



TEMPLE AND COMMUNITY

The relation and evolvment between religious architecture and the temple community in Bangkok during the Rattanakosin period (1782-now): Wat Arun, Wat Pho and Wat Phra Kaew.

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5306027 AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis (2023/24 Q3)

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Main research question: How has the relationship between temple architecture and the temple community evolved during the Rattanakosin period (1782-now)?

ABSTRACT

This research explores the evolving relationship between temple architecture and the temple community during Thailand's Rattanakosin period. It reveals insights into the nation's ethos and cultural richness. Buddhism, central to Thai identity, shapes communal life in Thai temples, or *Wats*. Admit three key case studies—Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Arun, and Wat Pho—this study looks into the correlation between architecture, history, religion, society, and culture. Wat Phra Kaew, a royal chapel, represents royal patronage and spiritual symbolism as the prime example of the nation. Wat Arun, shaped by monarchs and community demands, features its iconic *Phra Prang* adorned with intricate porcelain. The *Prang* became a cultural beacon along the Chao Phraya River. Wat Pho, transformed by King Rama I, epitomizes artistic and spiritual devotion with its trapezoidal layout inspired by Buddhist cosmology, becoming a hub of education, medicine, and communal rituals. Wat Pho, symbolizes artistic and spiritual devotion through its trapezoidal layout inspired by Buddhist cosmology and overtime has evolved into a hub for education, medicine. The relationship between temple architecture and the temple community during the Rattanakosin period has evolved in different ways, with each influencing the other dynamically. The relationship developed into a stronger, more supportive, and increasingly significant bond, which remains a vital part of Thailand's cultural identity today, continuing to grow and evolve.

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INTRODUCTION

Thailand, often referred to as “the land of smiles”. This nickname is an embodiment of the character of the nation, represented by its citizens, traditions and cultural ethos. At the core of this identity is the nation's predominant religion, Buddhism, which holds a fundamental place in the lives of its citizens, with 92.5% of the population adhering to it¹. This influence is evident in traditional architecture, particularly in temples, where Thai communities gather for worship and celebration². These temple complexes, known as *Wats*, serve as vital centres in both urban and rural areas, fostering a strong bond between religion and society. These holy grounds play an integral role that is expressed in the nation's identity and serve as active hearts for local communities³. Understanding the historical evolution and enduring significance of this temple-community relationship is crucial to grasping Thai culture's essence. Thus, this research aims to delve deeper into this dynamic and explore its persistence throughout history. The following research question will be posed:

How has the relationship between temple architecture and the temple community evolved during the Rattanakosin period (1782-now)?

To answer this question, the first chapter will provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the topic. It will encompass an exploration of fundamental aspects of Buddhism, a description of the individuals within temple communities, and an examination of the typical components found in temples.

The *Rattanakosin* period, for which the architecture in Thailand is best known for, originated in the hearth of the capital: Bangkok⁴. Within this religious centre of a 1kmx1km plot, along the main river, the Chao Phraya lie, three well known temples; Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Arun, and Wat Pho. These temples serve as the primary religious centres of the nation, making them ideal case studies for exploring the relationship between temple and community.

Distinguishing this research from existing literature, such as works by Stratton⁵ and Bruce⁶, is its in-depth examination of the temple-community connection. While previous studies touch on this connection, they often lack specificity. Moreover, this study stands out for its focus on three case studies spanning different centuries within the Rattanakosin period.

Each temple will be explored in individual chapters, beginning with “the jewel in the crown of Bangkok”; Wat Phra Kaew, then moving across the Chao Phraya River to examine Wat Arun in Thonburi and then back across the river to Rattanakosin Island concluding with Wat Pho. The research will highlight the evolution, on the relationship, of these temples through analysis of their architectural layouts and their impact on community engagement.

Given the intricate nature of temple structures, the study will concentrate on three common components: the Bot/Ubosot, the Stupa/Chedi, and the Viharn. By focusing on these elements, the research aims to provide nuanced insights into the relationship between temple architecture and community dynamics. Recognizing the uniqueness of each temple, every case study will also explore a unique component to uncover its specific contributions to the community.

While analysing these components, the study will establish connections to its community activities, as each component serves a distinct function tied to corresponding communal use. The value coming from these components emerge from the significance the community places upon them. To navigate the extensive range of activities associated with temples, the study will

1 'Thailand: Population by Religion', Statista, accessed 9 March 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1256547/thailand-population-by-religion/>.

2 Nithi Sathāpitānon and Brian Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand: A Guide to Traditional and Contemporary Forms* (Editions Didier Millet, 2012).

3 Carol Stratton, *What's What in a Wat: Thai Buddhist Temples: Their Purpose and Design* (Silkworm Books, 2010).

4 Sathāpitānon and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand*.

5 Stratton, *What's What in a Wat*.

6 Helen Bruce, *NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK* (Bangkok: Chalermnit press, 1960).

delve into three main activities; housing, schooling and ceremonial activities, chosen for their prominence and relevance. However, once more acknowledging the individuality of each temple, a particular activity will be explored in each case study, shedding light on its specific contribution to the relationship between the temple and its community.

Temple	Layout century	Components	Community activity
Wat Phra Kaew	19 th - 20 th - 21 th	The emerald buddha Bot	Housing Ceremony Schooling Royal coronation and funerals
Wat Arun	19 th - 20 th - 21 th	The main Prang of 70 meters Bot Viharn Stupa/Chedi	Housing Ceremony Schooling Royal Barge Procession
Wat Pho	19 th - 20 th - 21 th	The reclining Buddha Bot Viharn Stupa/Chedi	Housing Ceremony Schooling Massage (school)

Chart 1 research case study structure

This research applies a structural approach facilitated by existing literature. These are in the forms of: books, academic articles and thesis's. However, it's important to note that much of the oldest literature dates back to the early 20th century, with limited archival images available from the late 19th century. Despite this gap, essential historical information is still accessible, although not from the exact period of focus. Particularly regarding the first case study, Wat Arun, there is a notable absence of literature and images, likely due to a predominant focus on the newer temple constructions during that time.

In addition to literary sources, travelogue passages originating from the 19th and 20th centuries from authors like Maryvelma Smith O'Neil⁷ and William Warren⁸, as well as Helen Bruce's⁹ personal experiences, offer valuable insights into communal activities.

Furthermore, travelogue films¹⁰ dating from the mid-20th century effectively depict and describe the lives of the people and their interactions with the temple. These films are without sound, spoken in English or in Thai. Additionally, archival images featuring building plans and older floorplans contribute to our understanding of the temples former states and their following evolution.

Finally, this research concludes by incorporating all this information derived from these diverse sources and culminating a understanding of temple architecture, including their architectural layout, components, and functions in relation to the temple community. This comprehensive exploration will enhance our understanding of how the relationship between them has evolved to its current state.

⁷ Maryvelma Smith O'Neil, Bangkok : A Cultural History (New York : Oxford University Press, 2008), <http://archive.org/details/bangkokculturalh0000onei>.

⁸ William Warren, Bangkok (London : Reaktion, 2002), <http://archive.org/details/bangkok00warr>.

⁹ Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

¹⁰ BANGKOK THAILAND 1953 TRAVELOGUE FILM 'GOLDEN TEMPLE PARADISE' SIAM 62664, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1g8A_ARHWc; New Horizons - Thailand, 1960, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Hpkh-PG2VE>; Thailand, Old Bangkok 60 Years Ago, 1951, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__yNz9cpz11; Siam: Land of the White Elephant (1932), 1932, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlD2mzxGD1U>.

