวศมหาสถาน อมรพิมานอวตารสถิต สักกะทัตติยวิษณุกรรมประสิทธิ์) -- "The city of angels, the great city, the residence of the Emerald Buddha, the impregnable city (of Ayutthaya) of God Indra, the grand capital of the world endowed with nine precious gems, the happy city, abounding in an enormous Royal Palace that resembles the heavenly abode where reigns the reincarnated God, a city given by Indra and built by Vishnukarn. " (พระมหานครอันกว้างใหญ่ดุจเทพนคร เป็นที่สถิตย์ของพระแก้วมรกต เป็นมหานครที่ไม่มีใครรบชนะได้ มีความงามอันมั่นคงและเจริญยิ่ง เป็นเมืองหลวงที่บริบูรณ์ด้วยแก้วเก้าประการน่านรื่นรมย์ยิ่ง มีพระราชนิเวศใหญ่โตมากมาย เป็นวิมานเทพที่ประทับของพระราชาผู้อวตารลงมา ซึ่งท้าวสักกเทวราชพระราชทานให้พระวิษณุกรรมลงมาเนรมิตไว้)

The Fine Arts Department, cited in Pichet Dejpew. (2005). Rattanakosin Island: Social and Culture Development. Bangkok: Mac. p.55

⁵⁴ A coronation ceremony marking the king's reign over both the kingdom and the universe. See details in 5.2.1 and 5.2.2

⁵⁵ The area around Sanamchai with a tall shrine similar to the area in front of the Chakrawat Phaichayon Hall in the Ayutthaya period. Thus, it is sometimes called "Sanam Nachakrawat"

The town plan of this Rattanakosin Island clearly shows the topography of Mount Sumeru. It displays the great universe, which is made up of overlapping universes and numerous galaxies. This is evidenced in the positioning of the palace to the south of the temple of the Emerald Buddha, which corresponds with the positioning of the Jambudvipa continent to the south of Mount Sumeru - Jambudvipa is one of the elements in the great universe. At the same time, the grand palace itself is a symbol of Mount Sumeru in another universe. The quintessence of the connection between the principle of Mount Sumeru and the cosmic quality of the universe is in royal ceremonies held in Sanamluang. The entire Grand Palace, which is to the south of Sanamluang (the main area of the ceremonies), represents the Jambudvipa continent to the south of Mount Sumeru.

The cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru dictated town planning until the reign of King Rama V who initiated a humanistic approach to the expansion of the capital. This weakened the influence of the cosmology of Mount Sumeru. Since then, town planning and the construction of other royal structures have, at most, been related to the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru simply by name, to indicate the residence of deities. Examples include Phratamnak Chitralada⁵⁶ (พระตำหนักจิตรลดารโหฐาน) in the Dusit Palace (the residence of the king and the queen), the Amphonsathan Mansion (วังอัมพรสถาน) in the Dusit Palace (the residence of Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn), the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall (พระที่นั่งจักรีมหาปราสาท), the Ananda Samakhom Throne Hall (พระที่นั่งอนันตสมาคม), and the Mrigadayavan Palace (พระราชนิเวศมฤคทายวัน). The arrangement of the buildings, the structural design and the decoration, however, were influenced by western architecture and concentrated on functionality agreeable to the culture at that time, rather than by old practices.

Most of the current royal palaces, including Phratamnak Bhubing Ratcha Niwet⁵⁷ (พระตำหนักภูพิงศ์ราชนิเวศ), the Sukhothai Palace⁵⁸ (วังสุโขทัย), the Saprathum Palace⁵⁹ (วังสระปทุม), Phratamnak Suanpathum⁶⁰ (พระตำหนักสวนปทุม), Phratamnak Chakri

⁵⁶ Derived from the Jitlada Garden of the God Indra in the heaven realm of Tavatimsa (Source: Tribhumikatha Picture Album, Ayutthaya Version, No. 6, early pages, picture no. 15)

⁵⁷ Bhubing Palace is the residence of the king located in the rural area of Chiang Mai. It is used during his visits there. (Bing or “Nakhon Ping” is the name of the city of Chiang Mai and is named after the Ping River, where the city is situated.) Bhubing Palace is the royal residence of their Majesties. It was built in 1961 on Doi Buakha Summit, Doi Suthep Sub-District, Muang District, Chiang Mai Province.

⁵⁸ Sukhothai Palace means the mirthful place. It was built during the reign of King Rama V and given the name “Wang Sukhothai” by King Rama VI. Nowadays, it is the royal residence of Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn and his family.

Source: Government Gazette, the announcement of the names of the palaces, Vol 35, 3 November 1918, page 247.

⁵⁹ Saprathum Palace means the Lotus Pond. It was built during King Rama V’s period. It is now the royal residence of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.

⁶⁰ Suanpathum Palace means the Lotus Garden. It is now the royal residence of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.

Bongkot⁶¹ (พระตำหนักจักรีบกข), Phratamnak Ploypathum⁶² (พระตำหนักพลอยปทุม), Phratamnak Ruenrudee⁶³ (พระตำหนักรื่นฤดี), and Phratamnak Rimpha⁶⁴ (พระตำหนักริมผา), are not associated with the principle of Mount Sumeru. The name “Phratamnak” only identifies the residence of the royal family.

The city’s construction and expansion plan focuses instead on functionality *and benefit to powerful political figures*. Whereas the temple or the palace once denoted the city centre, department stores now do this. Even the construction of government buildings depends on the benefits that will accrue to decision-makers, rather than on factors such as location and elegant design. This has caused the city to lose the quality of the sacred state.

Sacred Mountain in Social System

There are different realms in the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru. This implies that even though everything is systematically connected, they do not have equal status. The world views, the explanations and the arrangements in the Mount Sumeru paradigm gave rise to class distinction in Thailand. For example, the god-king school placed the king above everyone and everything. The caste system divided society into classes such as the monarchy, civil servants, monks and commoners and slaves. It was applied strictly and introduced only for the purpose of good order and educating people about their rights and responsibilities. The social class system in the Siam Kingdom was based on the past karma of its citizens. It was not the same as the theory of social relations mentioned in the Asiatic Mode of Production by Karl Marx⁶⁵ who saw class distinction as social exploitation.

According to history, it may be possible that the class system in the Siamese kingdoms originated in economic system and the system of government. During the Sukhothai period people bartered goods. Everyone depended on themselves and the government was self-sufficient in terms of four immediate basic needs. The class distinction in this period existed only to identify the ruling class or the warriors. They were regarded as fathers and the ordinary people perceived themselves as their children who sought their protection. Kingship was the result of their past good karma.

⁶¹ Phratamnak Chakri Bongkot means the Lotus of Chakri Dynasty. It is now the royal residence of Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Walailak.

⁶² Phratamnak Ploypathum means the Pearl Lotus. It is now the royal residence of Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya Sirivadhana Barnavadi.

⁶³ Phratamnak Ruenrudee means the Joyful Residence. It is now the royal residence of Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda Sirisobhabannavadi.

⁶⁴ Phratamnak Rimpha means the residence on the cliff. It is now the royal residence of Princess Soamsavali Kitiyakara.

⁶⁵ Marshall, G., (1998). "Asiatic mode of production." in *A Dictionary of Sociology* --: Encyclopedia.com.

The kings were bound to uphold virtues seriously while ordinary people were only encouraged to observe moral precepts and persist in wholesome acts.⁶⁶

Society in the Ayutthaya Kingdom was clearly divided into the monarchy, the nobles, the monks, the commoners and the slaves. Class distinction probably existed due to the demand for commoners and slaves to produce goods for overseas trade, which was monopolised by the elite class through the Ministry of Finance. Besides, the state was in need of labour both to produce goods, even forbidden items, as a tribute to the elites, and to serve in the army to fight off invaders.

Demand for the labour of commoners and slaves began to decline during the early Rattanakosin era because there was an influx of Chinese immigrants into the country. This was helped on by the diminishing ability of the elites to monopolise trade and the advent of a freer economy. Therefore, more Siamese commoners were allowed to join the open labour market. The biggest social reform during this period, which caused the demise of the caste system in Thailand, was the abolition of slavery by King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V). The Siamese generally held the King in high regard for his action. However, in terms of the economy, the end of slavery opened up an enormous new labour market in the country, which was then entering into the new era of the commercial system called 'free trade'. During that time, the Kingdom needed to adjust its economic model with a view to trading with western countries.

As the social structure changed, perspectives on the principle of Mount Sumeru also shifted. However, this seemed to happen to the ruling class only. For ordinary people, who were once commoners and slaves, Mount Sumeru was still an influential factor in their world view and actions. People may have been given equal rights under a democratic constitution and the capitalist economy, which always demands mobile labour, may have made it harder for the system of class distinction to survive, yet still the ideas related to the principle of Mount Sumeru remained.

Class distinction still lives on in Thai society because, despite the demise of the feudal system and slavery, Thai people still firmly believe in good and bad karma determining their destiny and social status. They believe that people are born with different status and are related in a way that obliges them to show their gratitude to each other indefinitely. This perception helps support the perpetuation of the feudal system and class distinction in the minds of ordinary people in Thailand. Indeed, if everyone were to acknowledge their responsibilities and act morally, the class distinction derived from the principle of Mount Sumeru may actually be suitable for Thai society.

⁶⁶ Lithai, K. (1890-1919). *Traibhumikatha : the story of the three planes of existence* (the Thai National Team for Anthology of Asean Literatures ed.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group. and see comments on the objective of Traibhumikatha and the behaviours suggested and expected by King Lithai from his citizens in Piriya Kri-Raeug. (2546). *Tripoom Phraruang: Writings by Phra Maha Dhamaraja the First or King Rama IV*. Art & Culture, year 25, Issue 1 (Nov 2546) 155-163, and Pissnu Supanimit. (2007). *The mystery of Himmapharn*. Bangkok: Amarin.

Sacred Mountain in the Administration

Operating from the principle of Mount Sumeru, the God-king and the Buddha-king schools formed the basis of the administrative system in Thailand for centuries and are still influential in the present time. This gave rise to the notion of the sacred state, which was connected to other states according to a set model. The cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru mentioned in the Triphum scripture asserted that a state arose from a decline in morality among the general population. The unwholesome way of life of the human community eroded their virtuous qualities, and created problems which only a ruler or king could help solve. Simultaneously, the ruler was obliged to support the religious teachings and encourage people to do good deeds so that they would be born in a higher realm in their next lives. According to the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru, the state and the king were one. The king was the essence of the state. His actions expressed the quality of the sacred state.⁶⁷

The fusing of the state and the king in the sacred state was evident in some major Thai kingdoms such as Sukhothai, Lanna and Nakhon Sithammarat. Especially in the Ayutthaya Kingdom the founders of the capital had a full grasp of the different ideas on the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru, as found in Buddhism, Brahmanism, Hinduism and local beliefs.

The break in the link between the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru and the quality of the sacred state began in the Thonburi period. At that time perceptions changed about the role and practices of the state. This was because King Thonburi was not related to the royal family of the Ayutthaya dynasty.

During the Ayutthaya period the sacred quality of the king was determined by blood relation. However, in the following Thonburi period, it was judged by his works and virtues, according to Buddhist principles.

Ascension to the throne on the basis of traditional prestige and fulfillment of religious duties under the guidance of the God-king group, started to lose ground. The influence of the God-king group became restricted to matters of custom and ceremony only. The king was no longer seen as a god but rather as a person with supreme virtues and supernatural powers, comparable to Buddha's successor. The king used a sacred symbol and his virtuous qualities, focusing on his actions and his personal supernatural powers, rather than on the traditional prestige of the ruling class. The relationship between the government and its citizens was no longer god-like but similar to a family, whose work was to achieve the ultimate goal of the state.⁶⁸

The cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru persisted into the early Rattankosin period (King Rama I-III). However, notions about the sacred state and the king in the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru were clearly dominated by Buddhism, particularly as regards the concept of the "Thanmikaraja" king (ธรรมิกราชาธิราช). This was evident, for example, in the name of King Rama I "*Somdet Phraborom*

⁶⁷ Pattiya Akom, & Nithi Iewsiwong, E. (2002). Siramthepnakorn: The Collection of Essays about the History of the Early Ayutthaya Period (2 ed.). Bangkok: Matichon . p.18-25

⁶⁸ Summary from Nithi Elewsiwong. (2005). Thai Politics in King Taksin's Period (8th ed.). Bangkok: Matichon.

Thanmikarajathirat” (สมเด็จพระบรมชนกนาถราช). As in the Thonburi kingdom, the kings of the early Rattanakosin dynasty were considered to possess exemplary qualities and supernatural powers, like Buddha’s successor. Nevertheless, the administrative systems of this dynasty were similar to those of the Ayutthaya kingdom, but with more emphasis on the Buddhist philosophy. For instance, the focus on expanding the kingdom through colonisation was changed to supporting Buddhism, observing precepts and doing good deeds. This change was intended to spread “virtuous territory”, instead of colonies. Besides, it was believed that human wisdom would lead to success in this world.⁶⁹ The meaning of the sacred state in the early Rattanakosin era was thus an auspicious place for people to do good deeds, observe precepts and accumulate wholesome virtues. The goal was to attain enlightenment in the next lifetime.⁷⁰ While the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru was slightly different during the beginning of the Rattanakosin period, it was still influential in society. The establishment of the sacred state was turned into an attempt to build the sacred Buddhist state. This was clearly expressed in the staunch support of Buddhism by King Rama I-III.

The cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru concerning the sacred state went through a dramatic change again after the advent of the Buddhist order of Dhammayuttika, which separated religion from everyday life⁷¹. The interpretation of Buddhist teachings on the basis of humanistic principles, which emphasised self-realisation of ultimate truth and the present reality of one’s life, began to gain more ground. At the same time, the country faced new ideas on the cosmos from European countries, causing an explicit rejection of Mount Sumeru cosmology.⁷² This brought about new perceptions regarding the relationship between the state and the king, which involved more interaction with the people and engaging in worldly affairs. The state would no longer be able to project itself idealistically as the centre of other countries or of the universe but would have to accept that its kingdom had a real physical boundary.⁷³ The king’s status as a god was brought down to that of a human being

⁶⁹ See details in Chapter 4 part 4.1

⁷⁰ An analysis of the religious interrogation of King Rama I to the Buddhist Supreme Patriarch and high-ranking senior monks. See the details of the questions and the answers in --. (--). *The Royal Interrogation in Rattanakosin Era: King Rama I to V, Vol 1*. Bangkok: The Business Organization of Teacher's Council of Thailand.

⁷¹ See the details of this transformation in Chapter 3, Part 3.3

⁷² For example, Choapraya Thiphakornwong wrote in the Sadaengkijjanukit book “...How can this investigation show that the world is flat with Mount Sumeru in the middle?...” Choapraya Thiphakornwong. (2002). *Thai Youth Encyclopedia* (2nd ed.). Bangkok: The Business Organization of Teacher's Council of Thailand., and further details in the writings, the letters and the comments of King Rama IV

⁷³ King Mongkut’s description of the location of Bangkok gives a real sense of physical territory “...The Siamese Kingdom is located in the south of the central gulf and southeast of India. The location can be identified by western geography. For example, Ayutthaya’s latitude and longitude are 14’ 19” North and 99’ East, respectively.”

Source: King Mongkut. (1969). *The Kingdom and People of Siam*. In *The Brief Notice of the History of Siam from Sir John Bowring* (Vol. 2). Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. p. 341

Also see the details about the awareness of the country’s territory through maps from Thongchai, W. (1994). *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

with ordinary human potential.⁷⁴The old power, which he previously gained from his perceived virtues, support for Buddhism, observation of precepts and wholesome acts - all of which helped raise his status above that of ordinary people - became his legal power. When this real power and the existence of physical territory were realised, it changed the way the central government operated. The colonial cities, which formerly demonstrated their loyalty through tributes, were now governed by laws passed by the central government.

The old cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru was consequently no longer perceived in the same way during the reign of King Rama V. During his era, religion seemed to have value in terms of archeological history, arts and crafts. Religion was separated from everyday life. It was used to serve goals in the secular world, rather than in the spiritual world. It was practised only when it was considered useful for the existing lifetime, instead of being seen as the way to accumulate wholesome karma for the next life, in the higher realms, or for attaining nirvana.⁷⁵ The state was not deemed sacred. Rather, it was seen as a region of sovereignty, prosperity and justice. Its existence was considered beneficial for serving the purposes of the secular world.

In 1932, during the political reform that ended absolute monarchy in Thailand, the cosmic principle and the ideas about the sacred state were replaced. The spiritual world and the secular world split totally. In practice, the new political system did not recognise the King as a god or a reincarnation of a god or even as a person with absolute virtues. However, the King was still seen as an indispensable element of Thai politics. This is because Thai people continued to perceive him as a god-king or a reincarnation of god having meritorious qualities, being helpful to the country, and

⁷⁴ "...by becoming the king. To say that it is from the power of the deities is disrespectful to the elderly supporters who kindly gave their endorsement.....The backing of the elderly supporters for this kingship is clearly heard and obviously seen by many people. There will be no claim for the power of the deities any longer..." King Mongkut. (1969). *The Collection of Royal Thai Literature Vol. 2*. Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University.

⁷⁵ An analysis of royal remarks, letters and writings of King Chulalongkorn and Somdet Phramahasamanachao Kromphraya Vajiranavarorasa (the Buddhist Supreme Patriarch) that clearly indicate the characteristics of secularism.

See details in King Chulalongkorn. (1897). *The Royal Guidance given to Thai people upon his return from Europe in the year of the rooster, 1897 A.D.* The Fine Arts Department., King Chulalongkorn. (--). *The Royal letters of King Chulalongkorn: Comparison of Theravada and Mahayana*. Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University, The Committee of the Buddhism Week. (1984). *Buddhism: The National Religion of Thailand*. Bangkok: Amarin. p.7, *The Royal letters between King Chulalongkorn and Somdet Phramahasamanachao Krompra Vajirayana Varoraj*. Bangkok: SaponPipattanakorn.

Even though many secular statements appear in the royal letters and pieces of literature, the writer personally thinks that the King had both advanced views in world affairs and a deep and thorough understanding of Buddha's teachings. This may be because the writer is still loyal to the monarchy and grateful for their exemplary qualities and the example of morality they set for ordinary people.

being a symbol of national identity and unity⁷⁶. Government under a constitutional monarchy is simply an ideal of a group of people who assume actual power to rule a country, in the place of the King. For ordinary people, the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru is deeply ingrained as a paradigm that can explain or give the answers they want, in a more satisfactory way than any legalistic arguments about the merits of a constitutional democracy

The 1932 revolution and political reform happened to take place at the time when the current king ascended to the throne. His dedication to helping people improve their living conditions confirms his status, firstly, as a highly revered figure to whom Thai people owe their gratitude, and, secondly, as a king who perfectly upholds morality, in a manner akin to that of the ruler of the universe in the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru. His involvement in many social and economic development projects, which are directed at improving the quality of life of poor people in rural areas, helps him maintain his unofficial god-king status and earns him high respect among Thai people. This was apparent in the way Thais expressed their gratitude to the King during the 2006, 60th Anniversary Celebrations of His Majesty the King's Accession to the Throne.

