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**SIGNIFICANCE OF HELL SCENES IN MURAL PAINTINGS  
DURING THE REIGN OF KING RAMA I**



**Mrs. Kimiko Matsuura**

สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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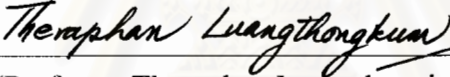
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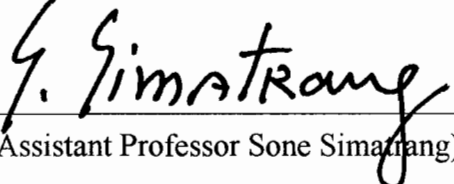
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วิทยานิพนธ์เล่มนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ที่จะศึกษาและวิเคราะห์ภาพจิตรกรรมฝาผนังในสมัย  
รัชกาลที่ ๑ ทั้งทางด้านรูปแบบและเนื้อหาของภาพจิตรกรรมที่มีที่มาจากคติไตรภูมิ โดยเฉพาะฉาก  
ภาพนรกภูมิ และมุ่งที่จะศึกษาบทบาทความสำคัญของภาพนรกภูมิในจิตรกรรมฝาผนังที่มีผลต่อ  
สังคมในสมัยนั้น

วิทยานิพนธ์เล่มนี้วิเคราะห์เนื้อหาของภาพนรกโดยใช้ระเบียบวิธีทางประวัติศาสตร์ศิลป์และ  
วิเคราะห์สารสำคัญที่ภาพนรกพยายามจะสื่อกับผู้ดูในบริบททางสังคมและการเมืองในสมัยนั้น  
ผู้วิจัยได้เปรียบเทียบจิตรกรรมฝาผนังสมัยอยุธยากับรูปแบบ เนื้อหาและวิธีการนำเสนอภาพใน  
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ผลการศึกษาพบว่า จิตรกรรมฝาผนังสมัยรัชกาลที่ ๑ นิยมเสนอภาพไตรภูมิบนฝาผนัง  
ด้านหลังพระประธานในโบสถ์หรือในวิหาร ภาพจากคติไตรภูมิเหล่านี้เน้นการนำเสนอภาพในส่วนที่  
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นรกภูมิถูกทำให้แตกต่างอย่างตรงกันข้าม ทั้งรูปแบบ เนื้อหาและวิธีการนำเสนอภาพทำให้ผู้ดูเกิด  
ความรู้สึกว่า สวรรค์ภูมิเป็นรางวัลในขณะที่นรกภูมิเป็นการลงโทษ และการที่ภาพทั้งสองถูกนำเสนอ  
ในแนวตั้งโดยภาพสวรรค์ภูมิอยู่ด้านบนสุดและภาพนรกภูมิอยู่ด้านล่างสุดมีผลในการสื่อสาร  
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วิทยานิพนธ์เล่มนี้วิเคราะห์ให้เห็นว่า ภาพไตรภูมิในจิตรกรรมฝาผนังสมัยรัชกาลที่ ๑ ได้ถูก  
นำมาใช้เป็นเครื่องมือในการอบรมศีลธรรมและสร้างความชอบธรรมให้สถาบันพระมหากษัตริย์ใน  
บริบททางสังคมสมัยนั้นที่มีแต่ความไม่สงบและความไม่มั่นคงทางการเมือง

ภาควิชาไทยศึกษา  
สาขาวิชา ไทยศึกษา  
ปีการศึกษา ๒๕๕๗

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....  
ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา .....  
ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาร่วม .....

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The thesis aims at studying and analysing the form and content of King Rama I's Traiphum mural paintings with a focus on the scene of Hell and examining various aspects of the significance of the scene of Hell in these mural paintings in the reign of King Rama I.

Based on a textual analysis, using an art history method, the thesis analyses the messages King Rama I intended to communicate to the audience and identify the significance of the scene of Hell in conveying these messages in the social and political context. In comparison with mural paintings of Ayutthaya period, the form, content, and medium of mural paintings from nine temples in the early Rattanakosin period are examined with reference to the literary background that provides the subject matter, while at the same time they are also analysed with reference to the social and political background underlying the creation and presentation of the mural paintings by King Rama I.

The research undertaken reveals that King Rama I extensively presented the Traiphum in the form of mural paintings, placing them on the wall behind the presiding Buddha image in the *ubosot* or one of the principal *viharns*. These murals focus on the three realms in the World of Desire placed in layers in a strict vertical order. In this representation, the scene of Hell is expanded and elaborated and is made in vivid contrast to the scene of Heaven. Through their form, content and medium, the notion that Heaven and Hell are the places for reward and punishment for men and that they occupy a particular space within the distinctive hierarchical order of the universe is effectively conveyed to the people, particularly to the laity, in the most vivid and convincing way.

The findings of this research suggest that the Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I were intended to serve as an efficient means to convey the messages of moral enforcement and the justification of the kingship in the midst of social unrest and political instability.