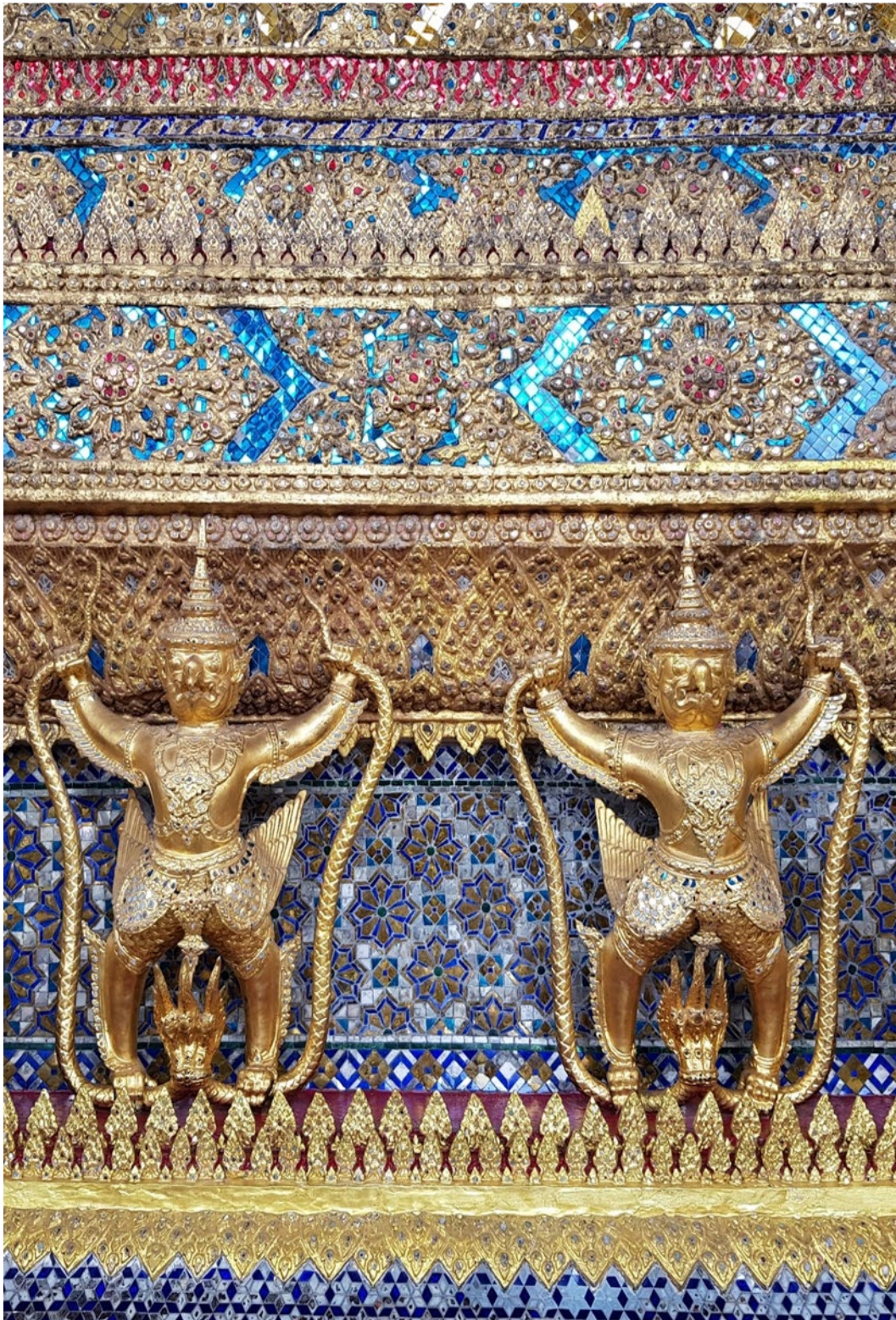


Image 2 Detailing in Wat Phra Kaew by author

1



a Giving alms in 1951 by Micheal Rogge



b Mae Chi in 1932 by Henri Rabb Ferger

Image 3 a and b

CHAPTER ONE

BUDDHISM AND WATS

Delving into the rich tapestry of Thailand's cultural and spiritual identity, the national flag serves as a symbolic gateway to understanding the ethos that the Thai hold dear: nation-religion-king. Each element of the flag carries profound significance, reflecting the historical struggles and cultural pillars that define the Thai identity. The crimson stripes, bearing witness to sacrifices during Thailand's fight for independence, symbolize the blood of life. The blue represents Thailand's monarchy. Completing this triad of core values, the white embodies purity and Buddhism, the country's predominant religion¹¹. This symbolism echoes the great influence of Buddhism in Thailand, where the majority of citizens adhere to this religion, and its impact is deeply embedded in the country's culture. The focal point where these religious and cultural facets unite is the “*Wat*”. This chapter aims to delve into a comprehensive understanding of the nation's religion and its relevance to society. It further explores, on a more granular level, the intricate dynamics of temple architecture and the temple community. In essence, this chapter serves as a prelude, resembling a table of contents, laying the foundation for the following analysis of the case studies. By providing essential elements and insights, it equips the reader with a complete perspective on the paramount aspects that play a role to the intricate relationship between temple architecture and temple communities in Thailand.

Buddhism

Buddhism is categorized into two main schools: *Hinayana*, known as the "Lesser Vehicle," and *Mahayana*, referred to as the "Greater Vehicle." However, in Thailand, these terms are not commonly used. Instead, the *Theravada* school, in line with *Hinayana*, is recognized as "Southern Buddhism" and is prevalent not only in Thailand but also in Ceylon, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia¹². In *Theravada* Buddhism, the Buddha is not considered a god but rather “the enlightened one”. The Buddha is a person, born as Prince Siddhartha in 623 B.C. and numerous stories narrate his birth, life, and death. Having achieved enlightenment during meditation beneath the *Bodhi* (tree), he spent the remainder of his life preaching. These teachings were later compiled as the *Dharma*, encompassing the rules, framework, and essence of the Buddhist faith¹³. The *Dharma* is also known as the four noble truths. These truths are not fixed dogmatic principles but rather lived experiences intended for individual exploration by sincere spiritual seekers within their hearts¹⁴. The ultimate goal is to attain salvation, leading to *Nirvana* — a state of perpetual enlightenment¹⁵. The Buddha asserted that this path is accessible to anyone willing to invest the effort and commitment required to follow the *Dharma*, including the *Noble Eightfold Path*. These are the eight qualities to be cultivated on, this path include right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration¹⁶. According to Buddhist beliefs in the cycle of rebirth, living beings undergo numerous rebirths, attaining higher states based on the goodness or badness of their previous lives, ultimately culminating in *Nirvana*¹⁷. Our actions, whether good or bad, determine the workings of Karma. Law of Karma stipulates that similar actions yield similar outcomes. Unwholesome actions result in undesirable consequences, while wholesome actions can be understood in two ways. One perspective sees wholesome actions as merely avoiding the unwholesome deeds. The other perspective can be viewed positively, involving doing good and making merit, known as “*Tham bun*”¹⁸. Individuals of religious faith, also known as the *Laity*,

11 Lucas Martin, 'An Encounter with Thai Heritage: Understanding the Significance of the Thailand Flag', accessed 11 March 2024, <https://thaitriplover.com/an-encounter-with-thai-heritage-understanding-the-significance-of-the-thailand-flag>.

12 Karuna Kusalasaya, 'Buddhism in Thailand: Its Past and Its Present' (Buddhist Publication Society, 30 November 2013), <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/kusalasaya/wheel085.html>.

13 Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

14 John Bullitt, 'Buddhist Studies: What Is Theravada Buddhism?', *buddhist studies*, 2008, <https://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/whats-thera.htm>.

15 Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

16 Bullitt, 'Buddhist Studies: What Is Theravada Buddhism?'

17 Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

18 *Buddhanet and The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Fundamentals of Buddhism by Peter D. Santina, 1984, http://archive.org/details/fundbud1.*

engage in merit-making and worship through various means and at different locations. This includes providing offerings at Spirit houses, offering prayers at home altars, and participating in other religious practices. However, the pinnacle of merit-making and worship is achieved by entering the priesthood, known as *The Sangha*, the community of Buddhist monks¹⁹.

Monks, Nuns and the Laity

The *Wat* functions as a sacred space where both monks, nuns and the Laity converge to express their respect and make merit to the three Refuges of Buddhism also known as “the Triple Gems”: *The Buddha, The Dharma, and The Sangha*. Consequently, the *Wat* is the focal point, the heart of Buddhism, where individuals come together to deepen their spiritual connection and engage in meaningful practices²⁰.

Monks reside in the *Wat*, because the compound serves as a temple and as a monastery. They commence their day at 4 am with meditation and chanting, departing from the *Wat* around 6 am for a barefoot walk through the neighborhood, carrying their *alms bowl* to receive food from the people²¹. See image 4. This practice is



Image 4 Monks collecting alms by Cameron Wood

rooted in the monks' commitment to living with what is offered to them, emphasizing the rejection of greediness. The *Wat* relies on the generosity and donations from its community. In turn, the community eagerly participates in this act of giving to make merit, enhance their karma, and seek religious guidance and blessings²². In adhering to their humble lifestyle, monks limit personal possessions to the essentials. Additionally, if someone explicitly offers assistance by saying, "if you need anything, please tell me," the monks may make requests; otherwise, they refrain from doing so. Once the monks collect their food, the day unfolds with a structured routine. Breakfast is shared at 8 am, followed by the beating drums or the ring of bells at eleven am, inviting the *Laity* to join in collective prayer and chanting. During this ceremonial session, monks partake in the offered food first, followed by the *Laity*, to ensure that the monks complete their final meal before noon. Subsequently, their nourishment is restricted to liquids for the remainder of the day²³. The hours following the communal meal are occupied with various activities. Meditation takes precedence, complemented by tasks related to temple upkeep, daily chores, educational classes, and communal chanting. These engagements fill the day, fostering a balanced and purposeful lifestyle²⁴. Monks have the flexibility to remain in *the Sangha* for various durations, whether for a lifetime, a year, a few months, or even just one day, and they can choose to leave at any time. However, to be formally recognized as a *bhikkhu*, one must undergo ordination. This involves shaving the head and eyebrows, followed by the acceptance of 227 vows and the donning

¹⁹ Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

²⁰ Stratton, What's What in a Wat.

²¹ Thailand, Old Bangkok 60 Years Ago.

²² Stratton, What's What in a Wat.

²³ Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

²⁴ Stratton, What's What in a Wat.

of yellow robes, marking the official commencement of the monastic journey. It is customary for all males to enter *the Sangha* at least once in their lifetime, committing to a period of at least three months. However, many individuals choose to extend their stay, sometimes dedicating their entire lives to the monastic life²⁵. This tradition fosters a shared understanding among community members of the monk's way of life, cultivating appreciation and strengthening the bond within the community. This mutual understanding, gained through personal experience, enhances the connection between monks and the temple community, as they share a glimpse of life on both sides of the monastery wall.