The chronology of the change in status of the states and the kings can be summarised as follows;

1. The governance of ancient kingdoms like Sukhothai and Lanna, which were Buddhist states, is believed to have had the "Paternal" aspects in which the king was considered "father" and people "children". Combined with the Dhamma-based democracy, the king supposedly took on the role of a father who looked after his children by putting Buddha's teachings into practice.
2. In Ayutthaya, the capital was both the sacred centre of the kingdom and the universe. Adopting the god-king beliefs (Devaraja) as the basis of the system of government [governmental system], the king was considered a reincarnation of god. He had the ultimate duty of protecting [as protector of] the people and he issued laws and orders based on the principle of Mount Sumeru.
3. The combination of the Buddharaj and the Devaraja groups was recorded in the Thonburi Kingdom. The government seemed to *create the family relationship in order to achieve the security of the state*. The king was supposed to possess meritorious qualities and supernatural powers, comparable to Buddha's successor.
4. During the early Rattanakosin period, the state was in a position favourable for people to do good deeds, observe precepts and accumulate wholesome acts in

⁷⁶ It is evidenced in the way people expressed their admiration and love for, and loyalty to, King Ananda Mahidol (King Rama VIII). Without belief in the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru, it would have been impossible for people to accept the king who ascended to the throne at the age of eight. If ordinary people in those days were really striving for democracy, as the Political Reformist Party contended, it was most unlikely that they would have loved and respected someone whom they did not know and had not met or someone about whose personality and abilities they had no knowledge. Despite his age, he was accepted as the ruler of the country. Even when King Rama IX became king, people still showed their love and loyalty to him unconditionally. These two events clearly showed that the principle of Mount Sumeru was still a significant part in the life of Thai people during that time even though Thailand had already developed into a democracy.

order to attain Arahatsip or nirvana in the next life. Also embracing the ideas of Devaraja and Buddharaja, the king assumed the role of a reincarnation of god with supreme virtues comparable to Buddha's successor.

5. The governments between the reign of King Rama IV and VI started to accept the reality of the purely physical area of the kingdom and abandoned the notion of the kingdom being the sacred centre of the universe. Even though the country was governed by an absolute monarch, the kings' attention revolved mainly around developing the country.
6. The notion of the sacred state disappeared entirely during the political reform in 1932, during the reign of King Rama VIII. However, the king's image as a person of absolute morality and virtue persisted. He became a symbol of unity for the general populace.
7. Nowadays, the king is still held in high regard for his exemplary qualities. He is seen as a symbol of national unity and for this Thais owe him their gratitude. The sacredness of kingship was reduced from god-king status to a person displaying ideal values and, currently, being the father of the nation. This means that he is more closely related to ordinary people.

The political chronology shows that the notion of a sacred state and a sacred person was simply a guise to help unsophisticated laymen to adhere strictly to Buddhist teachings. The state, which was once considered the centre of the universe, is now secularised. The kingship reached its peak, remained there for a while, and then began to decline. This decline may some day reach the point where there will be another radical change, possibly even leading to the extinction of the monarchy. The point is that even the sacred state or a sacred person cannot escape the law of nature that nothing in the world and the universe stays the same.

4.3.3 Sacred Mountain and the Sacred State at Present

As the social structure continues to change, the relevance of the cosmic principle and perceptions about Mount Sumeru as the centre of the universe also change. As of now, the cosmic principle of Mount Sumeru has no role in the governance, the administration and the statehood of the Thai kingdom. Thailand is no longer the sacred state but a country with its own territory, sovereignty and population. It is a free country where everyone can advance their own interests. Everyone seen equal, regardless of their position and responsibilities. Ironically, however, power and virtue are not determined by moral qualities but wealth. Present and future rulers will still need to acquire a certain level of nationwide acclaim and respect, like the kings of old. This cannot be done so much through virtuous acts as through money and an ability to fulfill the desires of the public, whether those desires are wholesome or not. The noble and exemplary qualities of the king, and his ability to help people lead a

self-sufficient and contented life with greater spiritual happiness, are no longer sufficient to satisfy the demands of the people. While many people may accept a ruler who will lead them to materialistic fulfillment and affluence, others do not even know what they are really looking for.



Figure 38 : Bangkok in the present day

This is now the characteristic of the Thai state, which tends to adopt capitalism as its cosmic principle. The old form of the state - which was made up of territory, sovereignty, population and nationhood - originated from an extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language, or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory.⁷⁷ This model is now rapidly being transformed into one that does not have a strong sense of territorial integrity but is simply a land of capitalists. This type of state has an administrative system of a joint-stock enterprise, which sees the population as employees and classifies society on the basis of economic gains based on the number of stocks possessed and the opportunity to acquire wealth.

It would be ill-advised, even dangerous, to reject Thailand's history and ignore old-school thinking and culture. Thailand is a long-established country. Even though

⁷⁷ Clifford, G. (2000). *The World in Pieces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p.234

the old attitudes about the state and the system of government might be no longer suited to the present circumstances, it is essential to understand the previous forms of government and administration. Indeed, if the time is ripe for political change, the new ideas should be blended into the old customs to prevent a complete break with the past. The same is true for the Buddhist and Hindu principles of Mount Sumeru, which co-existed with local customs and interests since the early beginnings of the state and which became the root of Thai culture and tradition that has influenced the political situation in Thailand until now.

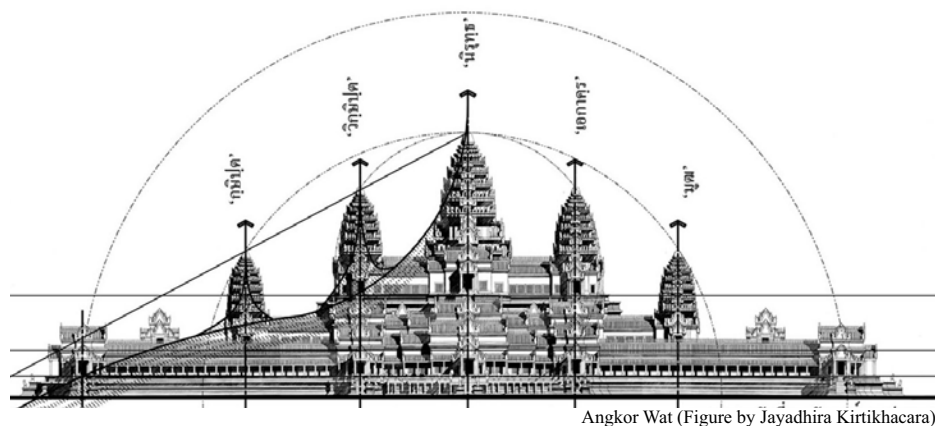
4.4 Sacred Mountain and Sacred Architecture

In terms of place, sacred architecture is intimately connected with places of worship and other sacred or similarly intended spaces. It is a construction that results from, or apparently from, a conscious act. Sacred architecture is the art and the science of building. It is the art or the practice of designing and building structures,⁷⁸ especially, those intended for spiritual purposes. Sacred architecture in Thai culture is not restricted to religious structures such as Buddhist temples, Islamic mosques and Christian churches but can be any building that enhances spiritual awareness and development, such as the Grand Palace and other palaces in the country.

It also includes residences of members of the royal family who are regarded as sacred personages, spirit houses and even permanent and temporary structures with a special spiritual significance. Sacred structures are places where individuals can detect sacred phenomena. As in the case of other sacred places in Thailand, the ideal behind sacred architecture is the principle of Mount Sumeru.

Generally, the cosmological ideal of Mount Sumeru is prevalent in many structures in East and Southeast Asia. It arises from the influence of Brahmanism, Hinduism and Buddhism (As mention in Chapter 2 and 3). Examples of sacred architecture in the region are Borobudur Temple on Java Island in Indonesia, sacred shrines in Bali and the religious ruins of the ancient Champa kingdom in Vietnam. Other structures, which are sacred monuments of the Khmer empire, include Vat Phou, Angkor Wat, Bayon, Preah Vihear Temple and Phnom Rung Temple. Such structures would also encompass all temples and religious buildings from various kingdoms such as Pagan, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Lanna and Srivijaya (Nakhon Sithammarat Province). All of the structures mentioned above are strongly influenced by the principle of Mount Sumeru.

⁷⁸ Architecture. (2009). In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved June 18, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/architecture>



Angkor Wat (Figure by Jayadhira Kirtikhacara)

Figure 39 : Sacred architectures in sacred mountain form
(figure by Jayadhira Kirtikhacara and Waranan Sowannee)

4.4.1 Sacred Architecture in Thailand

Most of the listed buildings in Thailand have a religious connection. They are considered to be of higher spiritual value than ordinary houses or even the King's palace. These religious shrines are built to last longer than other buildings, which are usually made of wood (the King's residence is made mostly of wood, with a concrete foundation). Hence, heritage buildings from ancient kingdoms in Thailand are temples and religious shrines.

This dissertation concentrates on Buddhist sacred structures because they serve as a good example in explaining how to create sacred phenomena, capable of being

discerned through architecture. (The royal residence as sacred architecture is explained in Chapter 4.3 due to its relation with the sacred state and the divine kings)

During the time when Lord Buddha was still alive, temples were simply temporary monasteries for monks during the Buddhist Lent. The first Buddhist monastery in the world is Jetavana Vihara, donated by a wealthy man who was also one of Buddha's chief layman disciples. His name was Anathapindika. The monastery became a residence of Buddha and of monks. After Buddha's Parinibbana, or attainment of nirvana, a number of stupas were constructed to enshrine his relics. Four places, where he was born, attained enlightenment, gave his first teachings and achieved nirvana, were also designated as the holy sites and maintained by resident monks.⁷⁹ When Buddhism spread to Thailand, it was blended with local beliefs and culture. This included the adoption of the idea about religious monuments and structures, as found in old temples dating back to different eras, such as Lanna, Chaiya, Nakhon Pathom, Lopburi, Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. It is thus evident that Buddhism has been embraced in the Siamese kingdoms for a long time.

In Thailand, the ideals of Buddhism and those of the kingdoms were inseparable. Every city had to have a temple named 'Wat Mahathat' (วัดมหาธาตุ) as a sacred centre and as a place in which to house Buddha's relics. Temples of this name can be found, for example, in several provinces and include Wat Mahathat in Ayutthaya, Lopburi, Ratchaburi, Suphanburi, Petchaburi and Nakhon Sithammarat. Some have slightly different names such as Wat Phra Si Mahathat Sukhothai, Wat Phra Si Mahathat Si Satchanalai and Wat Phra Si Mahathat in Pitsanulok Province.

The construction of temples was often endorsed by the king, members of the royal family or highly revered monks. Ordinary people could not generally afford to build temples. They therefore assumed the role of keeper or caretaker. Some people volunteered to take care of temple affairs and others offered to provide necessary items for the temple.

Some temples were built for specific reasons. For instance, Wat Mahathat was built as the central temple in several provinces that were once the chief outposts of the kingdoms. Some temples were located in the palace and reserved for royal ceremonies. Examples of this kind of temple are Wat Phra Si Sanpet (วัดพระศรีสรรเพชญ์) in Ayutthaya, Wat Phra Si Rattana Sasadaram (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดาราม) or the Temple of The Emerald Buddha in Bangkok.

There are also temples built in memory of dead parents and located on ancestral land. Examples of such temples are Wat Phutthai Sawan (วัดพุทธไสสวรรค) and Wat Amphawan Cheti Yaram (วัดอัมพวันเจติยาราม). Several temples were constructed to serve as a reminder of some important event or in honour of some important

⁷⁹ Chot Kullayanamitr. (1996). *Original Thai Architecture*. Bangkok: ASA. p.86

person.⁸⁰Nowadays, people are free to build a temple if they can afford to do so. A number of such temples have been named after the builder or after the person to whom the builder dedicated the temple – this could be the King, or a monk, or an ordinary person.

According to the guide-lines for constructing temples and for the use of temple land, and according to monastic rules, there are two types of monastery; namely, Wat Aranya Wasi (วัดอรัญญวาสี) and Wat Khama Wasi (วัดคามวาสี).

(a.) Wat Aranya Wasi is a forest monastery occupied by monks who practise extremely meditation or Vipassana Thura (วิปัสสนาธุระ). However, they stay there during the Buddhist Lent only and spend the rest of the year in forests or caves. Thus, there are not a lot of buildings in this type of monastery and the architectural style is basic and their construction simple. Monasteries of this type are, for example, Wat Pa Nana Chat (วัดป่าหนานชาติ) and Wat Nong Pa Phong (วัดหนองป่าพง) in Ubon Ratchathani Province and Wat Pa Puri Thatta Pati Pataram (วัดป่าภูริทัตตปฏิปหาราม) in Pathum Thani Province.

(b.) Wat Khama Wasi is a monastery located in a community or a city. Monks who live in this type of monastery are interested in studying the Buddhist manuscripts or Pariyatti Dhamma (ปริยัติธรรม). Such monasteries generally have more resident monks than those of Wat Aranya Wasi. They thus have more residential buildings and a larger piece of ground for ceremonial purposes. Wat Khama Wasi is divided into three sections. The first is called Sangka Waad (เขตสังฆาวาส) or the monks' residential area. The second is Puttha Waad (เขตพุทธาวาส), reserved for monks to perform their rituals. The last section is the ceremonial ground for laymen.

The most sacred area in the monastery is Puttha Waad because it relates directly to religious affairs. It comprises Kham Paeng Kaew (the wall), Rabiang Kod (a cloister), Chedi, Lan Sai (a sandy piece of ground), Vihara (an assembly hall) and Bot (an ordination hall). This study will accordingly focus on an analysis of sacred buildings in Puttha Waad in order to discover the significance of the sacred mountain in sacred architecture.

There are a number of extensive studies on sacred architecture in Thailand. Most of them concentrate on the study of either architectural works or architectural history. The study of the principle of Mount Sumeru concerns architectural history, which can be divided into three areas of study⁸¹ (a.) the study of architectural concepts (b.) design and architecture and (c.) architectural value. While many of the studies

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p.87-88

⁸¹ Anuwit Jareon-supakul cited in Woralun Boonyasurat. (2001). *Viharn Lanna*. Bangkok: Muang Boran.

tend to focus on particular fields such as history, concept, design, conservation and application,⁸² they pay rather less attention to the relationship between these fields.

It may seem that the principle of Mount Sumeru in sacred architecture in Thailand has already been thoroughly researched. However, while many researchers have attempted to discover the philosophy or theory in bygone times, they have focused on pattern, land and topographical elements. Those who tried to apply the principle of Mount Sumeru to architectural design tended to adhere too strictly to the topography described in the principle. The result was that it sometimes became an obstacle to the creation of new architectural works and the conservation of historical buildings. Some researchers have used architectural forms to link directly with Buddhist teachings in an attempt to find a connection between sacred architecture and Buddhism. This type of study has been limited to Buddhist principles only and has overlooked the purpose of sacred architecture.

In studying sacred architecture as a sacred place, this dissertation tries to reveal how sacred arts and architecture affects human perception, on the basis of the notion of the sacred mountain. By moving back to investigate the intentions of sacred architecture through an anthropological approach: direct observation of people in the settings in which they live, seeing how they experience sacred architecture,⁸³ and trying to understand their way of thinking. In collecting information about sacred architecture, two methods were used: the objective method of scientific base and the subjective method of mystic experience. The division deals with the sacred space of architecture, metamorphosed materials, the symbolism of the different elements of sacred places, motifs of elements which affect our senses, and continue the object of sense.

4.4.2 Significance of Sacred Mountain in Sacred Architecture

Sacred architecture was a medium used in expressing and explaining philosophies to people with different levels of intellect. Sacred architecture was not an

⁸² Ornsiri Panin, Veera Inpung, Chaiyasit Dankittikul & I. Manop. (1999). *The Knowledge Collection Project about The Evaluation of The State of Thai Studies in Architecture, Art and Crafts*, Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund.

Each field of study relates to the following subjects;

Architectural History – The study of history that focuses on an architectural style in a particular period

Philosophy, Belief and Tradition – The study that investigates the cause of the architectural creativity

Architectural Styles– The study of the architectural design, including the layout plan, space management, space and shape, component, structure, materials, construction method and decoration

Conservation – The thorough study of various aspects of architecture, including the assessment of architectural value and the physical condition of the buildings, in order to set guide lines for preservation

Style Adaptation – The study of architectural style in order to obtain basic knowledge that will be applied in new architectural design or in the study of changes in architectural design.

⁸³ Richley H. Crapo. (2003). *Anthropology of Religion: The Unity and Diversity of Religions*, New York: McGraw-Hill, p.4.

architectural product of some architects. It was a product of various fields of knowledge, including art, fine arts, architecture, decorative arts, engineering, mathematics and astronomy. They were all applied to create sacred places that would communicate directly with individuals at different levels of wisdom. People could generally grasp the message of sacred architecture to the extent that their intellect allowed.

Therefore, in order to find the real objective of sacred architecture, it is necessary to start from understanding the general concept of architecture and then progress to understanding other architectural details such as art and decoration.⁸⁴ This can be done by movements, time and perception,⁸⁵ which will condition the wisdom to arise. The principle of Mount Sumeru is used as a guide in designing every part of sacred architecture that can be perceived by people. These parts are;

Location

The position of a sacred building is always in reasonably close proximity to other sacred places and structures. A sacred building was seen simply as one of the galaxies in the great universe, which is a collection of countless galaxies. Thus the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is situated close to the Grand Palace, and the Grand Palace is next to Sanam Luang, The Grand Palace is also not far from the Chao Phraya River. Wat Suthat Thep Wararam Wora Maha Viharn (วัดสุทัศนเทพวรารามราชวรมหาวิหาร) is located near the Giant Swing (Sao Shing Sha -- เสาชิงช้า). This includes the vertical-axis relationship of Doi Suthep (ดอยสุเทพ) and Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep (วัดพระธาตุดอยสุเทพ) in Chiang Mai. The location of a sacred building enhances the status of the building as a representation of Mount Sumeru. At the same time, it helps to explain the relationship of other elements in the galaxies and the universe.

Looking at the relationship of users of the sacred place, the location and other elements, it can be said that people are compared to a galaxy when it shows the connection between numerous elements in the universe as well as the relationship of people at different positions in the society.