While women can be ordained and become *bhikkhuni* in Buddhism, this is not legally permitted in Thailand. According to Ellison Findly's book on women in Buddhism²⁶, at some point in history, nuns lost their influence, and monks gained primacy. Over time, new regulations emerged, and for a long time, there are no *bhikkhuni* to be found in Thailand, reflecting the historical shift in the roles of monks and nuns within the Buddhist tradition. This has been a topic of much controversy, but there is currently a new shift arising and *bhikkhunis* are gaining faith and help from the community. Presently, the primary role of women in Buddhism in Thailand is as *mae chi*, a form of nun. See image 5. These women, sometimes with shaved heads and dressed in white, do not take vows. Typically, *mae chi* are widows who contribute financially to the wat, receiving food and accommodation in return. Choosing the wat as their final residence, they spend their last days under the shelter of Buddha. Often residing in separate locations, they engage in meditation, housekeeping, and other monastery duties²⁷.

The activities of the *Laity* are closely connected to monks and nuns, involving participation in collective ceremonies such as chanting and communal meals, as mentioned earlier. The *Laity* of the community contribute through donations and acts of merit, which may also manifest in forms other than food, such as time or money. This support aids in the upkeep of the *Wat*, reducing reliance on nuns and providing monks and nuns with more time for meditation²⁸. The *Wat* is also the place where the living and lost come together (*The temple in my mother's village incorporates the remains of our ancestors within its gate and temple structures*). The *Laity* doesn't only visit the temple for prayer but also for learning, celebrating, eating, conversing, paying respects and engaging in various daily activities. The *Wat* functions not only as a residence for monks and nuns but also feels as a home for the *Laity*.



Image 5 Mae chi by Peter Rimar

25 Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

26 Ellison Banks Findly, *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), http://archive.org/details/isbn_2900861711658.

27 Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK; Stratton, *What's What in a Wat*.

28 Stratton, *What's What in a Wat*.

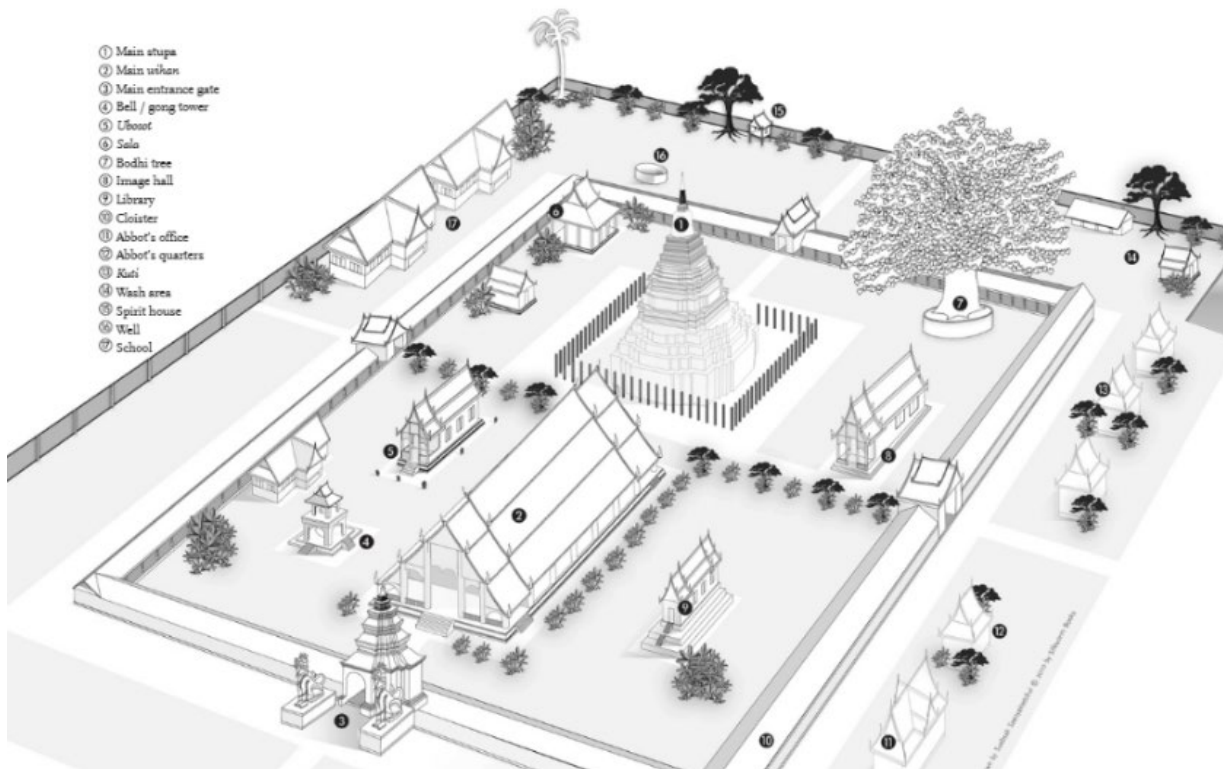


Image 6 Model of a Wat drawn by Suebsak Saenyakiettikul

Wats

It is not only a structure but a place. Its layout adheres to a divine pattern, symbolizing the Buddhist cosmos. When viewed from above, it resembles a mandala or diagram. The mythic *Mount Meru (the cosmological centre of Buddhism)*, also known as the main stupa, is positioned at its centre, encircled by oceans and an outer barrier. The structured ground plan of the *Wat* contrasts with the spontaneous sprawl of the surrounding village or city. The *Wat* is organized into a series of zones, forming a succession of increasing sacredness. Walled layers encircle the central ordination hall, *Bot*, or *Ubosot*, serving as the heart of the ceremonial grounds²⁹. There are a lot of structures found within the wall of the *Wat* compound. Throughout the temples in Thailand one can find many similarities between temples, particularly in the temple components. The model seen in image 6 represents a standard *Wat*. Nevertheless, differences in execution styles contribute to the uniqueness of each temple. Moreover, the size and prestige of a *Wat* are directly related to factors such as community donations, geographical area, and the scale of the community itself³⁰.

The *Bot*, *Viharn*, and *Stupa* are the three major sacred structures of a *Wat*. The most crucial among them is the *Bot*. Typically, a temple has only one *Bot*, serving as the ordination hall and marking the central point of the temple compound. During its construction, a ceremonial burial of eight distinctive round stones called *luk nimit* takes place, with a ninth stone positioned in the center, directly beneath the Buddha image. This sacred chapel is where monks undergo ordination, and it serves as the focal point for monks to gather on important occasions, such as *Wan Phra* (holy days), to confess any breaches of the 227 vows³¹. (*In different ceremonies I did three walks around the Bot to worship "the Triple Gems" holding, candles, flowers and incense. Making this the holy center for the community by literally walking around in circles.*)

29 Sathāpitānōn and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand*.

30 Stratton, *What's What in a Wat*.

31 Stratton; Sathāpitānōn and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand*.

The *Viharn*, also referred to as the assembly hall, shares a similar architectural design with the *Bot*. However, it is not considered sacred ground as it lacks the ceremonial stones found in the *Bot*. Unlike the *Bot*, which is limited to one per temple, multiple *Viharns* can be present. This structure serves as the location for ceremonies, worship, and prayers for both the *Laity* and monks. In smaller villages, when there is no *Viharn*, ceremonies may take place in open pavilions or within the *Bot* itself. The symbolic architecture of the roofs represents a sacred boat traversing the sea of endless rebirths towards the shores of *Nirvana*. This is the communal gathering place, as described earlier during the ceremony where, following the daily communal prayer, the monks have their meal, and afterward, the *Laity* partakes in theirs³². (*I have often participated and this is the daily sequential ceremony when I visit the temple. During the meal people laugh, socialize, eat and connect.*)

The *Stupa*, commonly referred to as *Chedi*, serves as a memorial tower dedicated to the Buddha and represents a cosmological reflection of *Mount Meru*³³. A *Wat* may feature multiple *Chedis*. Unlike the *Bot* and *Viharn*, the activities associated with the *Chedi* occur not within but around the structure. The *Chedi* comprises three levels: the base, the middle section housing a chamber containing a relic, and the top section with a spire. The relic within may consist of actual fragments of the Buddha, symbolic reminders, a buddha image or ashes of monks and devoted *Laity*³⁴.

³² Sathāpitānōn and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand*; Stratton, *What's What in a Wat*.

³³ Alisara Menakanit, 'A Royal Temple in the Thai Urban Landscape: Wat Pho, Bangkok' (Ph.D., United States -- Texas, Texas A&M University, 1999), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304561348/abstract/A0ACDA0CF9054B74PQ/1>.

³⁴ Sathāpitānōn and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand*; Stratton, *What's What in a Wat*.

2



a Wat Phra Kaew investiture of the Crown Prince, Maha Vajirunhis 1877



b Coronation day/Father's day celebration of King Rama IX

Image 7

CHAPTER TWO

WAT PHRA KAEW

Having gained an understanding of the key elements, let's delve into the historical evolution of the relationship between temple architecture and the temple community, starting with Wat Phra Kaew, also known as The Temple of the Emerald Buddha. This is the most renowned and significant temple in Thailand, often regarded as "the jewel in the crown of Bangkok" and a prime example of architectural excellence from the Rattanakosin period. Its establishment coincided with the beginning of the Rattanakosin period and the reign of the Chakri dynasty³⁵. While this research primarily focuses on the Rattanakosin Period, understanding the events leading up to this era is crucial, due to their profound influence and interconnectedness on the three case studies. A significant event that resulted in the establishment of Bangkok as the new capital of Siam, subsequently known as Thailand, was the fall of the former capital, Ayutthaya, to the Burmese in 1767³⁶. It was Taksin who re-established the kingdom and was crowned king in 1770. Subsequently, Taksin's reign ended in 1781 due to his descent into madness, leading to General Phraya Chakri, later known as King Rama I, assuming power³⁷. King Rama I orchestrated the establishment of Bangkok, also known as Krung Thep Maha Nakhon or "the city of angels," as the new capital, transitioning the royal residence from Wat Arun in Thonburi, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, to his new palace including Wat Phra Kaew. On June 10, 1782, the king made this transition, amidst a grand Royal Barge Procession across the river, solidifying its status as the new seat of power. This historic region later evolved into Rattanakosin Island, serving as the core of the expanding capital³⁸.



Image 8 Wat Phra Kaew with its jewel colored roofs by Nakhonpatom

This temple is the center of the nation, the monarchy and Buddhism, just like the Thai flag represents. Because of this, the relation between temple and community from The Temple of the Emerald Buddha is very different from others. However, because this temple is the pinnacle of Rattanakosin architecture³⁹ and the center of the nation in many ways, it is evident to still discuss examine and understand it.

Temple layout evolution

In 1785, the palace construction was finished, and a grand traditional coronation ceremony took place. The king's intention was to revive the splendor of the former capital city of

³⁵ Narisa Chakrabongse, *Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife, First* (Bangkok: River Books, 2019).

³⁶ Sathāpitānōn and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand*.

³⁷ O'Neil, *Bangkok*.

³⁸ Michael Smithies, *Old Bangkok* (Singapore ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1986), <http://archive.org/details/oldbangkok0000smit>.

³⁹ Sathāpitānōn and Mertens, *Architecture of Thailand*.

Ayutthaya, which had served as the capital for over 400 years. This aspiration undoubtedly stemmed from the deep respect and vivid memories that persisted after the downfall of the once-great kingdom. As a result, there are many striking similarities between Wat Phra Sri Sanphet in Ayutthaya and the present-day Royal Chapel⁴⁰. Wat Phra Kaew is situated in the northeastern part of the Grand Palace compound, heavily guarded by a surrounding white wall. Inside the Palace compound, various courts are divided by internal walls, while the temple itself is not partitioned by walls; rather, internal cloisters serve as dividers. These cloisters, called the Ramakien Cloisters, depict the Ramakien, a legendary story of good versus evil and this version of the story that is depicted is written by King Rama 1⁴¹. The hero of this tale, Rama, embodies the ideal king and traces back to the Ramayana figure from India. This narrative is one of the cultural heritages where nation, monarchy, and religion converge. Wat Phra Kaew has undergone numerous restorations every fifty years, corresponding with the reigns of the Chakri kings⁴². These renovations involved costly multi-year projects where artists and craftsmen repainted murals, repaired older structures, and constructed additional monuments. There are no major changes in the layout except for small additions. This tradition underscores Wat Phra Kaew's status as a site of royal patronage for Thailand's best architects, painters, and craftsmen over the past two and a half centuries⁴³. The influences of successive kings are layered, with differences evident in details and construction materials reflecting evolving architectural styles during each ruler's reign. Each king's reign is honored by a monument, known as *busabok*, displaying the royal insignia⁴⁴. The promotion of Wat Phra Kaew served to elevate the royal family, especially the King, as exemplary Buddhist practitioners. The King's continuous support and promotion of the temple underscored his dedication not only to Thai art but also to the propagation of Buddhism.

Temple layout present

Until 1932, when the absolute monarchy ended, the Grand Palace was the administrative and religious center of the kingdom⁴⁵. In the early twentieth century, the king's primary residence shifted to Dusit Palace⁴⁶. Nonetheless, the Grand Palace, with its temple, remains significant as the royal temple and a symbol of the nation's core. Its global recognition draws visitors, and the presence of the Emerald Buddha magnifies its sacredness⁴⁷.

Temple components

After examining the temple's connection with the monarchy, it's essential to recognize that what truly makes it the holy center isn't just its grand structures provided by the kings. It's the presence of the sacred Emerald Buddha image that elevates the temple to the pinnacle of sacredness. The history of this image is widely examined, with more literature available on the image than on the temple itself. According to chronicles, in 1434, lightning struck a chedi in Chiang Rai, revealing a stucco Buddha inside. When the stucco flaked off, the green Emerald Buddha was revealed, attracting people to worship the precious legendary statue⁴⁸. The Emerald Buddha's mystical origins and historical desirability among different past rulers have made it a potent symbol, legitimizing the Chakri dynasty and its present king⁴⁹.

Community Activities

Traditionally, former royal chapels like Wat Phra Kaew have no residing monks; instead, monks are invited by the king to perform rituals in the chapel⁵⁰. The Bot has historically only been

40 Songyot Weerataweemat, 'Royal Buddhist Architecture of the Early Bangkok Period: Investigations in Symbolic Planning.' (phd, University of York, 1999), <https://theses.whiterose.ac.uk/10861/>.

41 Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

42 Chakrabongse, Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife.

43 Melody Nina Rod-ari, 'Visualizing Merit: An Art Historical Study of the Emerald Buddha and Wat Phra Kaew' (Ph.D., United States -- California, University of California, Los Angeles, 2010), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/814730529/abstract/CB19738F8FA84879PQ/1>.

44 Chakrabongse, Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife.

45 Chakrabongse.

46 Sathāpitānōn and Mertens, Architecture of Thailand.

47 Rod-ari, 'Visualizing Merit'.

48 Subhadradis Diskul (M.C.), History of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Bangkok: Bureau of the Royal Household, 1982).

49 Eric Roeder, 'The Origin and Significance of the Emerald Buddha', 1999.

50 Rod-ari, 'Visualizing Merit'.

used to ordain male members of the royal family into the Buddhist order, not for ordaining any layperson⁵¹. There are no schools within the temple compound. The temple was initially dedicated solely to the royal family, this has changed over time as later kings included the people by allowing them to donate, sharing the responsibility for the temple between the monarch and the people. Giving the people opportunity to make merit. Nevertheless, the temple, like the ceremony of ordination, hosts most of the royal ceremonies and rituals, including funerals and coronations⁵².

Relation

The relationship between the temple and community at Wat Phra Kaew is distinct from other case studies. One might even question whether there exists a traditional community in the conventional sense. In the case of Wat Phra Kaew, the community can be viewed as the entire nation, given that the temple serves as the paramount example and embodies the collective beliefs, values, richness, and status of Thailand. It resonates throughout the nation, influencing the lives of all Thai citizens. This central role undoubtedly contributes to why 92.5% of the population adheres to Buddhism. The relationship is apparent on a grand scale, akin to that of a temple and its nation (community).



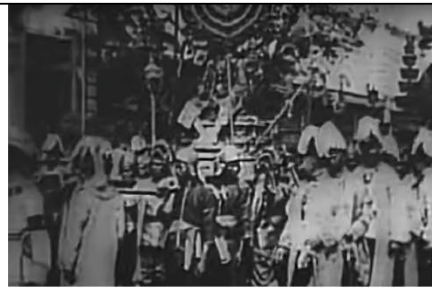
Image 9 Murals showcasing the Ramakien inside the cloisters by author

51 พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวเสด็จออกผนวช King's Ordination - 1957, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAtHPICEe6w>.

52 Sathāpitanon and Mertens, Architecture of Thailand.



a Coronation of King Rama X



b Coronation of king Rama VII



c Funeral king Rama IX



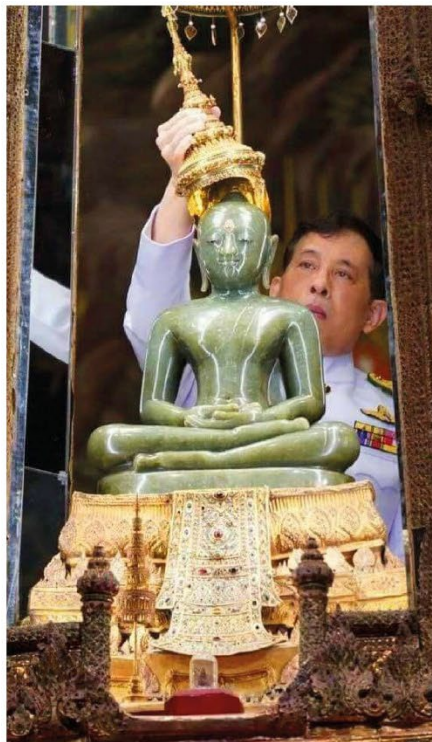
d Funeral of King Rama VI



e Protective demons from the Ramakien story



f Protective demons from the Ramakien story 1953



g Ceremonial change of garments by king Rama X

Image 10 Wat Phra Kaew present and past

3



a Wat Arun 1862 by Kinsbergen



b walking ceremony with candles, flowers and incense in 2024 by Wat Arun

Image 11 a⁴⁰ and b⁴¹

CHAPTER THREE

WAT ARUN

Now that we have an understanding of the profound impact a temple can have on its people, let's turn our attention to another prominent and well-known temple, Wat Arun, The Temple of Dawn. Unlike Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Arun offers opportunity for the temple community to establish a deeper relationship, as it is not the primary exemplar of many facets. Wat Arun, is situated on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, the exact origins of this temple remain unknown. However, the earliest evidence of its existence dates back to 1656⁵³. Legend has it that in 1767, when Taksin fled down the river to escape the Burmese, he and his army arrived at Wat Arun in the early dawn. It was at this moment that he decided Thonburi, would be the ideal location for Siam's new capital⁵⁴. Taksin's reign was brief, and King Rama I deemed the East bank to be a more suitable and strategically advantageous location for the capital, partly due to the presence of French forts from the 1660s that made it more defensible⁵⁴. Before moving the capital to the East bank of the river and founding Bangkok, King Rama I resided at Wat Arun. Originally named Wat Cheang, Wat Arun served as the



Image 12 Wat Arun at Sunset

first royal *Wat*, also housing the Emerald Buddha, during the onset of the Rattanakosin period, with both King Taksin and King Rama I having resided in the Thonburi palace right next to it⁵⁵.