Axis

The axis is one of the principal elements of architecture.⁸⁶The arrangement of sacred buildings based on the principle of Mount Sumeru corresponds with the axes of primary directions, namely east and west, and north and south. These directions are

⁸⁴ Kirtihacara, J., 2007. *Experiencing Angkor Vat : an Architectural Assessment*, Chiang Mai: Faculty of Architecture. P.38

⁸⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. Pt.2, Chapter 1-2.

⁸⁶ Le Corbusier. (1944). *Toward a New Architecture* (trans. F. Etchells), London: Architecture Press. p.73

based on the idea that the main building, which symbolizes Mount Sumeru or the core of the universe, is located at the centre.

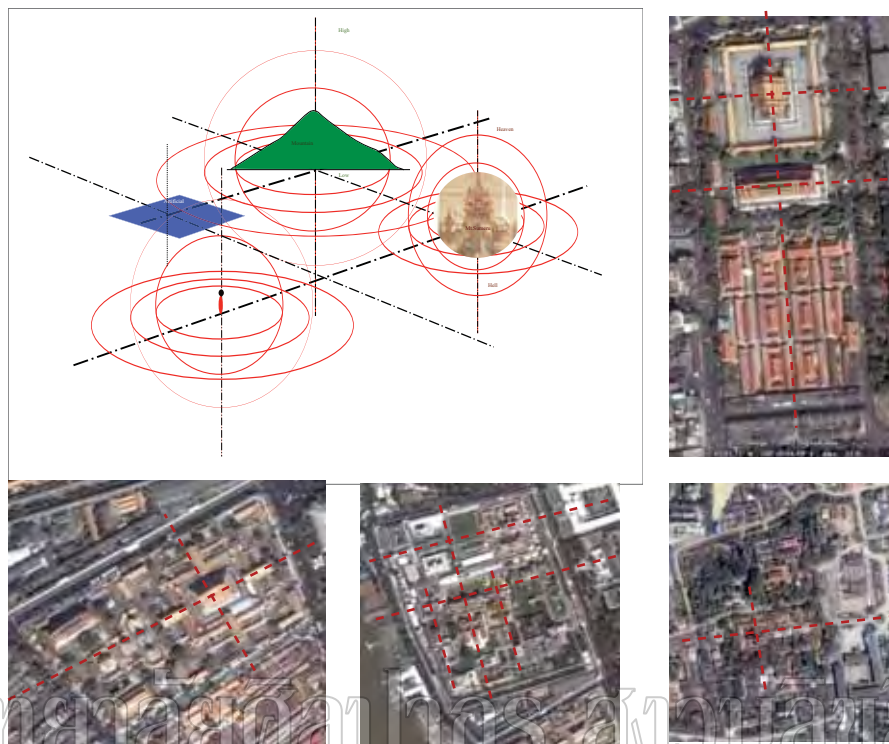


Figure 40 : Axes of Sacred Architecture

However, Thais did not follow the rules of axis strictly when building sacred buildings. For example, when an assembly hall was built on the axis of east and west, it pointed to the idea that the main enshrined Buddha image faced east. Sometimes it pointed to the idea that west was the direction where Lord Buddha was born, enlightened and achieved nirvana. Therefore, after Buddhists had paid homage to the east-facing Buddha image of the assembly hall, they would come out from that back part of the hall and pay respect to Chedi in the west. If the building was built on the axis of north and south, it pointed to a belief that north should be the direction in which a person's head points when sleeping.

The building plan was sometimes based on Thai astrology that stated that north is an auspicious direction. This type of arrangement corresponded with people's knowledge about basic directions and the orbit of the earth around the sun and the orbit of the planets, and with their feelings towards darkness, and front and back. It also helped to fix the meaning of auspicious and inauspicious directions, goodness, virtues, unwholesome qualities, past and future as well as an understanding about the positions of heaven and hell. However, an exception was permitted in the direction of the axis of sacred buildings that were to be constructed close to roads and rivers. In

this case, the sacred buildings would always have an elegant appearance and be in harmony with the transportation route.

Both the east-west and north-south axes were in line with the orbit of the earth around the sun. When a sacred building faced east, the building would glow respectfully at sunrise, just as it would look serene at sunset, with the light slowly fading from the back of the building. If the sacred structure faced west, the morning sun would cast a shadow over the front of the building, making it look majestic. This could create a sense of calmness and cause a feeling of admiration and faith regarding the sacred power. If the sacred place was built on the north-south axis, the morning and late afternoon sun would accentuate the ornamental or decorative sides of the structure.

The idea behind the selection of an axis corresponding with the orbit of the earth around the sun was probably to focus on balance and serenity, using the main structure to symbolize the centre of the earth.⁸⁷ The inclusion of features such as the orbit of the earth around the sun and the direction of the sunlight fostered the illusion that the sacred building was moving in space. These external factors of time and space enhanced the feeling of sacredness. The axis of the structure thus served as a bridge connecting people with the spirit of place or *Genius Loci*⁸⁸ of the sacred place.

บทวิเทศน์วิชาลัยศิลป์สถาปัตยกรรม ส่วนวนาลัยสิทธิ์

The layout of sacred architecture was usually rectangular. This was because of the need for functionality, symmetry, balance and other architectural prerequisites. In terms of construction, the rectangular structure was easy to build and provided better functional space than other designs.

The symbolism of the rectangular-shaped layout was possibly intended to portray Samsara (the continuous cycle of rebirth) in a form of space, while covered the cycle of evolution. The layout may also be related to physical time - involving the cycle of the sun and the moon, the signs of the zodiac and the constellation of zodiac stars on the four main axes; north, south, east, and west, – and to the internal space and time of the human soul.⁸⁹ Thus, the boundary of the sacred place is comparable to the merger of the lunar and the solar paths replicated in the rectangular space⁹⁰ whose principal building symbolizes Mount Sumeru as the centre of the universe.

⁸⁷ Eliade cited in Kirtikhacara, J., (2007). *Experiencing Angkor Vat: an Architectural Assessment*, Chiang Mai: Faculty of Architecture. P.48-49

⁸⁸ See Norberg-Schulz, C., (1980). *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, New York: Rizzoli. P. 18-33

⁸⁹ See more details about Mandala in Architecture Plan in Bunce, F. W., (2002). *The Iconography of Architectural Plan*, New Delhi: D.K.Printworld (P) Ltd. P.3-55 and see more details Mandala and psyche in Govinda, L. A., (1976). *Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa*, California: Dharma Publishing.

⁹⁰ Kramrisch, S., (1976). *The Hindu Temple*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. P.30-39 Stella Kramrisch explains that it shows a perspective of the solar system in terms of Heliocentric and Geocentric

Enclosure

An enclosure is something that encloses space, as a fence or wall.⁹¹ The layout of sacred architecture displays different layers of enclosures. Each layer signifies a turning point in feelings. People feel more spiritually connected as they go deeper into the sacred place, passing through enclosure after enclosure. The closer they get to the centre of the place, the more they need to be humble and well-behaved.

Some Buddhist sacred structures, such as temples, are usually surrounded by a wall, known locally as Kham Paeng Kaew (กำแพงแก้ว -- crystal wall). According to the manuscripts of the Buddhist school of Mahayana, the Buddha's residence in the heavenly realm of Sukhavadee (สุขาวดี),⁹² is enclosed within crystal wall. The gates in the walls of these sacred structures are decorated with sculptured reliefs and statues of mystical creatures from the Himmapaan forest. This was intended to represent the Himmapaan forest, which was situated in front of Mount Sumeru, in the north of the Jambudiva Continent. Some sacred places are guarded by statues of demons that are seen as the protector of religious structures.

The deepest enclosure, which also encompasses the assembly hall (Viharn -- วิหาร), is a cloister called Rabiang Kod (ระเบียงคอด) or Phra Rabiang (พระระเบียง). The inner wall of Pra Rabiang displays Buddha statues and murals depicting, for example, Jataka tales (ชาดก), Buddha's life and the Ramayana epic – this was a way to educate people about Buddha's teachings. The cloister area is roofed with one side open to the air. Its roof is supported by a line of pillars. As people walk clockwise around the assembly hall along cloister, admiring stories on murals and moving past alternating light and shadows from the open area, they steadily increase their level of concentration until they reach the other end of the wall. Their power of concentration uplifts them spiritually, before they enter the assembly hall to pay respect to the main Buddha image.

In the past, when only men were allowed to go inside the assembly hall, sections of cloister were used as a waiting place for children and women. The cloister also served as an open-air Buddhist school and as a waiting-room for Buddhists who came to the temple for religious ceremonies.

Another type of enclosure in the sacred place is called Lan Sai (ลานทราย) or the sandy ground. This is an open piece of ground around Chedis and Viharn – Chedis being monuments of worship where Buddha relics are housed, and Viharn being a sacred assembly hall. Lan Sai symbolizes the Sithundorn Ocean that encircles Mount Sumeru, which in this case is represented by the Chedi. Monks use the area of Lan Sai to contemplate Dhamma by either sweeping the floor or pacing. Additionally, the sand

⁹¹ Enclosure. (n.d.). Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Retrieved June 18, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/enclosure>

⁹² Chot Kullayanamitr. (1996). *Original Thai Architecture*. Bangkok: ASA. p.99

in this area prevents grass and unwanted plants from encroaching on the main buildings and helps lower the level of humidity to keep the structures from quick deterioration.⁹³



Wat Doi Kamo, Lamphun province
(วัดดอยคะม้อ จ.ลำปาง)

Wat Pongsanuk, Lampang province (Figure by Angella Srisomwongwattana)

Figure 41 : Lan Sai

Furthermore, Lan Sai marks the entrance to the sacred place. In some ways, it reminds people to watch their behavior, speech and thoughts as they enter the sacred space. For example, the sandy ground helps people to increase their mindfulness, making them aware of their steps while walking. Since it is an open area, people can feel the cooling touch of the wind, making them feel relaxed, calm, free from unwholesome thoughts and ready to go into the inner area of the sacred place.

⁹³ Woralun Boonyasurat. (2009). *Architecture*. Paper presented at the UNESCO Museums Capacity Building Program, Lampang Workshop, Lampang. p.14

Approach



Figure 42 : The first scene after pass the enclosure approach
(Illustrate by Paramat Siriprom)

The position, the view point, the direction arrangement in sacred architecture conduct by the approach or a way of dealing with place that is the entrance and movement. The approach has a strong influence on the state of mind of people in the sacred place. The direction in which people move forward from different positions on the principle axis, the arrangement of the other elements, the movement pattern and the three-dimensional structure, when combined, reveal different angles of light and shadow. As people continue walking, it gives rise to the four dimensional continuum, which is in harmony with length, width and height of object, image, space and time.⁹⁴ It creates a sudden sense of power and sacredness, which will gradually support the development of an understanding of the nature of reality in Buddhist teachings.

An example of a sacred structure in this case is the assembly hall. When people look into the assembly hall through the entrance, they will see a warm golden light coming from the principal Buddha image in the dark hall, which stands on the same axis as the people viewing in at the entrance. The hall implies a separation between the heavenly realms and the human realms while the Buddha image signifies the state of nirvana that is free from the rounds of rebirth. In addition, as one walks closer to the

⁹⁴ Coomarasawamy, A. K., *The Transformation of Nature to Art*, New York: Dover Publication. P.147

big principal Buddha image in the assembly hall, it almost seems that the Buddha is drifting slowly in the air. When people sit in front the principal Buddha image, they may feel that the Buddha is watching over them with loving kindness. Another example is people walking slowly around the Chedi with intense concentration. When people do this, they see the curve of this round-shaped structure gradually disappearing from view. This creates a sense of calmness and enhances Samadhi or concentrated mind. These surreal experiences help people to develop faith in the spiritual dimension of their lives.

Characteristics of Sacred Buildings

The main buildings in a Buddhist sacred place – in this case, a temple - are the Chedi, the Ubosot (ordination hall) and the Viharn (assembly hall). A Chedi is, as already indicated, a monument of worship built in commemoration of the Buddha, to house Buddha relics. It usually has a round shape and is hollow. Ubosot and Viharn are rectangular buildings used for rituals. In this study, the characteristics of these sacred buildings will be analyzed.

Shapes of the Buildings

The important building in Buddhist sacred architecture place is Chedi. Many Chedis in Thailand are built in a round shape, known locally as the Ceylonese-style Chedi (เจดีย์ทรงลังกา) or the bell-shaped Chedi. Another form of Chedi is called Phra Prang (พระปรางค์). Both styles of Chedi represent Mount Sumeru.

The round-shaped Chedi is built in superimposed tiers and consists of different parts; namely, the base, Ong Ra-khang (องค์ระฆัง -- the dome-shaped structure), Banlang (บัลลังก์ -- a quadrangular platform at the neck of the dome), Plong Chanai (ปล้องไฉน -- the lower part of the tapering spire), Plee Yod (ปลียอด -- the upper part of the tapering spire) and Yad Nam Khang (หยดน้ำค้าง -- a round ball at the culminating point of Plee Yod). The shape of this Chedi makes the structure look light and buoyant.



Figure 43 : The round-shaped Chedi (Illustrate by Mongkol Sopapinitnan)

The meaning of each part of a Chedi can be ascertained from a number associated with a particular word, phrase or question in a Katha or Dhamma puzzle. Hence, the meaning may be determined according to the number of realms of existence in Triphum, the number of Buddhas, the age of an individual, and the year in which the Chedi was built. Sometimes Chedis were built on the basis that certain parts were simply assumed to be traditional.⁹⁵ However, the writer of this dissertation believes that the meaning of a Chedi lies in the contemplation of nature or reality, done through walking repeatedly round a religious structure, irrespective of whether the structure is built in a round shape, a square shape or with superimposed tiers. The virtuous mind arises as a person walks round the Chedi with the right level of contemplation. This will lead them to the realisation of the rounds of rebirth, which rounds are comparable to a never-ending cycle of defilement. As a person looks up at the Chedi, it will seem that the pinnacle is among the floating clouds and that the top part of the Chedi is moving. As a round-shaped spired structure, the Chedi with its

⁹⁵ Chot Kullayanamitr. (1996). *Original Thai Architecture* . Bangkok: ASA. p. 33-34, 38, 44, 47, 50, 53, 68-69.

disappearing curves appears to gravitate upwards towards the sky, drawing the mind to a peaceful kingdom situated in a golden light in the higher realms.

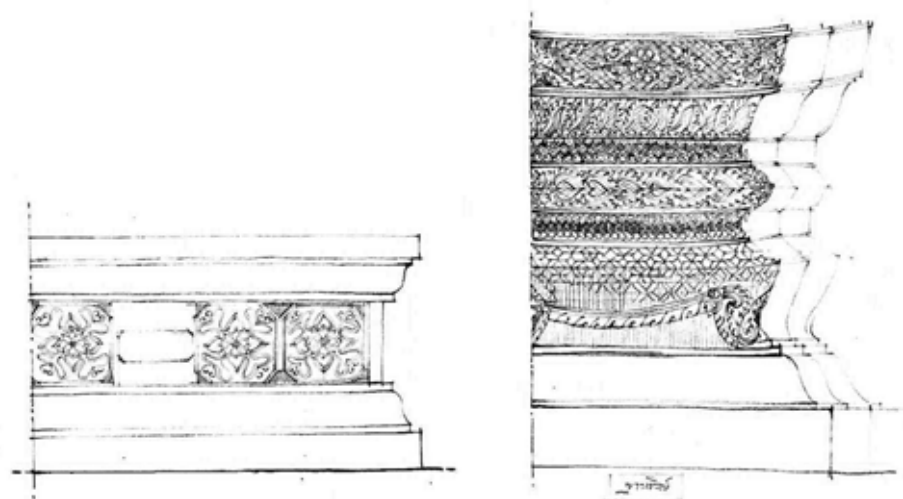


Figure 44 : The base of sacred building (Illustrate by Sayaporn Arpornthip)

Sacred buildings where religious rituals can be performed inside include Ubosot and Viharn. Generally both have a rectangular shape and serve as ceremonial sites. The base of these buildings is intended to denote a lion's leg, which is one of the animals in the Mount Sumeru principle. Sometimes, the base is decorated with sculptured reliefs of demons or Asura, giving the impression that they are supporting the building. This idea was derived from a story about the land of demons called "Tri Kuta Bunpot" (ตรีภูมบรรพต) or the three mountains, located below Mount Sumeru. The demons at the base are seen as being inferior to the building, which is a sacred place. They also illustrate that each architectural element in the building represents a physical element of Mount Sumeru. The demons at the base are seen as inferior to the building, which is a sacred place.

Another prominent characteristic of Thai sacred buildings is the concave curve. This is noticeable in several parts of the building where the edges can be seen pointing toward the sky, exuding a sense of buoyancy. These are in keeping with openings or windows and the space between decorative pillars that help to lessen the bulky appearance of the structures, making them look light and buoyant. The walls are built leaning inwards and the pillars around the building taper towards the top – making the upper parts thinner than the lower parts. These features make the overall structures look like they are rising towards the sky.

The roofs of temples are also different from those of ordinary houses, which are simply either gable roofs or hip roofs. Temple roofs, known as "Mondop" (มณฑป)

style roofs, are spired roofs of three, five or seven tiers overlapping each other. There are no historical records explaining what determines the number of tiers of the buildings. The numbers three, five and seven may refer, respectively, to the three planes of existence in Triphum, the five aggregates (five Khandhas -- เบญจขันธ์) in Buddhism and the five Buddhas in the great aeon (ภัทรกัปป์), and the seven mountains around Mount Sumeru.⁹⁶ Additionally, the number of tiers may designate the status of sacred buildings. For example, religious structures with seven-tier roofs were commissioned by the king. These include sacred buildings such as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok and the Phra Buddhabat temple (พระพุทธรบาท) in Saraburi Province,⁹⁷ both of which have Mondop roofs. Another type of roof is called “Prang” which is a bud-shaped roof, formed underneath by a series of tiers and receding cubes. An example of a building with a Prang-style roof is Prasat Phra Thepbidorn (ปราสาทพระเทพบิดร) in Bangkok, which houses the statues of former kings (who are called Phra Thepbidorn) of the current Rattanakosin dynasty. The prang roof of this building denotes the status of the kings, who were regarded as being the Indra King deity residing above Mount Sumeru.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

⁹⁶ Chot Kullayanamitr. (1996). *Original Thai Architecture*. Bangkok: ASA. p.45

⁹⁷ See more details about royal architecture in Chapter 4.3

A nine-tier parasol (called ‘Noppa Patala Maha Sawethachart’) used with the king’s throne found at the top of some royal buildings such as the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall and the Chakri Maha Prasat Hall. The five-tier spired roof is used with lower ranking structures such as Aporn Phimok Hall (Phra Thinang Aporn Phimok) and the Aisawan Thiphaya-art Royal building (Phra Thinang Aisawan Thiphaya-art)



Figure 45 : Shapes of the Sacred Buildings
(Figure by Sombat Wong, and Waranan Sowanee)

Buildings within the grounds of ordinary temples, which do not have royal titles, are each covered by a gable roof of three tiers, which helps increase the space within the building. The gable roof easily distinguishes the buildings from common houses. It also reduces the bulky appearance of the structure, making it look light and buoyant.