Temple layout evolution

When King Taksin arrived at the temple of dawn, the temple compound was smaller, featuring only the former *Phra Prang*, *Bot*, and *Viharn*, labelled as buildings 1, 12 and 13. See image 13c. King Taksin undertook the mission to restore the temple, successfully renovating the buildings, later known as *Bot-noi* and *Viharn-noi*, situated between the *Phra Prang* and the river⁵⁶. However, after his reign, attention of the monarchy shifted to the new temple, Wat Phra Kaew on the East bank. Nonetheless, King Rama I delegated the restoration responsibility to his son, Prince Komlaungisarasunthorn. During his time as prince, he restored the monks' residences, and as King Rama II, he oversaw the construction of a new and larger *Bot* and *Viharn*, labelled as buildings 8 and 4. King Rama II also initiated the renovation of *Phra Prang*, he laid the foundations during his reign, and the project was finished under the reign of King Rama III. In honour of his father, King Rama III decided to modify the plans and increased the height of the *Prang* to 67 meters⁵⁷.

53 Kanjanaphorn Polprateep, 'Interpretation of Wat Arun Ratchawararam (The Temple of Dawn): The Application of Sustainable Cultural Tourism Principles in an Interpretive Plan' (Silpakorn University, 2010).

54 O'Neil, Bangkok.

55 Smithies, Old Bangkok.

56 Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK.

57 Polprateep, 'Interpretation of Wat Arun Ratchawararam (The Temple of Dawn): The Application of Sustainable Cultural Tourism Principles in an Interpretive Plan'.

Temple layout present

Wat Arun spans approximately 50,000 square meters, including residential areas within its compound⁵⁸. What makes this compound unique is its direct connection to the river, which offers a main entrance on the west side and three entrances with boat docking areas on the East river side. See image 5⁵⁹. This river side also hosts unique traditions and activities, which will be further detailed later in this chapter. Additionally, gardens on the riverside serve as spaces for various ceremonies. On the west side, residential areas house the monks. Upon examining the layout, it becomes evident that there are two centre's within the temple complex, labelled as buildings 1 and 8 in the provided image 14d*. The *Phra Prang*, chosen as the unique element for this case study, is predominantly situated at the front of the river banks. In contrast, the main *Bot* building is positioned in the north-west corner. This deviates from the traditional layout discussed in the first chapter, where the *Bot* serves as the centre. It underscores that the main highlight of the temple compound in Wat Arun is the main *Prang*.

Temple components

Over time, the *Phra Prang* has evolved into a significant landmark. It serves as a memorial tower, akin to a *chedi*, differing in the shape of the top. While a *chedi* is bell-shaped and often gilded, a *prang* is bullet-shaped and reflects Khmer influences⁶⁰. Housing relics of the Buddha, it stands as Thailand's tallest *prang* since its construction, possessing four levels. During the reign of King Rama 4, it was adorned with intricate decorations using broken pieces of Chinese porcelain, becoming an iconic symbol for the nation⁶¹.

The *Bot* adheres to a traditional layout, featuring an entrance gate on the East side. With a raised base and a double-tiered roof, its outer walls and pillars are similarly adorned with floral patterns made of broken Chinese porcelain. The principal Buddha image within the *Bot* is not only luxurious but also contains the ashes from King Rama II's cremation in its pedestal⁶².

The chapel, *Viharn*, houses the renowned Buddha image known as *Phra Arun*⁶³. It is located between the *Bot* and *Phra Prang*, building 4.

Multiple *chedis* are situated around the temple complex. Four stand in a row just outside the *Bot*, building 6. Additionally, *chedis*, labelled, 2 mark the four corners of the *Phra Prang*, symbolizing the four significant episodes of the Buddha's life—his Birth, shelter under the *Bohdi*, teachings called the *Dharma*, and his death ascending to *Nirvana*⁶⁴.

Community Activities

When King Taksin declared Wat Arun the Royal temple, monks residing there were relocated, as it is customary for the royal wat to not have resident monks. However, when King Rama I moved to his new palace, the monks returned, prompting the prince's priority to renovate these quarters first⁶⁵.

The ceremony mentioned in chapter one, the walk around the *Bot*, is performed not around the *Bot* but around the *Phra Prang* due to its paramount importance, housing relics believed to belong to Lord Buddha⁶⁶.

Adjacent to the north side of the temple compound lie two schools, as depicted in the image. One serves as an elementary school, while the other caters to high school students. Additionally, there exists a community learning centre within Wat Arun. The community learning centre and schools aim to provide equitable education to marginalized children and youths while combating human trafficking and abuse. They also assist in post-education employment and

58 Polprateep.

59 admin, 'Our Favorite Places: Bangkok', CIRE Travel (blog), 31 January 2023, <https://ciretravel.com/our-favorite-places-bangkok/>.

* Unfortunately, there are few old floor plans available for the entire complex of Wat Arun. Most documents focus only on the main prang. It is possible that these documents are only accessible physically in Thailand, or that during those periods, other temple constructions were deemed more important to document, apart from the main prang.

60 Sathāpitanon and Mertens, Architecture of Thailand.

61 Polprateep, 'Interpretation of Wat Arun Ratchawararam (The Temple of Dawn): The Application of Sustainable Cultural Tourism Principles in an Interpretive Plan'.

62 Chakrabongse, Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife.

63 Chakrabongse.

64 Bruce, NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK; O'Neil, Bangkok.

65 Chakrabongse, Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife; Smithies, Old Bangkok.

66 Polprateep, 'Interpretation of Wat Arun Ratchawararam (The Temple of Dawn): The Application of Sustainable Cultural Tourism Principles in an Interpretive Plan'.

offer scholarships for higher education, all while instilling moral values and preserving Thai culture⁶⁷.

Wat Arun hosts the annual *Kathin* ceremony, during which the King leads a royal barge procession from the East bank of the river to the temple. Monks are then presented with new robes for the Buddhist Lent season. This is the same type of boat and travel ceremony as King Rama I did when he left Wat Arun in 1782. Now the king returns each year for this ceremony.⁶⁸

Relation

During the Rattanakosin period, the bond between Wat Arun and the community has not only endured but also strengthened over time. Events described in this chapter have influenced architectural changes, impacting the community, such as the departure and the returning of monks. Larger temple structures accommodate larger community activities, reflecting the growth of the city overtime. The community, including the monarchy as spiritual leaders, actively supports the temple through donations and merit-making, reinforcing its integral role in society. The former kings, especially King Rama II, left a lasting legacy in Wat Arun through their devotion to their beliefs. Over time, Wat Arun has become a cultural time capsule, preserving traditions, values, and faith still evident today. Further validation of this enduring legacy can be gleaned from a comparative analysis of old and new images, offering additional insights into the temple's enduring significance on the community. The temple's architectural beauty and symbolism serve as an inspiration for the community, as evidenced by quotes highlighting their impact. Becoming a key element in the symbolic hearth of the nation.

Quote by Mishima, Yukio in his novel *The Temple of Dawn*⁶⁹

“With the first rays of dawn over the Maenam River, the tens of thousands of porcelain fragments turned into so many tiny mirrors that capture the light. A great structure of mother-of-pearl sparkling riotously... The pagoda had long served as a morning bell tolled by its rich hues, resonant colors responding to the dawn. They where created... to evoke a beauty, a power, an explosion like the dawn itself. “

Quote by Seidenfaden, Major Erik in his *Guide to Bangkok*⁷⁰

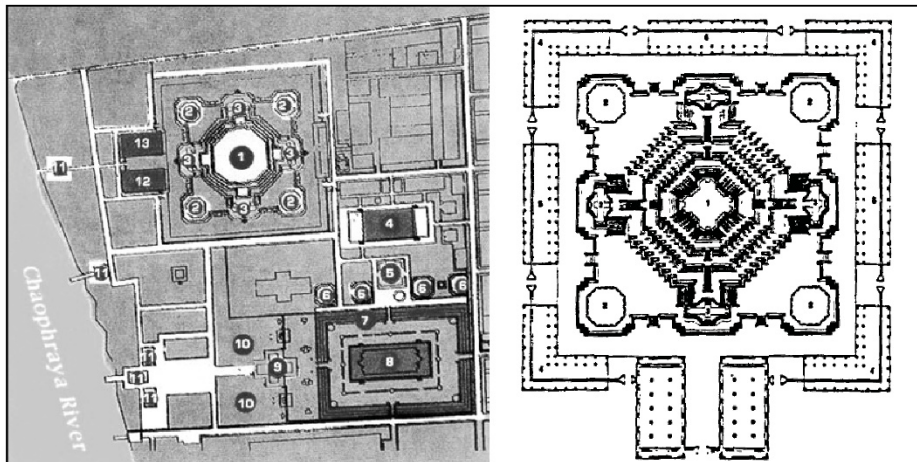
“...At sunset when the fiery ball of the king of day disappears behind the tall leafy trees which from a frame around the towers and temple buildings, then the five prang stand out against a scarlet background, a background which slowly changes its colour to rosy tints, then to mauve, until finally the black shadows of the night envelop the whole fabric. Indeed a wonderful of impressive picture that this can hardly be imagined. “

⁶⁷ 'Community Learning Center | Clcwatarun.Org', Mission and objectives, accessed 20 March 2024, <https://www.clcwatarun.org>.