In addition, the roofs of sacred buildings are elaborately decorated with symbols that represent various elements in the universe found in the principle of Mount Sumeru. Examples of decoration are a decorative part on the ridge of the roof comprising seven thin spikes called Satta Boriphan (สัตตบริภัณฑ์) (found in Lanna temples), the floating cloud pattern, roof finials (Chor Fah -- ช่อฟ้า) of Naga head. This includes small roof tiles overlapping each other, symbolising the waves of Sithundorn Ocean.

Decorative elements of the Buildings

The word “element” denotes a characteristic unit which is a part of an architectural form. The element has a double meaning as it denotes both an independent whole and a part belonging to a more extensive context.⁹⁸

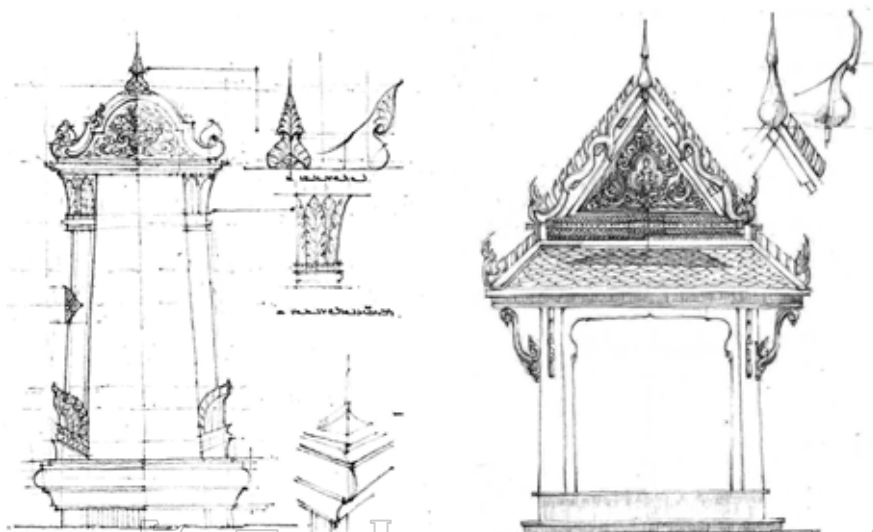
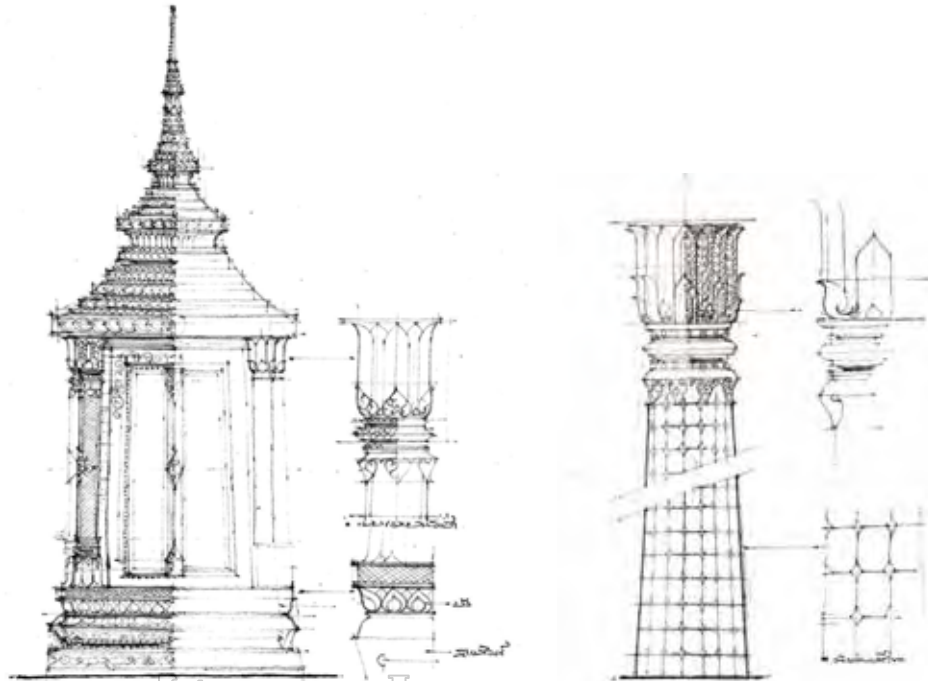


Figure 46 : Decorative elements of sacred buildings (Illustrate by Sayaporn Arpornthip)

The main decorative elements of Thai architecture are Chor Fah : a finial of the head of Naga, the serpent king on the top edge of a structure, Bai Raka (ใบระกา) : toothlike ridges on the sloping edges of a roof gable, representing the fin on the back of Naga, Hang Hong (หางหงส์) : a finial at the lower end of a bargeboard, Nag Sadung (นาคสะดุ้ง): undulating bargeboards built to represent the body of Naga, Khan Thuai (คันทวย) : a corbel. These roofing elements are obviously derived from mystical creatures on Mount Sumeru. Chor Fah, which means ‘sky tassel’, resembles either the head of a mystical bird ‘Garuda’ or the head of Naga, the serpent king. Similarly, Bai Raka can, in addition to the meaning given above, symbolise both the feathers of Garuda and the fins of Naga as the two animals are entwined in battle.⁹⁹ Hang Hong, meaning ‘goose tail,’ is – as just mentioned - a finial at the lower end of a bargeboard. For some experts, Hang Hong is seen as another Naga head. In architectural design, these decorations help protect the roof against wind, rain and humidity.

⁹⁸ Norberg-Schulz, C. (1968). *Intensions in Architecture*. Cambridge: M.I.T.Press. p.133

⁹⁹ Sathapithnonda Nithi, & Brain, M. (2005). *Architecture of Thailand: A Guide to Traditional and Contemporary Forms*. Bangkok: Asia Books.p.142



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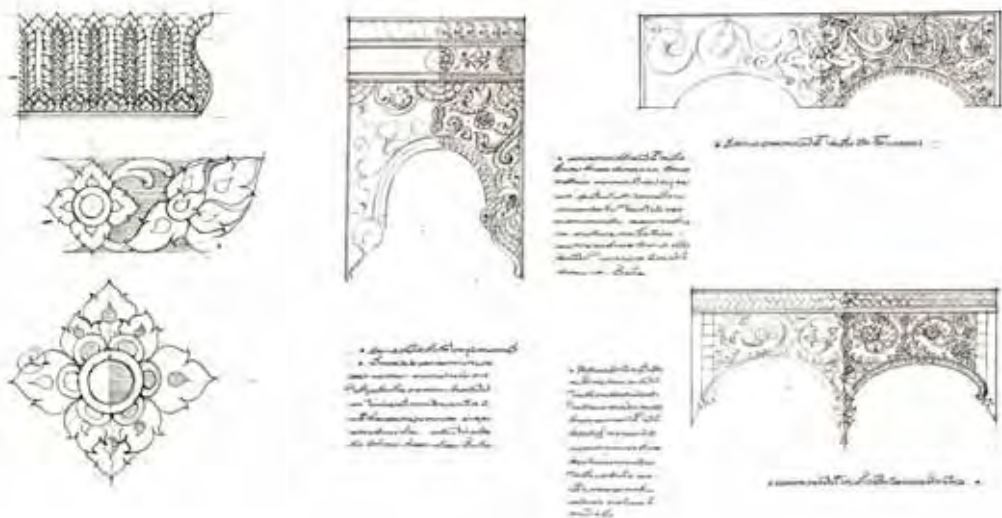


Figure 47 : the decorative parts of sacred buildings developed from natural forms and made by Thai traditional technique. (Illustrate by Sayaporn Arpornthip)

Generally, the decorative parts of sacred buildings can take the form of a gilded relief, or simply be made using carved wood, lacquer painting, mother-of- pearl inlay,

glass mosaic, crockery mosaic, ceramics, plaster and stucco. The most prevalent form of Thai motifs is called ‘Lai Kanok’ (ลายกนก)-- a systematically arranged set of designs, which appear to be a stylized version of natural forms such as flames, leaves and flowers.

Other motifs are drawn from sacred narratives such as the Jataka tales¹⁰⁰ and divine beings such as Narai, Garuda, devas and other zodiacal figures. Perhaps the least decorative part of sacred buildings is the base. It is simply made in different layers to add height and structural complexity to the building. It is often built in a shape that resembles a lotus bud or a lion’s throne. The most decorative parts are covered with glass mosaic, gold leaf, paint or consist of a relief pattern of figures and forms. The buildings are usually surrounded by guardian figures such as elephants, Garudas, Asura and Devas.

The use of color in Thai sacred architecture comes in seven pure, gem-like hues representing the days of the week. These are, starting from Sunday: red, yellow, pink, green, orange, sky-blue and violet.¹⁰¹ These colours can be seen in most parts of the buildings, except the walls, which are always whitewashed. The largest expanse of colour on the exterior of a sacred building is the roof, which is covered by glazed ceramic tiles, typically laid in a two-tone pattern with a large rectangular area in the centre, surrounded by a border in a contrasting colour. This design gives the large roof surface a lighter appearance and more dynamic configuration.¹⁰²

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

¹⁰⁰The Jataka tale or *chadok* (ชาดก) in the Thai language refer to a voluminous body of literature concerning the previous births of the Buddha.

¹⁰¹ Sathapithnonda Nithi, & Brain, M. (2005). *Architecture of Thailand: A Guide to Traditional and Contemporary Forms*. Bangkok: Asia Books.p.206

¹⁰² Sathapithnonda Nithi, & Brain, M. (2005). *Architecture of Thailand: A Guide to Traditional and Contemporary Forms*. Bangkok: Asia Books.p.206

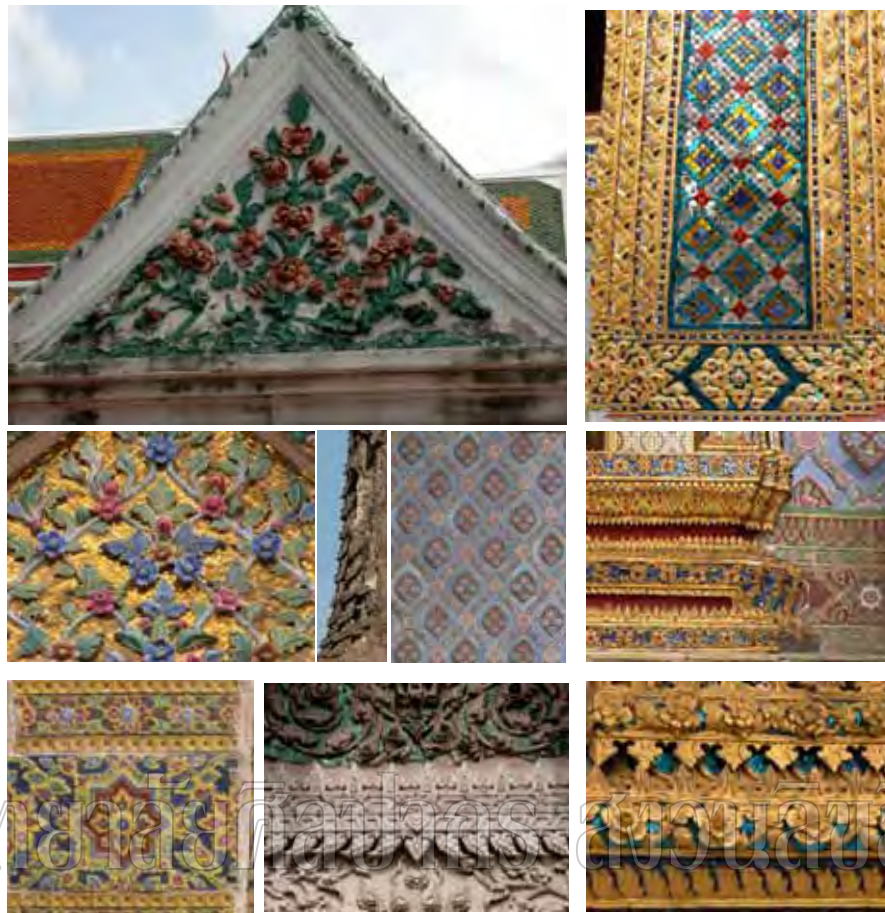


Figure 48 : Color used and decorative elements of the Sacred Buildings
(Figure by Waranan Sowannee)

All the elements of sacred structures in Thailand, from the base to the roof, are meant to create the impression of lightness. When looking at a sacred building, people's eyes glide from the edge to the centre, from the base to the upper part, and from the top to the sky, and then to the planes of existence above. In the process, physical outer space links with spiritual inner space.

All of the elements of a sacred structure are thus meant to convey to people a sense of calmness, lightness and drifting in the air as if the structure were rising towards a higher place¹⁰³. These elements include the concave base, the leaning walls, the tapering pillars, the sweeping multi-layered roof or the spired roof, the overlapping tiers, the indented corners, and the decorative elements and motifs. They are all helpful in lessening the hefty look of the structure and making people feel as if every line and every element point to the same place, which is the emptiness above.

¹⁰³ Chot Kullayanamitr. (1996). *Original Thai Architecture* . Bangkok: ASA. p.58

The Interior Space of Sacred Buildings

Entering into an ordination hall or an assembly hall is comparable to a sudden transition from the external world to a sacred space – from a bright outside to a dim, quiet enclosure. The interior space of Thai sacred architecture is often adorned with gilded, lacquered columns and mother-of-pearl door panels that glisten in the morning and the evening. The ceiling is covered with either gold leaf or pieces of shaped glass that are designed to reflect light and be reminiscent of stars. The walls are decorated with polychrome murals which are dimly illuminated when receiving sunlight, evoking feelings of obscurity and eeriness.



Figure 49 : The Interior Space of Sacred Buildings
(Figure by Waranan Sowannee)

Enshrined in the building, the main Buddha image, which is entirely covered with gold leaf, glows against the backdrop of lighted candles. This creates the impression that an aura is radiating out of the body of the Buddha image. This sacred atmosphere is also aided by the chanting of monks and the fragrance and thin smoke of incense sticks. These factors encourage the development of intense concentration and faith in the context of Buddhism. After people adjust to the subdued light, their previous feelings of uncertainty, confusion and doubt transform into a sense of freedom. This transition is aided by the luminosity of the Buddha image, which represents the heavenly realm or the state of nirvana, far removed from Samsara.

The decoration of the interior space of Thai sacred architecture contains elaborate detail, which is done repeatedly. Illumination, colour, and texture are other important means to the definition of the mass element.¹⁰⁴In terms of structure, these elements display the organisation within the clutter. Duality of Existence shows that “unity” denotes a combining of all the parts, both agreeable and disagreeable, shown through visualisation. It induces thoughts about the rounds of rebirth, which is related to the law of causality or Karma. As a result, it makes people realise the impermanence of life and aspire to be free from Samsara.

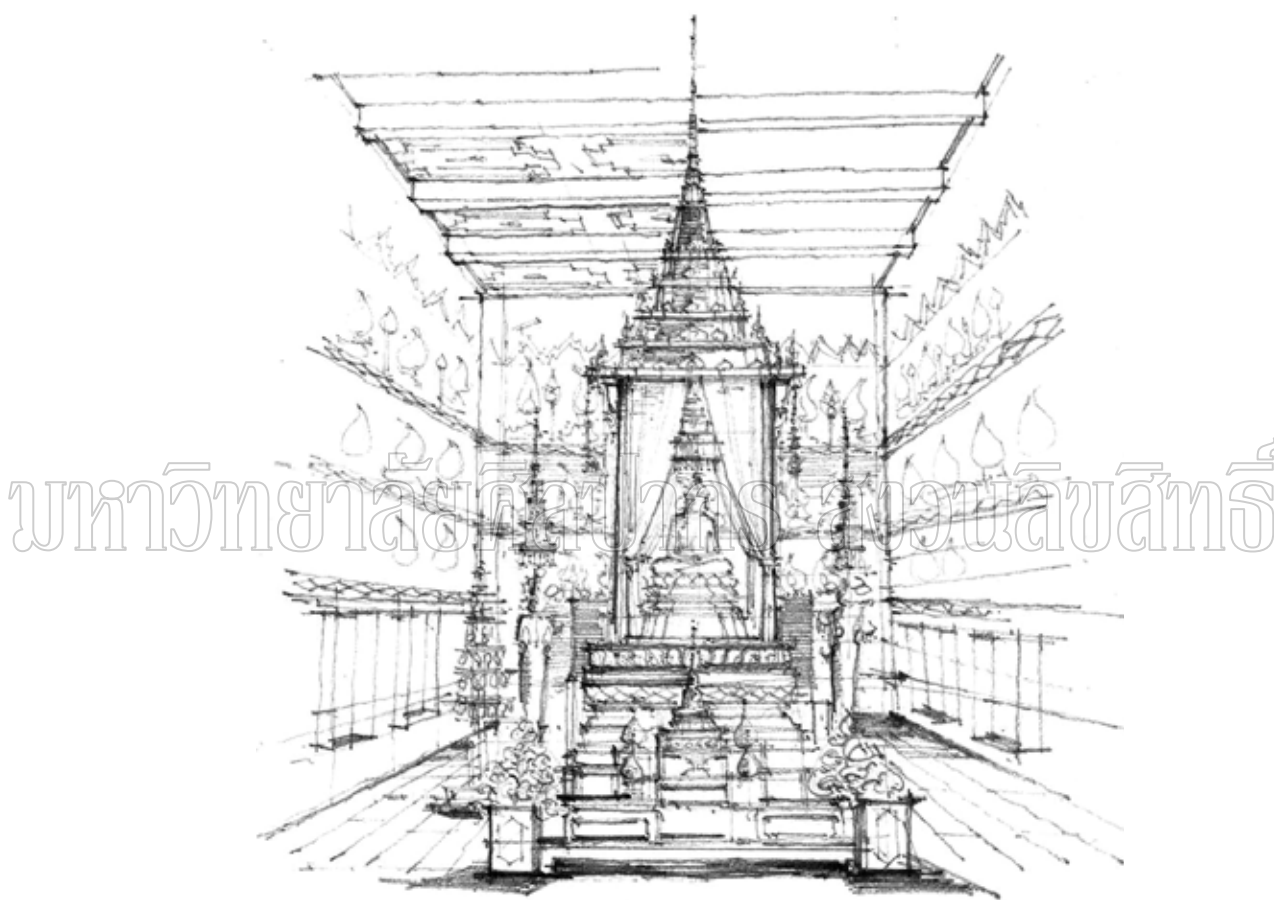


Figure 50 : The Interior Space of Sacred Buildings (Illustrate by Sayaporn Arpornthip)

A variety of decorative arts in sacred buildings ranging from paintings, motifs, light and shade to the main Buddha image transform the state of nirvana or ‘Lokkutara’ to the state of profanity or ‘Lokkiya’. These are appealing to people and give them a feeling of pleasure and delight.¹⁰⁵They can even stimulate a strong sense of enchantment with Buddhism. However, according to Buddhist teachings, people should not get carried away by warm feelings, a pleasant atmosphere and the

¹⁰⁴ Norberg-Schulz, C. (1968). *Intensions in Architecture*. Cambridge: M.I.T.Press. p.134

¹⁰⁵ Kirtikhacara, J., (2007). *Experiencing Angkor Vat: an Architectural Assessment*, Chiang Mai: Faculty of Architecture. P.100

splendour of the Buddha image, all of which could hinder them in reaching the spiritual bliss beyond worldly phenomena.