⁶⁸ Chakrabongse, Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife.

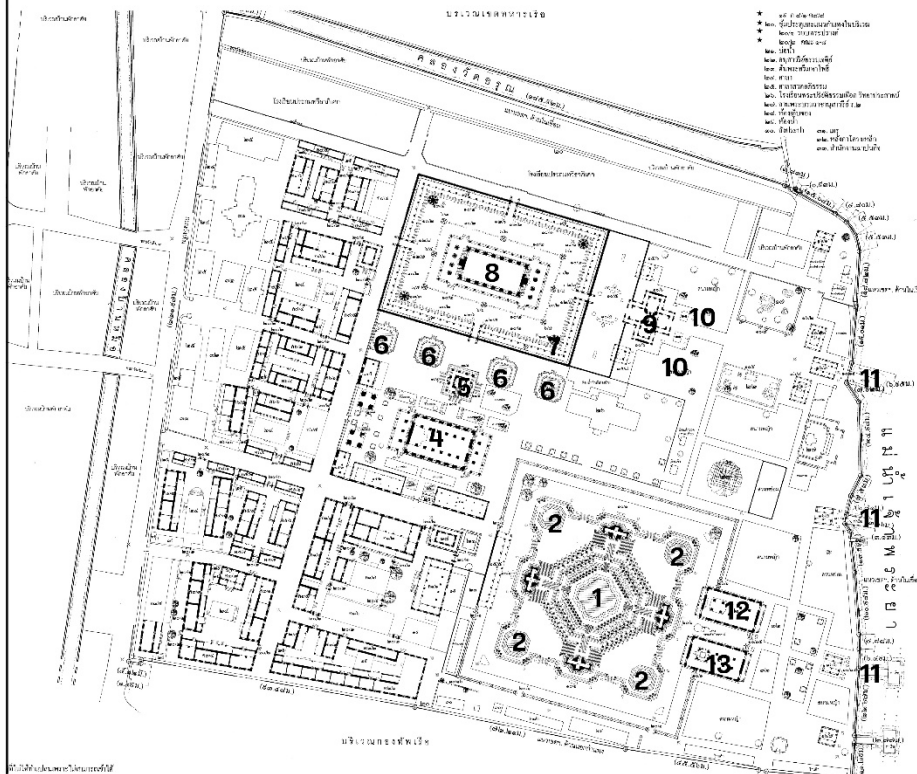
⁶⁹ Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of Dawn* (Tokyo : Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1985), <http://archive.org/details/templeofdawn0000mish>; O'Neil, Bangkok.

⁷⁰ Major Erik Seidenfaden, *Guide to Bangkok with Notes on Siam* [1927], 1927, <http://archive.org/details/guide-bangkok-siam>; Smithies, Old Bangkok.



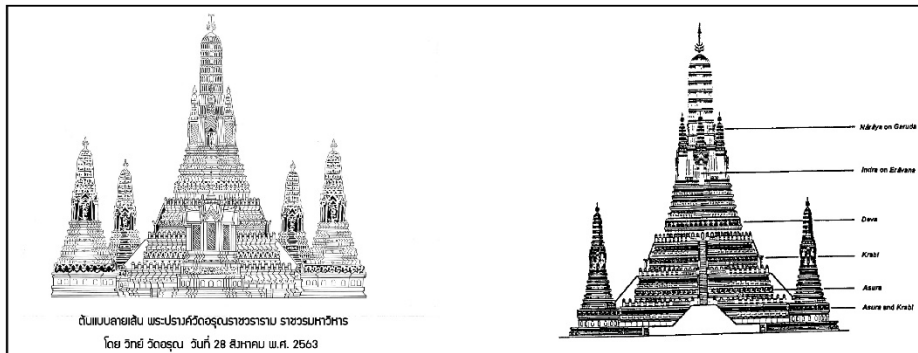
a Wat Arun map

b Wat Arun map of the Phra Prang complex 1986 by Weerataweemat



c Wat Arun map 2015 adapted by author from the Royal Government Gazette Department of Fine Arts

Image 13 a, b and c



a Wat Arun Phra Prang elevation 2018

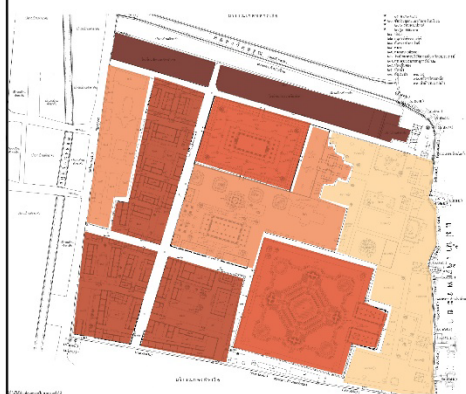
b Wat Arun Phra Prang elevation by Weerataweemat



Time

- King Rama I
- King Rama II
- King Rama III

c Wat Arun map 2015 adapted by author from the Royal Government Gazette Department of Fine Arts



Functions

- Most important space in the temple compound
- Temple compound
- Housing
- School
- Gardens

d Wat Arun map 2015 adapted by author from the Royal Government Gazette Department of Fine Arts

Image 14 a, b, c and d



a Monks walking ceremony around the Phra Prang



b Monthly cleaning



c Volunteers



d Kathin ceremony



e Monks maintaining the compound including their houses



f Ceremony



g Royal barge progression

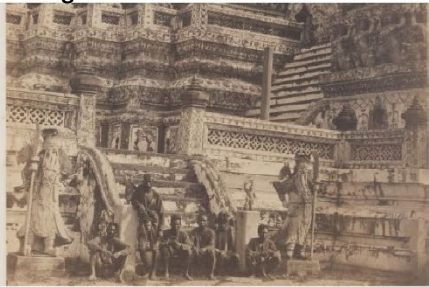
Image 15 Wat Arun Present a, b, c, d, e, f and g



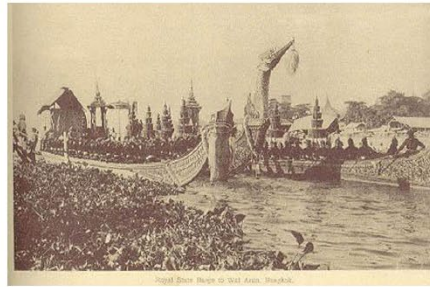
a Thonburi with Wat Arun in the background 1885



b Temple gate 1900



c Wat Arun 1862 by I. van Kinsbergen



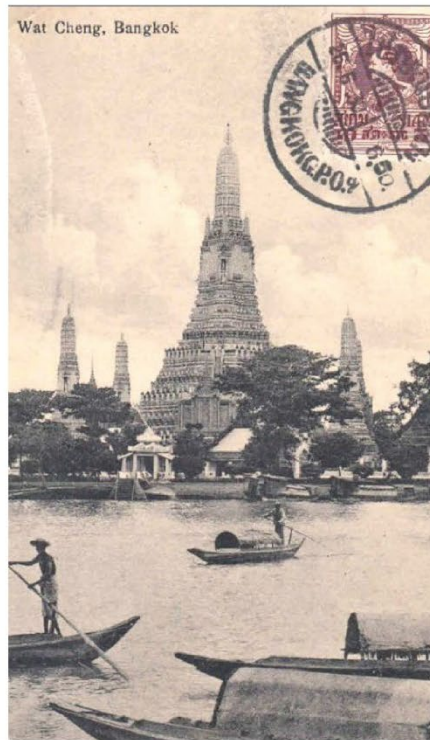
d Royal barge progression 1930



e View from Phra Prang 1893 by I. van Kinsbergen



f Cemetery 1865



g Wat Arun postcard 1925

Image 16 Wat Arun past a ,b ,c ,d ,e ,f and g

4



a Laity praying in the *Bot* of Wat Pho



b Children in traditional Thai dancing clothes sitting on a *chedi* 1920 by W. Giercke

Image 17 a and b

CHAPTER FOUR

WAT PHO

While this last case study may not have served as a royal chapel like the other two, it still holds great significance and remains the largest temple compound in Bangkok. Situated on the East bank of the river, directly opposite Wat Arun, lies Wat Pho, also known as Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkhalaram. It is renowned for housing the Reclining Buddha image and is commonly referred to as the Temple of the Reclining Buddha. This temple predates the founding of Bangkok, originating during the Ayutthaya period under King Phetracha's reign (1688-1703)⁷¹. When King Rama I journeyed across the river to his new palace, he discovered Wat Pho in a state of despair. Upon completing the construction of his new palace and Wat Phra Kaew, he announced in 1789 his commitment to restoring Wat Pho to align its magnificence with that of the royal palace⁷². Over a span of seven years, five months, and twenty-eight days, employing 20,000 workers, he completely transformed Wat Pho, leaving no trace of its former state⁷³.

Temple layout evolution

King Rama I, driven by his religious devotion, undertook the renovation of Wat Pho with the intention of not only halting neglect but also enhancing its grandeur. The marshy and uneven terrain was unsuitable for his new plans, prompting him to haul the earth and completely fill the area again to create an even and stable foundation. Consequently, nothing of the old *Wat* remained, and there is no older literature known about its previous state. Instead of designing the compound in a rectangle, the temple's unique trapezoidal shape, inspired by the cosmic realm of Buddhism, was carefully planned by the king himself⁷⁴. See image 19b. Construction commenced in 1792, starting with the *Bot*, adorned with the sacred round stones called *luk nimit*, building 18. The completion of the temple in 1801 was celebrated with a grand ceremony⁷⁵. In addition to rebuilding the temple, King Rama I recovered 1248 Buddha images from the ruins of Ayutthaya, giving them a new home at Wat Pho. Among these, 689 are made of metal, and 183 are crafted from stucco, many requiring reconstruction due to damage. To display these treasures, inner and outer galleries were constructed between the *Viharns* surrounding the *Bot*⁷⁶. This act imbued the temple with cultural significance as a memorial of Buddha images. He also commanded the retrieval of the former main Buddha image from the previous royal temple in Ayutthaya, known as Phra Sri Sanphet. However, due to the damage inflicted by the Burmese plundering, rendering it impossible to



Image 18 The reclining Buddha and the mother-in-pearl inlay on its feet by Lasma Plone

⁷¹ Khanitthā Wongmānit et al., *Samutphāp Wat Phrachētuphon wimonmangkhlārām = Pictorial book of Wat Phra Chetuphon* (Krungthēp [Bangkok: 1992, 2535).

⁷² John Barry Bell, 'Wat Phra Chetuphon : the narratives of form, symbol, and architectural order in the Thai temple', 2007, 428.

⁷³ Chakrabongse, *Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife*.

⁷⁴ Weerataweemat, 'Royal Buddhist Architecture of the Early Bangkok Period'.

⁷⁵ Chakrabongse, *Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife*.

⁷⁶ Menakanit, 'A Royal Temple in the Thai Urban Landscape'.

restore its former glory, the monks and the king opted to bury it in a *chedi* named Phra Chedi Sri Sanpetdayam, building 8⁷⁷. While King Rama I greatly supported Wat Pho, King Rama II focused his plans on Wat Arun, placing only a *Chedi* next to the Phra Chedi Sri Sanpetdayam. However, King Rama III initiated extensive alterations in response to the temple's rundown condition, beginning restoration work in 1831. The most significant changes included replacing the old *Bot*, building 1, with the larger building seen today and adding numerous *chedis*, including his own larger one, building 8. The library, building 9, was also expanded to accommodate King Rama III's vision of transforming Wat Pho into a public university or a center of learning for all classes of people. Making the temple to bridge the gap between the state and its citizens by establishing it as a knowledge hub, fostering a connection between the two⁷⁸. Additionally, a *Viharn* was constructed in the northwest corner to house the reclining Buddha image. The last mayor changes are by King IV including a renovation of the ceiling of this *Viharn*⁷⁹. The evolution of the temple layout is seen in image 20.

Temple layout present

Wat Pho is an expansive compound spanning 80,000 square meters. Divided by Cheptuphon road, the northern part primarily consists of the holy temple grounds and religious architectural components, facing the royal palace grounds, while the southern part comprises residential quarters, a library, and a school. The northern part is called the *phutthawat*, and the southern part, the *sankhawat*⁸⁰. Although its architectural layout differs from that of Wat Arun, some elements remain recognizable. As previously mentioned in the initial chapter, while the primary structure is evident, there are variations present. Notably, the *Bot* prominently occupies the northern part of the compound, and the mandala features multiple layers, symbolizing Buddhist cosmology accurately, as studied by Chatri Prakitnonthakan⁸¹. See image 19c. A unique feature of Wat Pho is the sole blue-roofed building amidst the orange ones, housing the reclining Buddha and adding to the temple's distinctiveness.

Temple components

The *Viharn*, housing the colossal reclining Buddha image, was added by King Rama III in 1832. This impressive image, depicting the Buddha on his deathbed, measures 15 meters in height and 47 meters in length, shaping the *Viharn* to accommodate its size⁸². Notably, the feet of the Buddha are adorned with mother-of-pearl inlay, symbolizing purity and respect. In Thai tradition, it is believed that one should never point their feet towards the Buddha, as they are considered the least clean part of the body⁸³. The anonymous artist meticulously crafted the feet to be a fitting representation of the Buddha, despite their unconventional portrayal. While the artist's name remains unknown, many craftsmen in temples work anonymously, motivated by the pursuit of merit rather than recognition⁸⁴.

Unlike at Wat Arun, the *Bot* at Wat Pho holds greater prominence. The *Bot*, central to Wat Pho, has undergone extensive rebuilding and expansion over time to accommodate the growing number of visitors. It houses a Buddha image containing ashes from King Rama I and is supported by 152 marble pillars⁸⁵. The spaces between these pillars feature illustrations from the *Ramakien*, intricately carved into the structure. UNESCO recognized the significance of these carvings in 2008, acknowledging their role in preserving cultural traditions⁸⁶.

Wat Pho features multiple *Viharns*, each contributing to the temple's mandala layout. Four directional *Viharns*, situated to the North, South, West, and East (buildings 2, 3, 4, and 5),

⁷⁷ Bell, 'Wat Phra Chetuphon'.

⁷⁸ Menakanit, 'A Royal Temple in the Thai Urban Landscape'.

⁷⁹ Khanitthā Wongmānit et al., *Samutphāp Wat Phrachētuphon wimonmangkhlārām = Pictorial book of Wat Phra Chetuphon*.

⁸⁰ Weerataweemat, 'Royal Buddhist Architecture of the Early Bangkok Period'.

⁸¹ Chatri Prakitnonthakan, 'Symbolism in the Design of Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimonmangkhalaram (Wat Pho)', *Journal of the Siam Society* 102 (2014).

⁸² Chakrabongse, *Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife*.

⁸³ O'Neil, *Bangkok*.

⁸⁴ Bell, 'Wat Phra Chetuphon'.

⁸⁵ Prakitnonthakan, 'Symbolism in the Design of Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimonmangkhalaram (Wat Pho)'.

⁸⁶ O'Neil, *Bangkok*.

are interconnected by galleries and cloisters, housing a total of 872 Buddha images. These *Viharns* are divided into two parts, with outer openings leading to the outer courtyard and inner openings leading to the inner courtyard. The L-shaped *Viharns* in each corner symbolize another layer of Buddhist cosmology⁸⁷. Since there are several *Viharns*, multiple ceremonies or events can occur simultaneously.

Positioned at each corner of the L-shaped *Viharns* are clusters of five *Chedis*, consisting of a large central one encircled by four smaller ones. Additionally, four larger *Chedis* adorn the corners of the inner courtyard, similar to the placement and form of the four prangs surrounding the Phra Prang in Wat Arun⁸⁸. King Rama III further embellished the temple grounds with numerous additional *Chedis* along the outer parts of the galleries. As the temple got denser with all the additions these areas were transformed into tranquil gardens. Notably, the largest *Chedis*, that were already mentioned, symbolize the first four reigns, contributing to the temple's historical significance⁸⁹.

Community Activities

Wat Pho has long provided accommodations for monks, with a dedicated area, *sankhawat*. This area also houses a school for the *Dharma* teachings, a library, and meditation cells⁹⁰.

At Wat Pho, a distinctive ritual entails placing coins in 108 bowls encircling the reclining Buddha, each bowl symbolizing auspicious qualities of the Buddha. These characteristics are also depicted in the design of the mother-of-pearl inlay on the Buddha's feet. This practice is believed to attract good fortune and serves as a charitable donation for the monks⁹¹.

King Rama III dedicated Wat Pho to be a center of knowledge, focusing primarily on traditional Thai medical practices⁹². This initiative evolved into the Thai Traditional Medical Science School and Body Massage, located in pavilions between the L-shaped *Viharns* on the East side of the temple. Many visitors seek massages based on centuries-old Thai medical techniques, making Wat Pho a popular destination for holistic healing practices⁹³.

Relation

The relationship between temple architecture and the temple community has evolved significantly at Wat Pho. Originally found in a state of disrepair, King Rama I's efforts to restore the temple reflected his religious dedication. Subsequent additions and renovations, such as the construction of the *Viharn* housing the reclining Buddha by King Rama III, further enhanced the temple's architectural significance. These structures not only represent Buddhist cosmology but also serve as centers for community activities and rituals. The layout with multiple *Viharns* and courtyards allows for simultaneous ceremonies and events. Unique traditions and programs like placing coins in bowls around the reclining Buddha and the establishing of the Thai Traditional Medical Science School underscore the temple's role as a center for spiritual and practical knowledge. Through its architectural evolution and community-focused initiatives, Wat Pho exemplifies the dynamic interplay between temple architecture and the temple community, shaping its identity as an esteemed cultural and educational institution in Bangkok.

Quote by Marquis de Beauvoir who climbed* on the Reclining buddha⁹⁴

"When we tried to climb upon him we entirely disappeared in his nostrils... We stood amazed before this titanic work...No creed ever saw such display of wealth,

⁸⁷ Prakitnonthakan, 'Symbolism in the Design of Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimonmangkhalaram (Wat Pho)'.

⁸⁸ Khanitthā Wongmānit et al., *Samutphāp Wat Phrachētuphon wimonmangkhlārām = Pictorial book of Wat Phra Chetuphon*.

⁸⁹ Weerataweemat, 'Royal Buddhist Architecture of the Early Bangkok Period'.

⁹⁰ Menakanit, 'A Royal Temple in the Thai Urban Landscape'.

⁹¹ Chakrabongse, *Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife*.

⁹² Bruce, *NINE TEMPLES OF BANGKOK*.

⁹³ Chakrabongse, *Exploring Old Bangkok: Royal Palaces - Temples - Streetlife*.

⁹⁴ O'Neil, *Bangkok*.