4.4.3 Values of Sacred Mountain in Sacred Architecture

The metaphors about the great universe, galaxies, Mount Sumeru, the four continents, the Sindhudorn Ocean, the concept of time in Buddhism and the nature of all Buddhas in the aeon and the universe, imply the notion that should be inferred from wisdom. It is a concept for people with wisdom to contemplate upon, concerning the stage of time in the universe and the stage of time in the mind as well as the reality of nature and mind. To estimate the values of sacred mountain in sacred architecture, it is necessary to consider various factors. These factors are the environment, the appropriate physical conditions of a sacred architecture that are visible objects, sounds, smell, texture,¹⁰⁶ particularly – concerning people who make use of the sacred architecture - wisdom, experience and knowledge of Buddhist teachings.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์



Figure 51 : Serenity, Lightness and Buoyancy in Thai sacred architecture
(Illustrate by Sombat Wongasawanarumon)

¹⁰⁶ the tongue and taste concern the sense doorway but more studies are needed.

There are three main characteristics of Thai sacred architecture that applies the principle of Mount Sumeru.

1. Serenity
2. Lightness
3. Buoyancy or airiness giving an impression of upward movement¹⁰⁷

Walking into a sacred place is comparable to entering into the centre of the universe, where Mount Sumeru is situated. Every step means the arising and the falling away of physical phenomena and mental phenomena or consciousness. As a person passes each section of the sacred place from the wall, the sandy ground (Lan Sai) and the cloister (Rabiang Kod), their mind slowly becomes calmer. As a person walks around the Chedi, they become more inclined to develop deeper concentration and mindfulness.

The three characteristics mentioned above are factors that support the development of the five spiritual faculties (Indriya 5) which are faith or conviction (Saddha), mindfulness (Sati), perseverance (Viriya), concentration (Samadhi), and wisdom (Panya) to the right extent. When facing the main Buddha image in the sacred building, a person's mind enters a state of serenity. This is when the five spiritual faculties are in perfect harmony. The mind will then be ready to reach a higher level of wisdom. Therefore, all of the elements constitute the road that leads to the Genius Loci¹⁰⁸ or spirit of a sacred place.

4.4.4 Sacred Mountain and Sacred Architecture at Present

Buddhist teachings can be divided into numerous discourses that apply to different types of personalities at different levels of defilement (Kilesa) and wisdom. The teachings range from the mundane or worldly or Lokiya (โลกียะ) level to the supramundane or Lokuttara (โลกุตตระ) level, which is the highest level, aiming at eradicating all defilements, and hence ending Samsara. At the mundane level, the architectural symbols in a sacred place are meant to teach laymen with defilements to realise the need to develop wisdom to eradicate those defilements (However, these symbols are not necessary for people with a high level of wisdom to attain the supramundane level.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, it is noticeable that Buddhist sacred architecture in Thailand is laden with symbols and tales, which are aimed at making people scared of bad Karma or the consequences of bad deeds, and at persuading people to perform

¹⁰⁷ Chot Kullayanamitr. (1996). *Original Thai Architecture*. Bangkok: ASA. p.22

¹⁰⁸ See Norberg-Schulz, C., 1980. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, New York: Rizzoli. P. 18-33

¹⁰⁹ Chot Kullayanamitr. (1996). *Original Thai Architecture*. Bangkok: ASA. p.22

good acts that will bear fruit in heaven.¹¹⁰ The Jataka tales encourage people to be committed to striving for virtue, as in one of the stories of Buddha's life.

Building sacred structures as a tool to explain Buddhist concepts was definitely not a simple task since builders needed to have a thorough and accurate understanding about the true essence of the teachings before they could transform the concepts into a material form. Applying the principle of Mount Sumeru to architectural works also meant that the builders had to acquire knowledge related to a variety of subjects such as the arts, architecture, engineering and astrology. They had to be able to express the state of sacredness through an architectural form that was both functional and supportive in encouraging people to acquire Buddhist wisdom. Architectural works are seen as an expression of society and culture. Artistic products represent a dimension of life in terms of spirituality.¹¹¹ Sacred architecture is a way to learn about Dhamma and ultimately to attain the highest level of knowledge to understand the reality of life and the universe.

In contrast to sacred architecture, modern architecture is not aimed at fostering a sense of serenity and lightness or at helping people to experience a state of sacredness. People who were masters of Thai architecture and culture have fallen away. The goal of studying architecture as a way to work for religion and royalty has been replaced by a goal to practise the profession for material gain. The pressure to survive in modern society, where everything seems to be going through a process of radical change, has altered the way of thinking of Thais. Even though new temples retain the old architectural style, they pale in comparison with the age-old temples in terms of creativity. This is because of a lack of deep knowledge about the philosophical substance of Buddhism.

Many activities that take place in a sacred place are not really related to the substance of Buddhism but are more concerned with the exploitation of Buddhism for commercial benefit and tourism. Sacred places may still be spiritual centres for Thai people but their misguided intentions in going there point to a disrespectful attitude towards the spiritual value of sacred architecture. Eventually, people will only know sacred structures as a religious symbol and not understand their true significance. These structures may thus in time become buildings without substance. That would be the end of Thai sacred architecture. Therefore, the future of Thai sacred architecture really depends on the attitude of present-day Thai Buddhists.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ John, L. (2005). *The Living Tree* (K. Sodsai, Trans.). Bangkok: Foundation For Children Publishing house. p. 52

Chapter Summary

The Mount Sumeru principle is manifested and applied by way of different types of symbols to explain the notion of sacredness. Every sacred space in Thailand is influenced strongly by the principle of Mount Sumeru, irrespective of whether the sacred space is a natural site, a sacred kingdom, a sacred urban plan, a sacred person, sacred architecture, or a sacred motif. Each figure and form constitutes a systematic set of symbols that point to the meaning of different aspects of the Mount Sumeru principle. It is a discourse. It contains the meaning and the dimensions that are metamorphosed into places, are transferred and are made more accessible to common people who have different levels of intellect. Collectively, they tell a story, which is accessible to common people who have a different level of intellect.

In sacred places, the sacredness is reflected through the association, the myth, the symbolic space, the metamorphosed materials and the motifs of elements, all of which affect human sense. It reveals the bond between nature on the one hand and human beings and their culture on the other. When a big community became a kingdom, the Mount Sumeru principle was used in drawing up a town plan, deciding on an auspicious location for the town or city, and establishing a form of administration. The principle helped people to acknowledge their role, duty, rights and status in society. This was done through a number of rituals and symbols, based on that principle that ordinary people could understand. When there was a widespread scarcity of food, or a famine, people performed rituals based on the Mount Sumeru principle to boost morale and obtain relief from their suffering. In normal times, rituals reflected the cycle of the world and the universe, both of which had Mount Sumeru as their centre, to remind people that they shared a common ancestry and a common destiny. As a result, it encouraged a sense of unity among people in society. At an individual level, the Mount Sumeru-based sacredness was communicated through a variety of architectural forms and features, ranging from layout, axis, position, architectural design, decoration to overall atmosphere. All of these elements were meant to encourage people who used the sacred place to have faith in Buddhism and to give them access to sacred experiences, depending on their level of Buddhist intellect and understanding of Buddhism.

The emergence of sacred places was the result of a social and cultural need. It represents a dimension of life that concerns spirituality. Sacred places encouraged the development of wisdom, enabling people to understand the reality of life and earth's relationship with the universe. The sacred places, which could give rise to emotions as varied as enchantment and doubt, and even fear, traditionally inspired people to create architectural marvels and also to acquire Buddhist wisdom. Every form of symbol in a sacred place can be deciphered in terms of interior experiences gained only at the sacred place. Metaphors about Mount Sumeru are only the notion. With this notion as a backdrop, it has been possible to show how physical representations of sacredness such as symbols, sacred architecture and rituals have deep meaning for people. The

interpretation of these forms and events requires careful consideration, as well as wisdom and proper concentration.

Every sacred place contains Dhamma puzzles. Some abandoned sacred places may have no significance to people nowadays but, according to the essence of Buddhist teachings, they are still a manifestation of the reality in which everything arises, remains for a short while, and then falls away. Nobody can escape this reality, not even the divine kings who experienced happiness, unhappiness, praise, criticism, and the acquisition and loss of possessions and position.

The principle of Mount Sumeru in sacred places involves a sophisticated interrelationship of form and symbol. When investigating all the elements in the principle, it shows that they have systematic relationship with each other. This interrelationship becomes ingrained in people's memory, and they interpret the symbols through the six senses aided by the awareness of the present moment.

Nowadays, Thai society seems to place greater emphasis on secularism than on spiritual progress. The Mount Sumeru principle and the sacred places are obviously being misinterpreted. People generally acknowledge the existence of the stories and symbols but they do not pay much attention to the underlying message and the essence of these symbols. One of the problems is that there has been a change in people's attitudes, values, objectives and ideals that are moving away from the right views. The result is that sacred places are being used to attain materialistic goals that are far removed from those originally intended. The materialistic goals take little cognizance of the real meaning of the symbols which were intended to teach people about spiritual realities.

This is only a partial interpretation of the underlying message of the principle of Mount Sumeru in its application to sacred places. Certainly, noble persons with a high level of wisdom would be able to understand the philosophical meanings of these Dhamma puzzles much more deeply than this. My understanding of the complex principles are critically set out in this chapter.

Chapter 5

Thai Sacred Place: Spaces of the Mind

In Thailand, there are a lot of sacred places, which can be categorised in many ways. This study investigates and interprets a number of sacred places in the country that have the sacred mountain theme. The previous chapter gave an in-depth explanation and interpretation about Thai sacred places through the analogy of sacred mountain. This chapter presents an analysis and a synthesis aimed at exploring the spatial structure of a sacred place without the help of signs and symbols explaining the stories about sacred mountains. It discusses the spatial structure, i.e. the cluster of notions relating to Thai sacred places. It is divided into four clusters; The meaning of sacred space and places in Thai context, The concept of Thai sacred space and places, Characteristics of Thai sacred places, Sense of Thai sacred places

5.1 The Meaning of Sacred Space and Sacred Place in a Thai Context

In Thai notion, sacred space is defined as a place that evokes a sense of sacredness of space and time. It is a place of great beauty where a person can find himself spiritually connected or awakened into moments of heightened spiritual consciousness.

People in general perceive a sacred space as a place of a higher entity associated with the supernatural, deities or sacred power. Whatever these higher entities are called, they represent sacredness or a higher power. This sense of "sacred" invokes a unity or a connectedness, a presence of the blessing of existence. Sacredness is when human beings become one with nature and are reminded of the sanctity of all space created by nature. Sacredness is an experience of the Divine in life itself, in all things. Humans see all things as interdependent and they experience a feeling of harmony when they have achieved this balanced perspective. For Thais, sacred space and sacred place are things which are accessible, rather than inaccessible. To them, the notion of sacredness is not the preserve of certain religions or faiths. People can experience the sacredness of a place through their senses, including their consciousness.

A sacred space is not just contained within the concrete form of something that is created. It is something whose presence in creation must be discerned and felt. However, the majority of people, particularly Buddhists, lack Buddhist wisdom to realize the ultimate truth without the aid of a medium, such as symbols. Being ignorant of the facts, and guided merely by a sense of their own importance, they still

need to hold on to something to help them find the meaning and the purpose of their existence. That is where the sacred place comes in.

A space becomes sacred when we feel thoroughly familiar with it. A sacred place is created when we start to identify specific landmarks and localities, recognize particular positions and understand spatial relations among things in space.¹ It is a space of spirituality. In Thailand, with its predominantly Buddhist culture, different levels of consciousness and virtue such as the planes of existence in the Mount Sumeru principle and the concept of the four continents are used to determine particular positions and understand the spatial relationship among things in sacred space. Then symbols are thereafter employed as a medium to depict the sacredness of a place in a physical form.

A sacred place is, therefore, a particular place considered to have special power because it symbolises something holy. A sacred place in Thailand is always replete with symbols, sacred centres and meanings. Symbolically, most sacred places represent centres of the world, point at which the three cosmic planes of heaven, earth, and hell are in contact and where communication between them is possible.² When human beings have an experience in a sacred place, they become one with the elements in the relationship system. This helps them to identify their position in relation to both other human beings and the world as a whole. On the basis of this understanding, humans become aware of their roles and duty in both the secular and spiritual world and are guided to behave appropriately in society.

Spiritually, sacred places support the development of intellect and understanding about the reality and their existence. Finally, as people attain nirvana, which is the ultimate Buddhist goal of life, all defilements and suffering will be eradicated.

Sacred space and sacred place are indeed one of the aspects of daily life and they represent a link between the spiritual and the secular worlds. The two worlds are inseparable in the daily lives of Thai people. To them, work is not just an occupation but a reflection of their spirituality. There is no way humans can gain wisdom in the spiritual world without an understanding of the secular world.

The significance of sacred space and place is therefore broad, covering physical, social, cultural and, particularly, mental space. The most noteworthy aspect of Thai sacred space and place lies in the spiritual dimension. Every place has equal potential to become a sacred place. Thus, based on this assumption, nature, the countryside, states, palaces, temples, spirit houses, arts and even persons, knowledge and mind insofar as it is divine, can constitute a sacred place.

¹ Tuan, Y. F. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.71-79

² *ibid*, p.70

5.2 Concepts of Thai Sacred Space and Place

To understand the sacred space and place, one has to understand its underlying concept. The underlying concept is comparable to the principle in sacred space. It is derived from inspiration, thoughts and imagination, and is the starting point of the process leading to the establishment of a sacred place. It also involves various ways of interpreting the idea and of expressing it through different symbols that can be experienced by the senses. In this study, the main principles of Thai sacred place relate to the concept of the system and the linkage between all things, the concept of time, and the concept of relationships between human beings, and between human beings and nature. All of these are discussed below.

1.) The Concept about the System and the Interconnection of All Matters

The concept about the system and the interconnection of all matters involves a set of things or parts connected to form a complex whole, or a set of things operating together as parts of a network or a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done; an organized scheme or method. This is the essence of the concept of a sacred space.

The concept of Thai sacred mountains, or rather the principle of Mount Sumeru, incorporates the concept of the system and the interconnection of all matters mentioned above. It directly deals with the concept of the oneness of the world and also of the entire universe. It is an attempt to explain that all living creatures and inanimate objects in the universe and all planes of existence (including human beings, deities, demons, animals and substances in nature) exist in or rely on the same reality, the same oneness. Even though living entities on different planes have their own qualities which differ from those of other entities on other planes, they are all related within the same system. When, therefore, a part of the system is missing or defective, it will affect other parts and disturb the whole system.

This concept about the system and the interconnection of all matters is often reflected in the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm on different space. Everything is in harmony since they co-exist in the same system (The Part as a Whole and the Whole as a Part). For example, people are a part of the community. Each community is a part of the city. Each city is a part of the province. Each province is a part of a country. Countries often form a union. Each union is a part of the Jambudiva Continent. The Jambudiva Continent is a part of the human realm. The human realm is a part of the Triphum. The

Triphum is a part the universe that has Mount Sumeru as its centre. This universe is a part of the great indefinite universe.³

An analysis of the layout of a sacred space reveals this concept of “a world within a world”. For instance, the city plan of the sacred state (in circular or square shapes) shows that elements are arranged in layers on top of one another. One of the main elements, namely Mount Sumeru, can also be identified in various positions in Thai sacred architecture. For example, the position of the Chedi or the main Buddha image enshrined in the Vihara (assembly hall) and the Ubosot (ordination hall), may represent the concept of the universe within the great indefinite universe. Another example is the sequence of enclosures in the sacred place.

Even the human body is a composite of an indefinite number of cells and atoms systematically connected with one another. Even though these cells have different functions, they operate in harmony as one, in perfect equilibrium or undisturbed normality.⁴

Obviously, the concept about the system and the interconnection of all matters includes everything in this great universe, whether it be animals, natural resources, individual human beings communities, kingdoms, the world or even the universe itself. They are all miscellaneous elements bound intricately in harmony under the overreaching principle of Mount Sumeru. And in the sacred space of the mind, human beings can come to understand all external matters, including the world and the universe system, when they understand their mind or consciousness. This is because the world is represented in oneself and oneself is the world. That is a psychological, absolute fact...”⁵

2.) The concept of “Helix Time”

Time is the moment, it is being and existence.⁶ There are four ways of thinking about the concept of time. The first way is to think of it as a straight line pointing upwards, meaning the continuous progression of life and all things. The second way is to think of it as a straight line pointing downwards, which is the regression of society as time goes by. The third way is to think of it as a

³ Tripitaka Book 20, Phra Sutantapidok Book 12, Aīguttaranikàya Tikanibat Julanee Sutra p.257-258 (พระไตรปิฎกเล่มที่ 20 พระสุตตันตปิฎก เล่ม 12 อังคุตตรนิกาย ดิกนิมาต จูฬนีสุตต หน้า 257, หน้า 258) and --. (2001). Phra Paisatkuruprapa SappatabuddhapuravaPanitanaviset Sutra (พระไตรปิฎกจูฬนีสุตตประภาสัตตปุททปุรวปนิธานวิเศษสูตร). Visavapat Pattamaget (Trans and edit), Bangkok: Thai-Tibet Study Center.

⁴ Prawase Wasi. (2007). *Humans' Way of Life in the Twenty First Century* (4th ed.). Bangkok: Suan Ngerm Mee Ma. P. 27

⁵ J. Krishnamurti, *The Transformation of Man*: page 163

⁶ Definition of ‘time’ in Thai dictionary by The Royal Institute, 1999

circle, which symbolises a return to the origin. The last way is to think of it as a helix or a spiral, which shows a return almost to the original state.⁷

Under the concept of sacred mountains, the concept of time indicates that the times of the world, the universe and human society overlap and condition each other. Time absolutely moves forwards, enabling a rough prediction of future events. Thai people tend to think of time as a circle, believing that everything will always return to its original condition. They believe in the round of rebirth as a basic principle of the world. At the same time, they accept the helix time concept, which states that things will return almost to the original state. Each turn of the spiral goes either upwards or downwards, depending on the person's actions and karma.

For Thais, time is a period of an event or activity or a process of something. It is about a certain period in their way of life such as planting crops, harvesting crops and other rituals related to nature. It is measured by clock or restricted to dates in the calendar.⁸ In terms of sacredness, time is measured by mind and consciousness. Sacred time is a time when a person is aware of the reality or awakens from ignorance to wisdom. This is when the mind sees the light, with great delight. The mind is always alert even when one is sleeping. It is tirelessly ready to experience the reality.⁹ Sacred time, therefore, takes place whenever the mind is aware of the reality.

Time is thus transformed into a sacred place and always related to space. This can be seen in symbolic depictions of Mount Sumeru, whether they be in the form of a mandala (Purusamonton), a square, or a circular chart of the universe. These may be interpreted as a round of rebirth of time and mind (consciousness) in the form of a sacred place. The architectural plan of a sacred place particularly demonstrates time in relation to the orbit of the sun and the moon, the zodiac, the star signs and the internal space and time of the human soul.¹⁰ The boundary of the sacred place is thus comparable to the convergence of the solar and the lunar paths. It is replicated in a square area¹¹ on whose vertical and horizontal axis is located Mount Sumeru, symbolically at the core

⁷ Adapted from The factors that reflect the thinking process of Thai society, by Chaiwat Satha-arnon, see Satha-arnon, (2006). *The Way Thais Think* on how to manage "the truth" in Thai society. In the Way Thais Think, ed. Prof. Dr A. Ganjanapan Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund.

⁸ Definition of 'time' in Thai dictionary by The Royal Institute, 1999

⁹ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. (2000). Ten Years in Suan Mok. Buddhism: Visaka Bucha issue, special issue, May, Buddha Dhamma – Buddhadasa in Memory 68(2).

¹⁰ See details in Mandala in Architecture Plan in Bunce, F. W., 2002. *The Iconography of Architectural Plan*, New Delhi: D.K.Printworld (P) Ltd. P.3-55 and see detail Mandala and psyche in Govinda, L. A., 1976. *Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa*, California: Dharma Publishing.

¹¹ Kramrisch, S., 1976. *The Hindu Temple*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. P.30-39 Stella Kramrisch explains that it shows a perspective of the solar system in terms of Heliocentric and Geocentric models

position of the universe. It can be symbolised by animal figures in the signs of Zodiac, placed at the base of the Buddha image. The position of the animals corresponds with the orbit of the star signs at different periods. Each animal figure represents people born in that star sign. When the stars move to a certain position in the universe, it causes a change in their lives. Therefore, the future can be roughly predicted as things will keep returning almost to the original state, like a helix, every 12 years.

Time in Thai context is the period of an event or activity. The purpose for which a place is used, and the duration of that event or activity, gives meaning to that place. The place will thus have different meanings associated with it at different times. These meanings can differ in the extreme, and range from sanctity to profanity. Space always alternately moves and stops. Space will be used for different activities at different time. For example, Sanam Luang or Phramen Ground in front of the Grand Palace is used for various ceremonies and events such as the Royal Ploughing ceremony, royal funerals, the bathing ceremony of the Buddha image, Buddhist ceremonies and even kite flying. Moreover, at night Phramen Ground turns into a temporary shelter of the homeless and a meeting place for the illegal trade. This clearly shows that the meanings of the place can rotate or differ at different time in the extreme, from the sacred to the profane.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

3.) The concept of the human relationships and the relationship between human being and nature

Concepts about the human relationship and the relationships between humans and nature determine the actions and behaviours of human beings as well as their relationship with other human beings and their surroundings. There are two types of human relationships. The first one concerns the relationship of people in society. In a sacred place, people will be classified by their status, planes of existence and the four continents where they reside, all based on their karma. The classification is obviously influenced by the principle of Mount Sumeru, which clearly shows that people in society have different status levels.

The second type of human relationship centres on the idea that everybody is equal as a human being. They all live in the human realm in the Jambudiva Continent and have equal opportunity to move to a higher or lower realm in their next incarnation.

This concept of human relationships is guided by morality and ethical considerations. People of higher status should not, therefore, take advantage of people of lower status, but rather treat them with loving-kindness. They should also follow virtuous principles and bring peace to the kingdom. This can be seen,

for example, in the concept of the virtuous king and the virtue of the ruler. The king is perceived as the reincarnation of a god. This shows that kingship does not happen easily but involves a long accumulation of virtuous qualities. Kingship comes with heavy responsibilities that must be carried out diligently and it also comes with noble principles that need to be upheld strictly in order to maintain this honourable status. Since everybody is equal as a human being, the same moral principles or precepts will guide their daily life also.

The concept of morality is expressed in sacred places through religious teachings, symbols and folklore.. Included here are the stories about the four continents of human beings and the different realms of existence and their occupants, for example, animals in the hell realm, animals in the human realm, mythical creatures, animals in the Himmapan forest, creatures in the Preta realm, demons, humans and deities¹². Even though these stories imply that humans do not have equal status, they aim at persuading people to see the value of morality and do good deeds by portraying examples of peaceful society and the consequences of bad karma. They also include local customs, rules and Buddhist teachings that serve as guidance for good living; namely, the five precepts, the eight precepts, the 38 Moral Principles for Good Living and the Four Paths of Accomplishment.

The relationship between humans and nature gives rise to the question whether humans exist under the law of nature or humans can control nature. In this case, nature can be classified as the natural environment (forests, rivers, skies, and so on.) and the law of nature. In terms of the natural environment, humans are controlled by nature. This much is evident from people's belief in the sacred power of mountains, rivers, forests, trees, rocks as well as some animals. Human beings need, therefore, to respect the sacred power of nature. When this sacred power is maintained properly, everything else is sustainable. People believe that whenever a natural disaster or a famine occurs, it is because of an imbalance in nature probably brought about by actions of human beings. Therefore, a ritual is performed to restore the sacred power to its normal state.

In terms of the law of nature, the relationship between humans and nature is determined by the law of dynamic interconnectedness, which states that everything arises under certain conditions and will definitely falls away. Human beings have to live by this law.

¹² See Lithai, K. (1890-1919). *Traibhumikatha : the story of the three planes of existence* (the Thai National Team for Anthology of Asean Literatures ed.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group.

5.3 Characteristics of Thai Sacred Place

The characteristics of Thai Sacred Place stem from different concepts such as local concepts of sacred places in Thailand; the concept of the system and the interconnection of all matters; the concept of time and concepts about the human relationships; and concept of inter-relationships between human beings and nature. There are different ways to present these concepts. In Thailand, there is a lot of evidence that shows that people have tried to find a way to explain the meaning and the state of sacredness through the medium of forms. These forms may have resulted from an attempt to assist people coming to use the sacred places. There was a gradual evolution of forms which were passed down for generations until they became characteristics of Thai sacred places. These characteristics are described below.

1. Integrity in Diversity

A Thai sacred place consists of a variety of integrated components and concepts arranged in integration. They blend well in the same space and system. They are put together in harmony into a unit or the same oneness.

In Thailand, various types of religious or superstitious beliefs can be seen in one place. For example, a Buddhist sacred place may include components reflecting a belief in Bramanism, ghosts, deities, ancestors and mythical animals in folklore. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish these beliefs from one another. In the case of the divine kings, who are perceived as sacred persons, each king may represent a reincarnation of a specific diety. The symbols used by the king show which gods the kings represent.

A Thai sacred place may feature many contrasting components but these components are all part of the universe, which has Mount Sumeru as its centre. They all belong to the same system, the same oneness. Every component is woven within the principle of Mount Sumeru.

2. Hierarchy Space

Sacred places in Thailand are hierarchically structured. Each sacred place has a certain level of significance in Thai society. Generally, Buddhist related places are at the highest level, followed by royal places, holy places in rural areas and the sacred places of particular groups of people. Each area has rules that lay down which architectural forms and components can be used. These forms and components in turn indicate the hierarchical position and status of the place as well as the spiritual and physical duties of people who use it or live in it.

For Example, in the layout of a sacred state, and city plans, architectural structures and rituals, things that represented Mount Sumeru would be placed in the most important position, which could be the middle, being the most prominent point or the axis point of the place. Sometimes, they would be surrounded by other components

to accentuate their presence. In architecture, each structure has its own specific status or ranking. This depends on the status of the owners or the users of the structures. The structure that has the highest status is the Grand Palace. It is followed by royal places and royal residences. Even houses have different status. For example, Ruen Kreung Sub house has a higher status than Ruen Kreung Phook house. Even Buddhist temples have different ranking. Temples in Thailand are broadly divided into private temples (built by commoners) and royal temples (built by kings or high-ranking government officials). Royal temples are classified into three classes (first class¹³, second class¹⁴, third class¹⁵), based on the ranking of the abbot or based on their own significance, which can be assessed somewhere between level one and level four. Each level has a name that is attached to the end of the temple's name. The first and highest level is called 'Racha Wora Maha Viharn'. Temples with this name are either built or renovated by kings, queens or crown princes. They are normally large and comprise many buildings. The second level is 'Racha Wora Viharn'. Temples at this level are renovated by kings, queens or the crown princes. The third level is 'Wora Maha Viharn'. Temples with this ranking are either built privately or renovated privately by kings, queens and crown princes. The fourth level is 'Wora Viharn'. Temples at this level are either built or renovated by kings, queens and crown princes and then donated to someone in honour of a particular individual.

Another examples are decorative elements (both external and internal space) also show the status of the buildings. Such as decorative elements of roof finials (Lamyong) such as Cho Fah, Bai Raka and Hang Hong are only used in high-ranking structures, Buddha related buildings and royal architecture. Even monks' living quarters and structures in the temples, excluding assembly halls, ordination halls, scripture pavilions (Ho Trai), study halls (Sala Kan Parian) or buildings enshrining a Buddha image, do not have these special decorative elements. Another example is a building with a spired roof, which has the highest ranking of all royal buildings and is reserved exclusively for the king. A spired roof may not thus used on other royal buildings, royal residences or even on religious buildings. Regalia and other items used in royal ceremonies also possess status. For example, items representing Mount Sumeru and used in royal ceremonies are more elaborate than corresponding items used in local ceremonies.

Some royal accessories such as royal parasols (called 'Chatr' in Thai) also indicate different prominence and prestige such as Sawatha Chat¹⁶, Chat Khao Lai

¹³ A first class temple or Phra Aram Luang Chan Ek is a temple that has a significant religious structure, enshrines the relics of kings or is a residence of a senior high-ranking abbot (Phra Racha Kana Phuyai). It is divided into three categories; namely, Racha Wora Maha Viharn, Racha Wora Viharn and Wora Maha Viharn

¹⁴ A second class temple is classified into Racha Wora Maha Viharn, Racha Wora Viharn, Wora Maha Viharn and Wora Viharn

¹⁵ A third class temple is classified into Racha Wora Viharn, Wora Viharn and Saman

¹⁶ Chatr made of white fabric.

Thong¹⁷, Chat Taad¹⁸ and Chat Moad¹⁹. Their ranks can be determined by a number of tiers. For example, the nine-tier Chatr²⁰ belongs to the king. The seven-tier Chatr²¹ is reserved for the king who has not yet been officially crowned, the official wife of the king, the queen, the crown prince and the crown princess. The five-tier Chatr²² is for members of the royal family with title of prince or princess 'Chao Fah', high-ranking wives of the king and the Supreme Patriarch who has the title of "Somdet Phra Maha Samana Chao". The three-tier Chatr is for the Supreme Patriarch.

Some features of the furniture and the buildings can also signify different status. Furniture with legs resembling those of a lion commands greater respect than furniture with legs resembling those of a pig. Traditionally, decorative material such as gold lacquer are found only on Buddha-related items. Similarly, construction materials such as bricks and stones were used mainly for temples and religious structures while houses and other buildings were usually made from wood.

These are some examples of things and symbols that signify status and ranking in Thai sacred spaces. In the past, people adhered strictly to the rules concerning these symbols. The concepts of social class distinction were applied in the layout of ceremonial plans and architecture and also apparent in the division drawn between ranks of, for example, monks, kings, high-ranking government officials and commoners. The respective groups determined the roles and duty of people within their ranks. In addition, language is also an indicator of status. There are different

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

²⁰ Nine-tier Chatr or 'Phra Noppa Patala Maha Sawetha Chatr' or 'Phra Maha Sawetha Chatr' for a king who has been officially crowned in a coronation ceremony

²¹ Seven-tier Chatr or 'Sabpata Patala Sawetha Chatr' for a king who is not yet officially crowned, the official wife of the king, the queen, the crown prince and the crown princess. It is called 'Sabpata Patala Sawetha Chatr' or 'Phra Sawetha Chatr Jet Chan' when it is used for the king's mother and the official wife of the king. It is called 'Phra Bowara Sawetha Chatr' when it is used by the crown prince.

²² Five-tier Chatr or 'Bencha Patala Sawetha Chatr' is for members of the royal family who holds a title of 'Chao Fah', high-ranking wives of the king (Phra Borom Racha Thewee or Phra Akra Chaya Thur), the Supreme Patriarch who has the title of "Somdet Phra Maha Samana Chao".

levels of language used in Thailand such as royal Thai language, polite Thai language and official Thai language. People nowadays care so little about social ranking and the levels of language that they use religious and royal words in naming things or persons or build structures that resemble royal or religious buildings. This was generally considered 'inappropriate' for Thai society in the past. This indicates that the significance of status and prestige in relation to buildings, ceremonies and people is likely to continue to decline to the point where distinctions are uncertain or ambiguous .

3. Complex Layers

Complex Layers are a result of the integrity in diversity and the hierarchical structure of sacred space. Each level of a sacred space consists of many different and connected parts. A sacred place may feature several minor elements of different levels. When illustrated in a vertical and horizontal relation, these elements reveal complex layers and display complicated and interrelated parts, including a sacred center of the system, a unit of the area in a city plan, a relationship between people, a building or group of buildings related to other units, a link between microcosm and macrocosm.

For example ; complex layers in the Grand Place, complex layers in the temple, complex layer of symbols in the sacred space. The sacred space consists of symbols derived from various faiths, including Buddhism, Brahmanism and a belief in the supernatural. These symbols also have a hierarchical structure. Each place is divided into several sections and laden with a variety of spiritual and religious symbols. Even symbols of Mount Sumeru can be found in different parts of a sacred place. These elements can co-exist in a place within a complex layer.

4. Patchwork of Overlapping Spaces

In the horizontal axis analysis, a sacred space is made up of so many different elements that it appears variegated. It is a like a patchwork of small areas, each with its own meaning, beliefs, story, and hierarchy. Each spot has its own meaning and story. These spots are put together in a sacred place with sufficient distance between them to show their own significance and purport. When one visits a sacred place, one can detect a variety of small sacred areas with their own meanings.

5. Blurred boundary

The boundary of a sacred space is not physically measured beforehand. Rather it is drawn from imagination. It can be said that there is an uncertain boundary between elements having different characteristics. To point out only one basic discrepancy, all of the terms tend to signify areas, districts, or frontiers, not boundary

lines. They mean a limit--an extremity without a clear-cut edge and without the sense of division between two powers.²³

For example; Humans, supernatural beings, and deities can co-exist in a place that does not have a fixed boundary, or in the case of a sacred state, there is an unwritten border without a boundary line. The state or the kingdom refers to the area of the kingdom to which the jurisdiction extends the power of the king".²⁴ It is the boundary of the sacred state in the outermost areas of a kingdom²⁵to which the king's power extends.

6. Flexibility

The uncertainty of boundary also extends to the exact meaning of a sacred place. This gives Thai sacred places another characteristic, which is flexibility. Since a sacred place does not belong exclusively to certain beliefs or faiths, it has the capacity to adapt to new or changing conditions. The place can blend in or adapt to new conditions or even embrace them entirely. The flexibility can be seen in the use of the sacred space too. Generally, the sacred space is not divided into specific sections nor is it clearly demarcated for activities or for use by certain groups of people or. It serves various purposes at different times.

This boundary uncertainty boundary and flexibility allows no boundaries for the constituent elements of a sacred place. Everything can adapt and blend well in with the environment. For example, the uncertain boundaries of beliefs allow people of different faiths to live together in harmony. Nowadays, this uncertainty and flexibility are fading away. People are becoming more individualistic and tend to classify themselves according to race, culture, region, language and religion. People can be consequently categorised as northerners, southerners, as coming from the three southernmost provinces, or from the border area, the rich, the poor, yellow shirt people and red shirt people. Everything in society now has a fixed position and a set boundary, irrespective of what it relates to, be it political activities, economy, politics, culture or religions and the sacredness.

7. A Space of Symbols

A Thai sacred place is an area of Dhamma puzzles. It comprises a system of symbols or representations. The people who built sacred places left the message that they wanted to convey in the form of symbols. They invested time and energy in

²³ Thongchai, W. (1994). *Siam Mapped : A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. p.75

²⁴ Pallegoix , *Dictionarium language Thai*, p. 16. cited in Thongchai, W. (1994). *Siam Mapped : A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. p.74-75

²⁵ Bradley , *Nangsu akkharaphithansap: Dictionary of the Siamese Language*, p. 84. cited in Thongchai, W. (1994). *Siam Mapped : A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. p.75

inventing artistic symbols in order to express concepts in visible or sensuous forms. Symbols are an expression or a representation of concepts. A symbol may have a number of underlying meanings that need to be interpreted thoroughly.

The most popular symbol used in Thailand in teaching the principles of religion is the sacred mountain or Mount Sumeru. This symbol appears in the sacred places of the ruling elite (the king, royal families and high-ranking government officials) and laymen. When used by the elite class, the Mount Sumeru symbols take an elaborate shape and forms part of complex rituals. When used by laymen, it takes on a simple form with a lighter tone in order to entertain and teach morality. Used this way, symbols become a medium to teach, to convey messages and to create a profound effect on people. However, symbols are useless for people who are not open to their underlying meanings and do not reflect carefully on how to derive the best benefits from them.

8. A Virtual Space

A sacred place is a virtual space of the sacred world. It is a place where sacred conditions have been transformed into physical forms that can be experienced through the senses. A Thai sacred place is energized by symbols that convey spiritually inspiring messages.

The beauty of the sacred world is unlike the beauty of things people see in the physical world; it is rather something that can only be sensed. This is the beauty that sets their minds free from their egotistic selves and enables them to experience profound happiness in the sacredness.²⁶ The beauty in this virtual space uplifts spirituality and encourages intellect to truly understand the reality. It can help a person to think, tending away from self center centrifugal rather than centripetal. It can help a person to think less about himself and be aware of his status and duty in society. Then the society will carry on peacefully.