* Climbing a Buddha image is very disrespectful.



a Wat Pho axo and building numbers

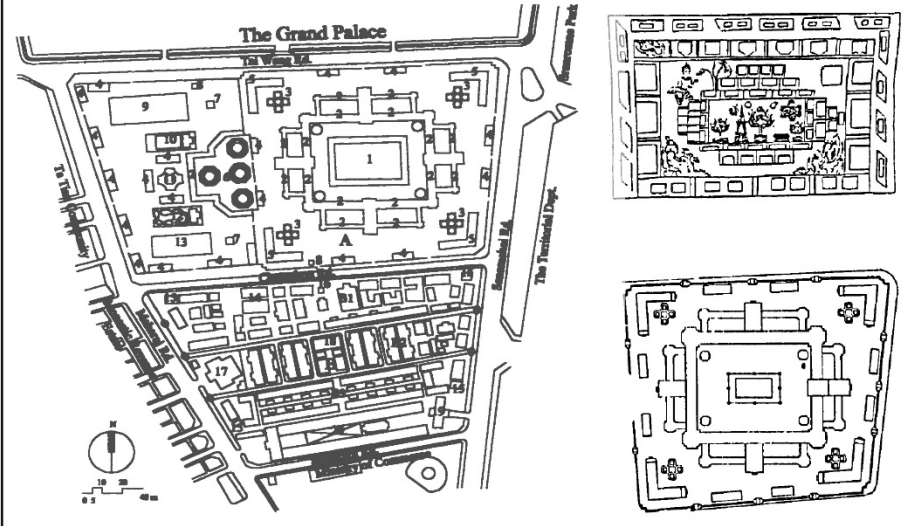


Image 19 a, b and c

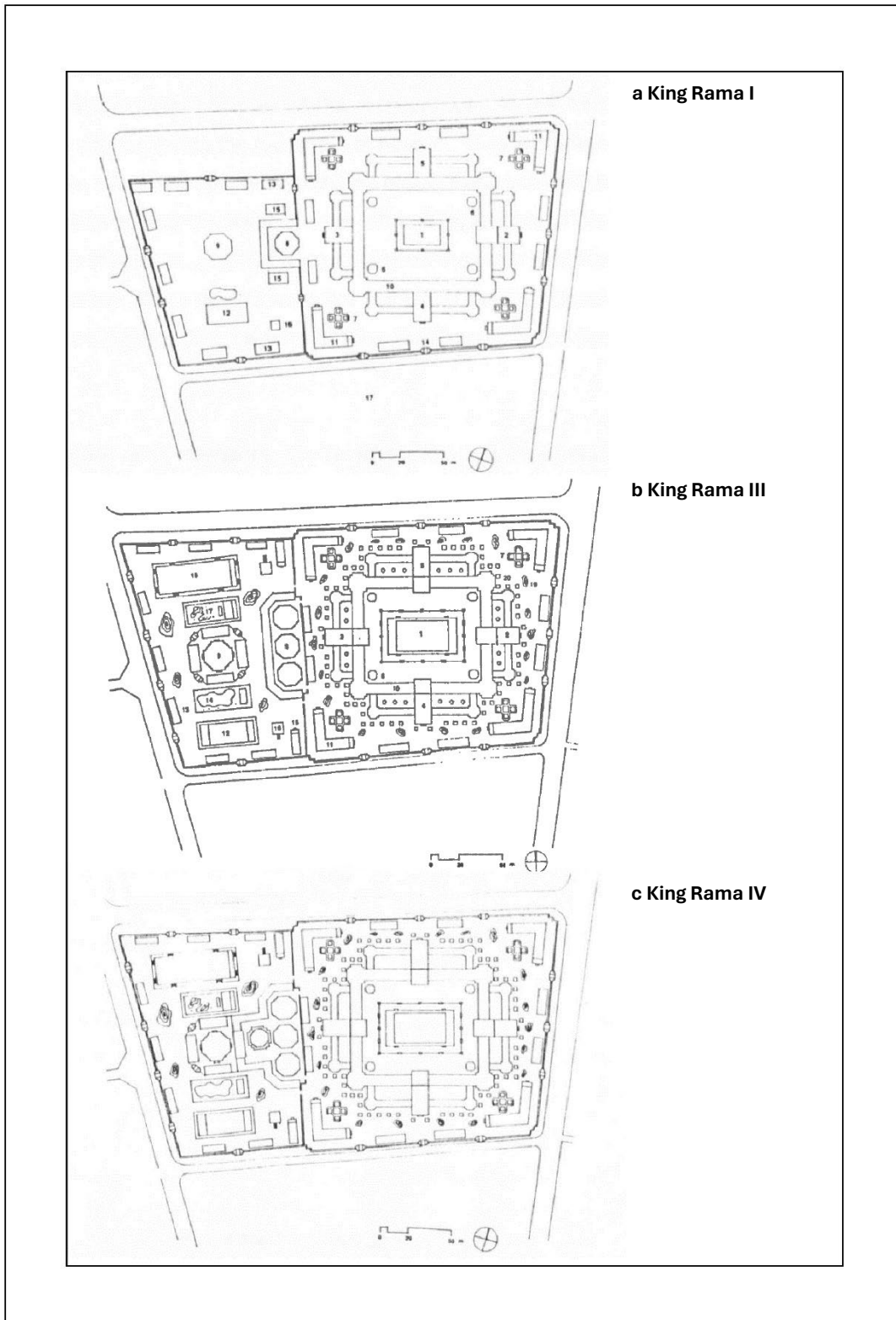


Image 20 Floorplan of Wat Pho a, b and c



a Main temple gate



b Praying inside the Bot



c Students on excursion



d Festival in the courtyards



e Prangs



f Monks taking a test



g Wat Pho gallery

Image 21 Wat Pho present a, b, c, d, e, f and g



a Main temple gate 1890



b Monks leaving the Bot 1951



c Man and girl removing weeds 1953



d Festival 1918



e Prangs 1953



g Wat Pho gallery 1930



f Thai dance ceremony 1920

Image 22 Wat Pho past a, b, c, d, e, f and g

CHAPTER FIVE

TEMPLE AND COMMUNITY

In conclusion, this research seeks to understand the intricate relationship between temple architecture and the temple community, focusing on its evolution during the Rattanakosin period. As highlighted in the initial chapter, there exists a profound connection between Buddhism temples and community life, where the Wat serves not only as a religious structure but as the spiritual nucleus of Thai society.

Strength

Monks and nuns reside within the Wat, engaging in daily rituals and receiving support from the Laity through donations and acts of merit. These activities are also seen in the case studies. Some activities dating back two centuries, persist today and have grown even stronger over time, becoming deeply ingrained in the Thai way of life. It verifies that the relationship between temple and community in these temples are evident through history with temples functioning as cultural time capsules preserving sacred spaces that shape collective identity and cultural heritage.

Monarchy

A key aspect noticeable in these case studies was the monarchy's role as upholders of religion. With their devout beliefs, and acts of merit, they played a pivotal role in shaping these temples. Their substantial contributions distinguished these temples from the multitude across the country, adding layers of meaning and importance. For instance, Wat Phra Kaew became a central pillar in the nation's ethos due to royal patronage. Similarly, the Phra Prang of Wat Arun evolved into a symbol of Thailand's cultural heritage, reflecting the monarchy's influence on temple architecture. Additionally, Wat Pho transformed into a centre of spiritual and practical knowledge through royal initiatives like the Thai Traditional Medical Science School, further enhancing its significance and impact within Thai society.

Significance

As the temples evolved, expanding in their decorations, grandeur, and size, their significance and holiness were also profoundly impacted. For example, the addition of the Viharn housing the Reclining Buddha at Wat Pho became one of its most renowned features. The Phra Prang of Wat Arun similarly evolved into a towering symbol that holds enormous spiritual significance. These developments elevated the temples' importance, attracting more visitors and worshippers eager to participate in acts of merit within these sacred spaces. The increasing architectural magnitude of these temples inspired awe and admiration among people, as the intricate decorations and structures hold deep symbolic religious meanings.

Growth

History played an influential role in shaping these temples. After the fall of Ayutthaya, Bangkok emerged as a new centre of power, population, and religion, leading to reconstruction efforts aimed to restore Bangkok to the glory of Ayutthaya. This notion elevated the historical importance of these temples and as Bangkok grew with an influx of people, these temples gained increased impact and value, fostering a thriving and growing community around them.

Support

In the modern era, with Thailand now a democracy, the influence and (financial) support from the monarchy have diminished compared to two centuries ago. The temples increasingly rely on tourism and community support for sustenance and upkeep, revealing a shift in their dynamics and sources of support within Thai society.

Follow up

Continuing on this note of shift, it would be intriguing to examine how the relationship between temple and community evolves on a smaller scale, such as within a village setting. Researching more intimate relationships within local communities could shed light on whether the dynamics of this relationship differ when grandeur is less pronounced.

In summary this research concludes that the relationship between temple architecture and the temple community during the Rattanakosin period has evolved in different ways, with each influencing the other dynamically. The relationship developed into a stronger, more supportive, and increasingly significant bond, which remains a vital part of Thailand's cultural identity today, continuing to grow and evolve.

Quote In the travelogue film “golden temple paradise” 1953⁹⁵

“Because here in Siam with all seriousness that we attach to our temples and our Buddhist religion, we are a very happy people, we like to laugh and we like to smile.”

⁹⁵ BANGKOK THAILAND 1953 TRAVELOGUE FILM ‘GOLDEN TEMPLE PARADISE’ SIAM 62664.

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