9. A Place of Experiences

A Thai sacred place is a place that can be experienced only through the senses. Each person has their own experience that differs from that of the next person. In Thai sacred places, the experience is available to both people who create the place and those who use it. The creators need to understand the different meanings of Dhamma puzzles. They also have to know how to express the concept of sacredness in a physical form and have a thorough understanding of the Thai way of life and thinking. If the creators have this ability and knowledge, the users of the sacred place will be more likely to experience the sanctity of the area and the state of sacredness. The users would, however, also need to practice right-mindfulness and concentration, to develop their skill in experiencing sacred conditions.

²⁶ Prawase Wasi, (2007). *Humans' Way of Life in the Twenty First Century* (4th ed.). Bangkok: Suan Gern Mee Ma. p.129-134

Characteristics of Thai sacred place are (1.) integrity in diversity, (2.) the hierarchical structure, (3.) complex layers, (4.) patchwork of overlapping spaces, (5.) uncertain boundary, (6.) flexibility, (7.) a space of symbols, (8.) a virtual space, and (9.) a space of experience. These characteristics are the tangible aspects of the authenticity of Thai sacred places. Form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting,²⁷ each has its place in creating a sacred place. The use of these sources permits an elaboration of specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined. However, Thai sacred places will not be complete without the intangible aspects of senses and feeling or “Sense of Place”

5.4 The Sense of Place in Thai Sacred Places

A sense of place is a feeling or feelings that an individual has towards the place where one finds oneself.. It is an intangible characteristic that makes a place special and different from other places. It also fosters a sense of genuine human attachment and belonging. Some places have this characteristic and some places do not. At the same time, some people believe that a sense of place originates from a feeling or a perception held by people and does not come from the place itself. A sense of place is much the same as the spirit of a place. It tends, however, to have a more expansive meaning than ‘the spirit of a place’. The spirit of a place revives the memory of people and of places that were associated with them from birth to death and also influenced their character and disposition²⁸. The spirit of a sacred place is something more than what we see on the first sight. It has, in fact, a hidden message about the sacred culture of people who respect that place. ²⁹

A sense of Thai sacred places is more than this. It is defined by tangible elements (such as buildings, location, landscape, objects) and intangible elements (such as memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odours, etc.). They are physical and spiritual forces that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to the place.³⁰

Every Thai sacred place, both natural and artificial, has a sense of place. It may not be easy to identify a sense of a Thai sacred place because individuals react

²⁷ ICOMOS, (1994). *The Nara Document on Authenticity*. Nara: ICOMOS.

²⁸ Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980). *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, New York: Rizzoli.

²⁹ See more in “Sense of Place” in Relph, E. (1986). *Space and Place: Place and Placelessness* (Vol. 3rd printed). London: Pion Limited.

Woodward, S. C. (2008). Visitor Centres and the Spirit of Place. *International Centre for Responsible Tourism Occasional Paper*, 10(Autumn 2008).

JIVE´, N. G., & LARKHAM, P. J. (2003). Sense of Place, Authenticity and Character: A Commentary. *Journal of Urban Design*, 8(Number 1), 67-81.

Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980). *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, New York: Rizzoli.

³⁰ ICOMOS. (2008). *Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place*. Quebec: ICOMOS.

differently to natural sacred places, sacred rituals, sacred areas, building, architecture, arts. There are, however, certain feelings or emotions that people in any sacred place will experience, including (1.) a sense of awe, (2.) a sense of wonder, (3.) a sense of pride, (4.) a sense of serenity, (5.) a sense of belonging, (6.) a sense of connection with the past, depending on the level of wisdom of a person, (7.) a sense of camaraderie with respect to nature, (8.) a sense of sacredness, being an appreciation of, and a reverence for, sacred things³¹, and last but not less (9.) a sense of absolute beauty and truth, stimulating the development of a higher level of wisdom that will ultimately lead to enlightenment.

Thai sacred places are linked with the people through belief, ritual, magic and religion. They are a projection of the ideas and feelings and everyday life of the Thai people. A sense of a sacred place should be conceptualized in terms of dominant feelings. In a sacred dimension, it helps people to connect with the sacredness. In a profane dimension, it encourages people to be both aware and proud of their cultural identity and heritage, and to conserve and safeguard its memory, vitality, continuity and spirituality.³²

The spirit of a place is not an intrinsic attribute of either the location or time. Rather it is the result of a spiritual response of individuals and society to the place. It is, therefore, not something peculiar to old sacred places but is common also in newly built places. The spirit of a place is shown in the ways the place is used and valued by people.³³ The spirit of Thai sacred places is visualised by Thai people who give their meanings. Spirituality is linked to the sense of community, where beings are interconnected and interdependent in their existence. We worship symbols of sacred mountains not only because they have a sacred meaning, but because we are a part of them. They are sources of our force, our spirituality and our soul.³⁴

Places that lack a "sense of place" are sometimes referred to as "placeless" or "inauthentic".³⁵ Sacred places that lack a "sense of place" are places that have no sacred meaning for the people and no special relationship to the culture in which they are located. Nowadays, Thailand tends to have an increasing number of sacred places that lack a "sense of sacred place". It has been caused by the change of attitudes among Thai people. Since they began to isolate 'the sacred' from the 'profane' and focus on success and happiness in the secular world the sacred world has, for them, lost its worth and appeal.

³¹ Elder D. Todd Christofferson, 2004, *A Sense of the Sacred*, Brigham Young University

³² ICOMOS. (2008). *Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place*. Quebec: ICOMOS.

³³ Laurence Loh, (2007). *Conveying the Spirit of Place*. in UNESCO. (2007). *Asia Conserved: Lessons Learned from the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation (2000-2004)*. Bangkok: UNESCO. p.10

³⁴ UNESCO-MAB. (2006). *Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes*. Paris: UNESCO.

³⁵ Relph, E. (1986). *Space and Place: Place and Placelessness* (3rd printed). London: Pion Limited.

A good example of a sacred place that lacks a sense of sacred place is Bangkok. In the past, Bangkok is the sacred state of Thailand but this place hardly ever have any sacred meaningful relationship with Thai people in the present day. It is only a profane capital city, the political and financial centre of the country. Evenif, a number of the local temples in Bangkok do not, however, really have meaningful relationship with the people in the area. Religious places are built to cater for superficial worship. Some sacred places that have been heavily commercialized for tourism or other profane purposes appear to have lost their sense of a sacred place. Even the god-king status of the monarch has been changed to that of a person displaying ideal values and who is currently also perceived as the father of the nation. This means that he is more closely connected to ordinary people and losing his status of divinity.

Chapter Summary

The meanings of sacred space and places in Thai context varies. It lies in the spiritual space, physical Space, social and cultural space and mind space. In Thai notions, sacred spaces and sacred place is defined as a place that evokes a sense of sacredness of space and time. It can help layman feel the same oneness with the nature. In Thai context, sacred place is not the sole preserve of certain religions, faiths or the holy power. Rather its meaning is accessible to all. In this sense, the sacred and the secular combine. Everyone can experience the sacredness of a place through their senses, including their consciousness and they can experience in daily life.

The Concepts of Thai Sacred Space and Place which are found in this study are (1.) the concept about the system and the interconnection of all things, (2.) the concept of helix time which states that things will return almost to the original state and each turn of the spiral goes either upwards or downwards, depending on the person's actions and karma and (3.) the concept of the human relationships and the relationship between human being and nature that determine the actions and behaviours of human beings as well as their relationship with other human beings and their surroundings. These concepts manifest in sacred place in the symbolism that represent in various part of sacred place.

Characteristics of Thai sacred place are (1.) integrity in diversity, (2.) hierarchy of spaces, (3.) complex layers, (4.) patchwork of overlap space, (5.) blurred boundary, (6.) flexibility , (7.) a symbolism space, (8.) virtual space, (9.) experience space. Thai sacred place usually comprise these characteristics and the last but not less is the intangible aspects of spirit and feeling or "sense of place"

Sense of place is the feeling or feelings that an individual experiences when in the presence of that place which are (1.) a sense of awe, (2.) a sense of wonder, (3.) a sense of pride, (4.) a sense of serenity, (5.) a sense of belonging, (6.) a sense of

connection with the past, and with high level of wisdom some people will experience (7.) a sense of comrade to the nature, (8.) a sense of the sacred which is an appreciation and reverence for sacred things³⁶, (9.) a sense of the absolute beauty and truth that stimulate the development of a higher level of wisdom that will ultimately lead to enlightenment. These are some spatial characteristics of Thai sacred place that may lead to more comprehensive understanding of various dimension of Thai sacred places.

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร สงวนลิขสิทธิ์

³⁶ Elder D. Todd Christofferson. (2004), *A Sense of the Sacred*, -: Brigham Young University.

Chapter 6

Propositions and Reflections on Thai Cultural Perspectives of Sacred Places: Significance and Values

This chapter, as the conclusion of the dissertation, consists of a summing-up of the critical discussion and discourse in the body of the dissertation. It is set out in three major sections, namely, sacred mountains as a paradigm, the significance of sacred mountains in Thai culture, and the values of the sacred Mount Sumeru in Thai Culture, followed by a concluding section on experiences from the study. The first section, 6.1, addresses the intension of the analogy of sacred mountain in the Thai sacred place concept. The second section, 6.2, addresses the significance of the sacred Mount Sumeru in the Thai context. The third section, 6.3, addresses the values of Sacred Mount Sumeru in the Thai context. The conclusion, 6.4, offers an evaluation of the experiences gained by the author during this research, the outcomes that extend beyond the research objectives and the precise anticipation of the prospect expression of Thai sacred places.

6.1 Intension of the Analogy of Sacred Mountain in Thai Sacred Place

A sacred place is a particular space that is considered to evoke a sense of sacredness to human beings. It is a place where a person can find himself spiritually connected or awakened into moments of heightened spiritual consciousness. Most sacred places in Thailand are related to Buddhism, which is entwined with local beliefs. The intension of Thai sacred place, thus, has different levels. It can start from offering people something to hold on to spiritually. It can be a set of practices aimed at keeping society in order or present a place that teaches morals. At the highest level, it is meant to guide human beings to the path that leads to the eradication of all defilements, according to Buddhist teachings.

The essence of the sacred, especially in Buddhism, is very difficult for ordinary people to truly understand. It is also nearly impossible to find someone who understands the teachings by himself without any help from the symbols. The principle of Mount Sumeru was, therefore, introduced into Thai sacred places as a symbol of the state of sacredness. These symbols help to turn the essence of the teachings into material forms that Buddhist laymen can understand. They are intended to uplift people's spirit to reach the state of sacredness and assist them in acquiring the intellect to realise the ultimate truth.

No matter what any form it is, the space of the sacred mountain sphere is an abstract term for a complex set of ideas that interprets a position of a human body and its relationship with the world. The analogy of sacred mountain in Thai sacred place associate to human awareness of the position and movement of the human body by means of sensory. One will have heightened perception and comprehension of the spirit of sacred places though one's kinesthesia.

The analogy of sacred mountains in Thai sacred places will serve as a bridge to connect the sacred with ordinary people. Strategic elements of sacred space such as positions and locations of natural mountains and cities, the city plan, the construction of sacred buildings, the concept about the relationship of people in society and the status of people are all influenced by the principle of Mount Sumeru. It creates a unique system that brings about a unity of every part in the society. The sacred places may be presented in different forms but their central symbols, which are compared to Mount Sumeru or the centre of the universe, will remind human beings that they are under control of nature, both in terms of natural surroundings and a law of nature.

The metaphors about Mount Sumeru cosmology are a medium that should be inferred by one's intellect to the existence of all things and the existence of the inner mind, the existence of macrocosm and the existence of microcosm, as well as the nature of natural and the nature of mind. Everything in the sacred place is related to human kinesthesia. It is explained that when a person enters into any kind of sacred places, his first experience is done through a sense of sight and touch, which perceive the distance and the height of the surroundings. The appearance of natural mountains gives an impression of the grandness. Particularly, the pinnacles of manmade mountains amidst the sun impart a sense of lightness. Other external elements such as the movement of the sun, the sunlight and the clouds make every element in the sacred place look as if it is moving. Additionally, regional architectural features such as the delicate curves of the buildings, multi-tiered roofs and the upward lines of the spire structures leave admirable impression on our minds for their serene appearance. The image of the serene Mount Sumeru amidst the sun stimulates the mind with the image of a peaceful kingdom situated in a golden light in the higher realms.

Every thing in sacred place is parallax to human perception. When one move to each position in sacred place, the principle axes, the arrangement of the elements, the movement patterns and every external stimulus affect the sensory gate, when combined, everything associated with inner mind¹. As people continue walking, it gives rise to the four dimensional continuum, which is in harmony of sacred space. It creates a sudden sense of power and sacredness, which will gradually support the development of an understanding of the nature of all things.

The layout of the sacred place where Mount Sumeru is located at the centre will guide our sight from the border to the centre, from the bottom to the top, from the horizon of the skies to the pinnacle and from the pinnacle to the universe. The repetition of these sequences in the sacred place is the arrangement of the elements that emphasise the depth of outer space and inner space in mental image. All symbols of Mount Sumeru - ranging from the level of the universe, the kingdom, the city, the building, the individual to the level of artefacts and decorations - not only reflect the unity of the wholeness but also support the development of concentration and level of mind.

¹ Coomaraswamy, A. K., *The Transformation of Nature to Art*, New York: Dover Publication. P.147

The decorative elements in Thai sacred place convey the duality of existence both part as a whole and the whole as a part and world within a world. It motives the delicacy and exquisiteness design in every surface of Thai sacred place. These elements present duality of existence that shows the unity combining of all the parts, both agreeable and disagreeable, shown through visualisation. It induces thoughts about the rounds of rebirth, which is related to the law of causality or Karma. As a result, it makes people realise the impermanence of life and aspire to be free from the cycle of life.

Walking from the entrance of the sacred place to its central part is a form of mental and physical practice intended for the balanced and firm development of faith, consciousness, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom. When each step is made with mindfulness, we can realise the arising and the cessation of physical and mental phenomena (Rupa and Nama). We will be mindful of the arising, the momentary existence and the cessation of our body sense. We will be mindful of the arising and the falling away of our emotions. When we circumambulate the symbol of Mount Sumeru - built with an axis that resembles a path that leads to the spirit of the sacred place – we are aware of our bodily movements in the sacred area and mindful of the present moments. This contributes to our spiritual connection with the sacred space.

When one move from one place to another, from one moment to the next moment and from one confinement to another, we begin to realise the cycle or the repetition of all events. We will come to understand that we are trapped in the round of rebirth, which is simply an illusion. We will realise our ignorance that has clouded our minds from birth to death. When the body experiences an object, the mind is then conscious of that object. As the eye sense experiences an image, the mind is afterwards conscious of that image. Also, while the ear sense experiences the sound, the mind is conscious of that sound and its meanings, particularly in the sacred circumstance. While the body is moving, the mind is conscious of the present experiences. All these, when done with the right understanding and contemplation, will help the development of wisdom². The accumulation of these experiences, which are represented in the symbols of Mount Sumeru and shown in a concentrated mind, will cause a spiritual awakening of the reality.

It is essential for a person to have a clear consciousness and an open mind to follow the signs in the sacred place, which was built in accordance with a custom that indicates the sacredness and the reverence. It is a form of physical appearance that allows humans to experience beauty and reminds them of another world that is more real than our profane life³. Eventually, when the person faces a central part of a sacred space – whether it is in a form of Mount Sumeru, a summit of a natural mountain, a structure, a king or a Buddha image – that means he is stepping into the state of true

² The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana 4) in terms of the bodily base “Katchanto Wa Katchameeti Pachanati” “be mindful of the steps as one walks” (หลักสติปัฏฐานในหมวดอิริยาบถบรรพพะ “คจฺณโต วา คจฺจามิติ ปชานาติ” “เมื่อเดินอยู่ก็กำหนดรู้ว่า ข้าพเจ้าเดินอยู่”)

³ “Natti Yanang Uppanyasasa, Natti Panya Achaniyo -- An understanding of the characteristics does not happen with the ignorant mind. An understanding or wisdom does not arise with the mind that does not understand the characteristics. (“นตฺถิ ฆานํ อปญฺญสฺส, นตฺถิ ปญฺญา อฆายิโน การกำหนดสภาวะไม่มีแก่ผู้ไม่มีปัญญา ปัญญาไม่มีแก่ผู้ไม่กำหนด)”) ”

peace without a sense of space and time. That is when the mind is mindful of the conscience. When the person experiences sacred phenomena, he should be mindful of the present moments so that he understands the intension of the sacred place and enhances the development of wisdom, which will lead to the end of the round of rebirth or sufferings.

However, a sacred place, which is dominated by the principle of Mount Sumeru, is only a symbolic representation of the concept. The meanings of the symbols in the sacred place need to be interpreted with wisdom, which comes from mindfulness and concentrated mind. For people who already have wisdom, beliefs, plans, rituals, patterns, memorization and repeated actions may contribute to a spiritual awakening. This is evident, for example, in the case of artistic works of Thai artists and architects in the past and a memorisation of Buddha's teachings of monks. Ironically, these beliefs and symbols may not be helpful to ordinary people to understand the state of sacredness.

An enchanted feeling, which arises when the person is in a sacred place, makes him realise the unwholesomeness of worldly pleasure and aware of the true peace. This feeling may last for a very short moment but it reflects the reality that nothing is permanent. When the person is mindful of the reality, he will understand even the impermanence of feelings. The power of sacred space will serve as a medium that stimulates and penetrates the mind for the freedom of sufferings. On the other hand, if the person is caught in pleasure and enjoyment, he is not likely to reach the state of spiritual peace and attain a higher level of wisdom.

It is, therefore, necessary to understand that the principle of Mount Sumeru is only a medium used to teach the reality. It is not a solution. The essence of the symbols that represent the principle of Mount Sumeru is the realisation of the reality. Only wisdom and mindfulness can understand the true meanings of these symbols.

It is also common that each person may have different interpretations of the symbols. It is because each person differs in his frame of reference, thinking, evaluation, levels of wisdom, opinions and karma. The stories stated in the principle of Mount Sumeru are evident only for people who have direct experiences. People, who do not have such direct experiences, cannot give a clear answer. However, when the conditions are right, they will have wisdom to completely understand the reality.

The essence of the principle of Mount Sumeru for ordinary people is actually not to prove whether the principle is true or false. It is about how to apply this principle in daily life. Someone may use the principle of Mount Sumeru as a motivation to do good deeds so that they can go to heavens or avoid going to hell. On the contrary, the principle of Mount Sumeru becomes an obstacle that prevents some people from understanding the Buddhist teachings. These people mistake the principle of Mount Sumeru for the concepts about the realms of existence, destiny, astrology, ghosts, psychic power, worshiping and various kinds of rituals. This is different for people who have the right understanding and observe moral practice. They may gain wisdom without the knowledge about the principle of Mount Sumeru. It, thus, shows

that each person has different levels of wisdom about the meanings of the principle in sacred mountains.

6.2 Significance of Sacred Mount Sumeru in Thai Context

6.2.1 Sacred Mountain as Paradigm

Human create place, at the same time, place is a structure of perception or a frame of knowledge to instruct human' mind and influenced to human life from generation to generation. Sacred Mount Sumeru has been a code of conduct for spiritual and interactive experiences of Thai ancestors for centuries and still has a significant role in present society. It can be said that sacred mount Sumeru principle is paradigm which is a collection of rationalized practices that organize thoughts by applying different methodologies, including classification, integration and the management of relationship between different beliefs.

Sacred Mount Sumeru is a structure of perception or a frame of knowledge that gives guidance to a network of knowledge, beliefs, thinking process of Thai people and serve like the margin for thoughts that dominate people in that period⁴. It acts as an indicator that determines whether the spoken words are accepted in the society. It is a 'mould', a source of reference for Thai people in defining and evaluating things. Mount Sumeru is the origin of a consciousness and the ways of life in a society⁵.

The chronology of sacred Mount Sumeru may seem impossible in the present world but "they actually have their own systems, patterns and reasons. They just represent a different set of systems, patterns and reasons for the present generation⁶". The study of the meaning of sacred place in Thai context through the sacred Mount Sumeru theme is the key to ideology, beliefs, customs and Thai culture. The knowledge created from within this theme addresses itself to a deeper understanding of various dimension of sacred places in Thai context.

Sacred Mount Sumeru is the "Holistic Paradigm" which is the concept of the world as interaction and integration of existence. A true nature in every existence is that it is connected and is one with others. Therefore each existence should be treated with respect, for human is part of the whole, and self-centeredness should be avoided.⁷ Since human beings and everything else are interrelated, it means that individuals, different groups of people, societies and culture have collective minds and collective

⁴ Foucault, Michel (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York : Pantheon Books.

⁵ Mercea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, Trans. From the French by Willard K. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 8. cited in Rni Lertleamsai, (2001). *Fah - Kwan - Muang : Tai Traditional cosmology, Study from Tai A-Hom' Scriptures* , Bangkok: Vi-Thi-Tat.p. 42.

⁶ Foucault, Michael, *The Order of Things* cited in Chaiwat Chareansin-Olan., (2545). *Semiology- Structuralism – Post Structuralism and the Study of Political Science* , Bangkok: Vipasa0. p. 87.

⁷ Pravech Vasi. (2007). *The Way of Human Being in the Twenty First Century* (4th ed.). Bangkok: Suan Gern Mee Ma.

consciousness⁸. Every action of human beings can have a repercussion to other things and the whole system. Finally, it will inevitably come back to affect human beings. The cycle of these events will happen continually without stop.

6.2.2 Significance of Sacred Mountain in Thai Culture

The belief of Mount Sumeru has a significant role in modern society, as reflected in a pattern of social interaction. This is because it has been a code of conduct for spiritual and interactive experiences of Thai ancestors for centuries. The myth of Mount Sumeru becomes a source of consciousness and the ways of life in a society⁹. The study of the myth and the myth of the origin of Mount Sumeru is the key to ideology, beliefs and Thai customs. It serves as a critical wisdom whose learning and teaching process in Thai society has been passed on through different levels of rituals, scriptures written by gurus, paintings, sculpture, architecture as well as storytelling in literature and folklore. They are authoritatively respected and perceived as 'sacred, leading to guidance for the same practice. This is an ordinary occurrence of an evolution of culture and perceptions of people in the society.

According to the significance of sacred mountain in Thai context, sacred Mount Sumeru is a collection of rationalized practices that organize thoughts by applying different methodologies, including classification, integration and the management of relationship between different beliefs. It is a structure of perception or a frame of knowledge¹⁰ that gives guidance to a network of knowledge, beliefs, thinking process of Thai people. It operates as the paradigm of Thai social. Sacred Mount Sumeru has influenced to three main system of Thai culture which are (a.) the value systems, (b.) the wisdom systems and (c.) the power system.

(a.) The Value Systems

The value system is public morality and spirituality of mankind. The value system is represented in form of cosmological order that give significant to the justice, the fertility, and the sustainability of social and nature based on the respect to the public and the fellowman. The value systems usually evidence in the form of religions and believe on the sacred things. The value system in the principle of sacred mountains mostly concern good deeds, morality of the community and individuals, justice, fertility and the

⁸ Phra Pracha Pasana Nathama Mo and the group. (2000) cited in Pravech Vasi. (2007). *The Way of Human Being in the Twenty First Century* (4th ed.). Bangkok: Suan Gern Mee Ma. p. 47

⁹ Mercea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, Trans. From the French by Willard K. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 8.

¹⁰ "A frame of knowledge in a certain issue during that period is like the edge of the sky for thoughts that dominate people in that period. It acts as an indicator that determines whether the spoken words are accepted in the society." Foucault, M., 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York Pantheon Books.

sustainability of society and nature.¹¹ All of these could not be achieved without mutual respect between people in society. It gives an example of happy people who reside around Mount Sumeru. It depicts stories of joyous lives of deities in different levels of heavens. At the same time, it tells stories of severe sufferings in hell. These stories are aimed at persuading people to appreciate the values of morals, do good deeds and avoid all unwholesome acts.

This value system is apparent in Thai society in a form of religions and superstitious beliefs in ghosts. Different types of rules and custom are created to keep society in order. For example, people in northern Thailand believe in different sets of rules called “Kaud” (กวด). People who violate these rules will not only bring bad consequences to themselves and their families but also their communities. Examples of *Kaud* are an invasion of public waterway and the cutting down of big trees believed to be a residence of ghosts. Nowadays, the value system in this paradigm turns into an attachment to superstitious beliefs. People understand the principle of sacred mountains at superficial level only. They do not care that positive results are products of positive causes¹².

(b.) The Wisdom Systems

Wisdom is knowledge – an ability.¹³ The wisdom system concerns a graceful way of life of wise people and society, which have long been practiced in a society.¹⁴ The Thai wisdom may be different in each period but maintains some unique characteristics. Based on the study, it can be understood that the principle of Mount Sumeru is one of the sources of the Thai wisdom system.

The wisdom system, which is based on the principle of Mount Sumeru, includes the way of thinking of Thai society, particularly the management of social relationships and the relationship between society and nature. It shows in the learning process, creativity and production. It is also evident in the dissemination of knowledge through social organisations in order to adjust itself to the changing environment. It can be seen in the knowledge, beliefs and behaviours that show the relationship between human beings and their surroundings, including humans, nature, and supernatural power.

The principle of Mount Sumeru has an influence on various aspects of the Thai wisdom system, including (a.) natural resource management, water resource management in relation to natural sacred mountains and water

¹¹ See Phinitphuwadol, S., (1982). *A comparative study on the thought of ideal society in literature: Trai Phumi Phra Ruang, Utopia and Tao-Te-Ching*, Bangkok: Ramkhamheang University. p.23, 29-30

¹² It is probably due to their limited views. Indeed, other people may understand the meanings immediately.

¹³ The Royal Institute Dictionary

¹⁴ Thai Junior Encyclopedia. Vol 23 <http://kanchanapisek.or.th/kp6/BOOK23/chapter1/t23-1-11.htm#sect2>

resource management in relation to the principle of Mount Sumeru (b) social management such as the administration system based on the principle of Mount Sumeru, the cosmology-based government and ethical practice for kings, rulers and comers (c.) language and literature such as folk tales, legends, music, Jataka, folklore and classic literature (d.) living skills such as problem solving skill, social adaptation and learning skill.

Besides, the principle of Mount Sumeru played an important role in the adaptation of Buddhist teachings, beliefs and traditions for appropriate practice, disease prevention and public health, an ability to apply agricultural knowledge with technology and an ability to adapt new technology to traditional values and beliefs to suit modern life style.¹⁵ It can be said that the influence of the principle of Mount Sumeru on the Thai wisdom system remains in Thai society.

(c.) The System of Ideology Power

The system of ideology power is a dignity and human rights. It is the right, which boosts confidence and power for local community. This power is a drive for new learning, creativity, production and the dissemination of wisdom, which will be applied in the development of society in accordance with moral practice that respects human right, justice and the sustainability of nature.¹⁶

The system of ideology power in the principle of Mount Sumeru mainly concerns political power, which indicates that “A leader of the society is the most significant component in the governmental system.¹⁷ The leader of the society or “Maha Chakrapat Diraad” is, therefore, required to have these qualities; namely, (a.) virtuous characters, (b.) power and (c.) the great processions.” In this case, the intension of power concerns an acknowledgement of how the ruler acquired and used the power. The ruler had to be accepted to have accumulated virtuous qualities from his past lives and uphold virtuous values by studying Buddhist teachings with noble men, observing precepts and helping people. The ruler’s wealth and prestige, which were the result of his wholesome deeds accumulated from previous lives, were not for personal use but for creating benefits for his people.

The principle of Mount Sumeru created a positive foundation for the political system, which was based on the unity of people in society. It is

¹⁵ Thai Junior Encyclopedia. Vol 23 <http://kanchanapisek.or.th/kp6/BOOK23/chapter1/t23-1-11.htm#sect2>

¹⁶ Anan Ganchanapan. (2006). Thais' Order of Thought. In Anan Ganchanapan (Ed.), *Thais' Order of Thought: Concept and Methodologies*. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund.

¹⁷ Phinitphuwadol, S., (1982). *A comparative study on the thought of ideal society in literature: Trai Phumi Phra Ruang, Utopia and Tao-Te-Ching*. Bangkok: Ramkhamheang University.

comparable to an ethical political form that adheres mainly to Buddhist teachings.¹⁸ According to the principle of Mount Sumeru, the basic philosophy of politics indicates that the king or the ruler practices the Four Brahmavihara (the Four Sublime Attitudes: Metta or loving kindness, Karuna or compassion, Mudita or sympathetic and Upekkha or equanimity) and the Ten Virtues for the kings or has a virtuous power to unite people in the society or the nation.

6.3 Values of Sacred Mount Sumeru into Thai Culture

The principle of Mount Sumeru is a vital knowledge that has been investigated and taught in Thai society for generations. Taught by the nobles with high intellect, it went through a number of transformations until it is accessible to people of different levels of intellect. It is represented in a variety of physical forms such as sacred mountains, sacred symbols in rituals, the layout of the city and architecture. It is also shown through traditions, customs, the value system, the wisdom system and the system of ideology power. All of the physical forms, traditions, rituals and systems mentioned above were regarded as sacred symbols. People treated these symbols so respectfully that it became a practice and, then, culture and a frame of thoughts of people in society. The principle of Mount Sumeru is thus significant in Thai society. The values of the sacred Mount Sumeru in Thai culture are discussed below.

Religious value

The concept of the sacred mountain should have a religious value at its core since it is its original purpose. It is used to explain, demonstrate and tell religious stories and the philosophy. It is employed as a tool in teaching wholesomeness, morality and ethics. It guides people about the right way of living. The concept of the sacred mountain is not the focal point of any religion practised in Thailand but a result of the combination of various faiths, including Buddhism, Brahmanism, Hinduism, local beliefs, animism and superstition.

Historical Value

The legend of Mount Sumeru causes historical consciousness among Thai people as Mercea Eliade said that "... humans realize that everyone and everything in the world including their ancestors and civilizations have a great sacred origin and a long history."¹⁹ And when Thai descendants share the same consciousness with their ancestors and realize the value of history, they will thus follow their ancestors' footstep through cultures, thoughts, beliefs, traditions, ceremonies and the way of life.

¹⁸ Phinitphuwadol, S., (1982). *A comparative study on the thought of ideal society in literature: Trai Phumi Phra Ruang, Utopia and Tao-Te-Ching*. Bangkok: Ramkhamheang University.

¹⁹ Eliade, M., 1963. *Myth and Reality*, New York: Harper & Row.p.18-19.

This is how culture is passed on from one generation to another, creating a unique identity.

Social value

The Thai spiritual culture is based on Mount Sumeru and embodies the people's paradigm. It is in fact a strikingly social work in many ways both religious and political philosophy as well as righteousness, justice, loving kindness, compassion and other virtues all should share in the social.

When Mount Sumeru is regarded as the centre of all things, it helps people understand their status and relationship with others in the society. It designates the boundary of their rights and the duties they should perform in the society. Additionally, the stories about Mount Sumeru nurture people to behave ethically, which at the end will bring peace to the society.

Politic value

The sacred mountain of Sumeru also offers a value necessary for the political establishment. Apparently, it is used as a symbolism that helps build the kingdom's administrative structures such as the 'Father-Son' system or paternalism, absolute monarchy, 'God-King' or Devaraja, Phutharaja and democracy. The political philosophy that is rooted in the notion of Mount Sumeru has a psychological influence over kings, rulers, politicians and all levels of civilians because it is the foundation of the administrative and political systems in Thailand. It is used as a reference for people's behaviours in the society, both in terms of political and apolitical involvements. Additionally, it plays an important role in the establishment of the Thai social structure.

Aesthetic value

Apparently, the notion concerning Mount Sumeru has a huge amount of influence over Thai arts. In Thailand, a lot of artistic works in the fields of architecture, painting, sculpture, literature and music were inspired by the structure and the interpretation of Mount Sumeru. It can be said that, without the concept of Mount Sumeru, Thai art would not have the characteristics that we see today. Besides, one may find it difficult to admire Thai arts without the knowledge about Mount Sumeru.

Interpretative Value

Sacred Mount Sumeru provides the interpretation of abstract philosophy by manifest into touchable space. It has ability to inform and enlighten people on social history, promote sense of sacred place feeling, create links among sacred and profane and create links with the past. It enhances the feeling of participation that people could have been involved in the making of a particular place.

Integrity value

The belief on Mount Sumeru is an integrity system that organizes classification, integration and the management of relationship between different things, both in nature and culture, tangible criteria such as design, materials, and setting and to intangibles such as association and feeling.²⁰

It gives explanations about the nature, surroundings, societies and cultures through storytelling.²¹ Support social practices and disciplines through an explanation of an origin of rituals, customs, beliefs, values and governmental institution.

6.4 Conclusion

Experiences from study

From the idea that influenced by Emeritus Professor Ken Taylor's concept of place²², researcher done this dissertation through the conceptual framework of which "Thai sacred places are a literally kind of thai history imprint. They can tell us, if we care to read and interpret them, something about the achievements and values of our predecessors". The dissertation chapters give an explanation of the meanings of sacred space and places in Thai context and the attitude of Thai people to the concept of sacred places through experiencing the symbols of sacred mountains, interpreting sacred places in Thailand, illustrating authentic characters, qualifications and spatial characteristics of Thai sacred places and discussing the significance of sacred mountains in Thai sacred places and Thai culture. The author hopes that it will, more or less, give a deeper understanding of various dimensions of sacred places.

Another benefit from this study is a new attitude towards the sacredness. The experiences obtained during this study give a better understanding about traditional knowledge taught and presented by noble men in the past which are "*All worldly knowledge is useful for surviving in the world only. It does not help human beings and support the development of wisdom to understand the reality as it is. The worldly knowledge is limited compared to its surrounding reality. This limited knowledge may*

²⁰ Integrity is a value used in Cultural Resource Management work by the National Park Service, Washington DC, USA: see Page, R, et a, (1998), *A Guide to Cultural Landscape reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, US Dept of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington DC.

For an application of these values and integrity see (a) Taylor, K., & Winston-Gregson, J., (1992), Cultural Landscapes as an Historical Resource: A Case Study at Windmill Hill, Appin, New South Wales, *Public History Review*, 1; 81-102. (b)

Specifically interpretative value see Taylor, K., (1994), Interpretive Values and Cultural landscapes: An Australian Perspective in *CRM*, 17:7; 16-18: this issue is entitled *Thematic Issue on Landscape Interpretation*. Cited in Taylor, K., (2003). Historical Landscape Planning: Borobudur, in *Fourth International Experts Meeting on Borobudur 4-8 July, 2003* Indonesia. P.14

²¹ Rni Lertleamsai, (2001). *Fah - Kwan - Muang : Tai Traditional cosmology, Study from Tai A-Hom' Scriptures* , Bangkok: Vi-Thi-Tat. P.54.

²² 'Cultural landscape'-- See Taylor, K. (2007). *Cultural Landscapes and Asian Values: Negotiating A Transition from an International to an Asian Regional Framework*.

be expanded as much as it can be but it fulfills only the worldly pleasure.²³It does not help to set human beings free from the round of rebirth or even the sufferings in daily life.”

For the author, the most significant benefit from this study is the new attitude towards life and its surroundings. There is a different purpose of life that is not about the success in worldly matters. The purpose of life is to be mindful of the present moments and the reality in daily life based on the sacred world. It is certainly not easy to maintain this attitude and practice accordingly. Additionally, nobody knows what the future holds or the attitude may change later. However, the author believes that this attitude will be in-printed in my consciousness for a long time.

The worldly success is no longer the essence of life but only a part of the reality. Life and daily routine are only a part of the whole system. The essence of life is to fully understand any reality that that occurs in one’s life. At the same time, the essence of sacred places represents the sacred Dhamma puzzles, whose true meanings are far beyond just being the symbols of sacred mountains.

The Prospect Expressive of Sacred Mountain and Thai Sacred Place

Thai sacred places are comparable to a documentary of the history of Thai culture. They are a record of the past events and explain the causes of present actions. They represent the values and achievements of Thai predecessors. Nevertheless, Thai sacred space and places are a product of change, which embodies physical changes caused by evolving attitudes towards the places. Nothing stays the same. As a sacred medium, the mountain symbols will continue to go through transformations. As the document, the meanings of Thai sacred places will be re-defined and interpreted. The authenticity, the characteristics and the spirit of Thai sacred places still exist; however, it could be expressed in different ways.

Each person has his own intentions. Therefore, everyone has different interpretations of sacred places. This dissertation might render a comprehensive analysis of sacred places in Thai context and demonstrate a clearer and more intellectual interpretation of Thai sacred places for people to appreciate, maintain and pass this sacred heritage to the next generation. In the future, the sense of Thai sacred places might be still exists as it also currently remains up to now, however, it could be expressed in the other ways. As the sacred medium, the mountain symbol will continue its transformation, the meaning of Thai sacred place will be re-defined and interpreted. As Thai history imprint, Thai sacred space and place reflect the transformation of the association, the social procedure, the living cultural system, and the paradigm shift of Thai people.

²³ See Smak Burawat, --. *The Intellect* , Bangkok: Raum San. P.5-6

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