Field of Study: Thai Studies

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Student's Signature Kimiko Matsuura

Advisor's Signature Siraporn Nathalang

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the deepest and the darkest place, hidden behind the glittering figure of the Buddha, just below the magnificent and elegant depiction of Heaven, stand fierce men with spears, stabbing the bodies of naked men and women who are climbing up and down a kapok tree full of thorns. Dogs nip at them from below, while vultures peck at them from above. Naked men are being boiled in an iron cauldron into which they have been squashed. They are pleading in agony, with their hands raised high. Surrounding them is a great profusion of exaggerated, deformed beings. One has no head but a face at his abdomen. Another has the head of a wild beast. Fierce flames and bright, crimson blood emanates from these strange beings who are spread all over the scene, providing the only colour to this otherwise colourless and ominous scene.

This is the depiction of Hell I came across at the *ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi. Such an elaborate picture of Hell is characteristic of King Rama I's Traiphum mural, created as part of the reconstruction activities that were being undertaken within the context of a situation where society itself was in a state of Hell.

Such a portrayal of Hell is hardly frightening for those of us members of a contemporary society who seek rational explanations to physical phenomena. However, for people two hundreds years ago, who were at all times surrounded by the fear of the mysterious unknown and who often also personally experienced such nightmares, this scene of Hell must have had a strong impact on them. Because of its influential power, Hell has been used as a device of fear in Buddhism and “represented one of the most practical methods of teaching naïve and unsophisticated individuals the need to practice virtue” (Matsunaga VIII).

Such a potent device as Hell, particularly the one described above as part of the Traiphum mural, must have played a significant role in conveying the underlying concept of the Traiphum. In fact, according to Ishii, the Traiphum murals, which depict in striking detail the various states of existence of living beings, including Hell, and which adorn monasteries across the country “had a significant impact on the formation of popular Buddhist ideas,” much stronger than manuscripts or sermons (24). He also said that “it is through these [Traiphum murals] that Thai peasantry is thought to have long been familiar with the substance of the Traiphum” (183).



In analysing the Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I , this thesis seeks to discover the messages that the king intended to convey to the people as well as the purposes that the king aimed at achieving by including such an elaborate scene of Hell as part of the mural and placing it at the *ubosot*. It also aims to determine the significance of the Hell scene at the time when it was being created by taking into account the social and political situation of that period in history.

## 1.1 Objectives

- 1.1.1 To study and analyse the form and content of the Traiphum mural paintings in the reign of King Rama I with a focus on *kamabhumi* (the World of Desire), particularly the scene of Hell.
- 1.1.2 To examine various aspects of the significance of the Hell scenes in these mural paintings during the reign of King Rama I .

## 1.2 Hypothesis

When he established Bangkok and ascended the throne, King Rama I intended to reconstruct a new society. As part of the reconstruction programme, several temples were built and the walls of their interior were decorated with mural paintings. It can be noticed that the Hell scenes were always featured within the context of the Traiphum cosmology and placed behind the principal Buddha image. It can also be noticed that the depiction of Heaven and Hell was made by way of contrast in composition, style and colour. More interestingly, the Hell scenes were prominently illustrated with clear and concrete images. Various Hell beings and forms of punishments, for example images of men in a hot iron cauldron or adulterous men and women climbing a tree of thorns, are clearly portrayed. It can be hypothesised that one of the reasons behind this emphasis on Hell scenes was to use them as a means of social and moral enforcement in the midst of social unrest and political instability.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

- 1.3.1 What are the roles of the scenes of Hell and the Traiphum in Thai society?
- 1.3.2 What are the form and content of King Rama I 's mural paintings of the Traiphum, and how do these paintings treat the scenes of Hell?
- 1.3.3 In what way are the scenes of Hell significant in relation to the messages that King Rama I 's mural paintings of the Traiphum were intended to convey to the audience?

### **1.4 Methodology**

Patrons such as King Rama I often communicate messages to a particular audience or to the larger society through mural paintings as artworks. By the choice of subject matter and of the form and content through which the subject matter is represented, the patron constructs an original visual language within the art work through which the message is conveyed.

A mural painting is, like any other form of art, a social product. The circumstances and the social milieu, the patron's personal situation, and the relationship of the patron with the people and society together inspire the patron to produce the art work and to convey specific messages to the audience through it. Consequently, in the choice of subject matter as well as the form and content, these conditions are reflected.

Based on this view of the nature of artwork, the analysis in this study is carried out in two phases. In the first phase, the paintings are analysed as objects having an independent existence; in the second, the paintings are analysed within the social context of that period.

In order to comprehend the messages communicated, the visual language that the patron constructs within the painting needs to be deciphered. To do so, the painting in which messages are encoded should first be examined as text, by analysing the form and content that constitute the painting with reference to the literary background that provides the subject matter of the painting.

Moreover, in order to more fully comprehend the messages that the painting was intended to communicate to its audience at the time it was executed and the significance of certain elements in the painting, it is necessary to examine the form and content with reference to the social and political background underlying the creation and showing of the painting (Pointon 67-71).

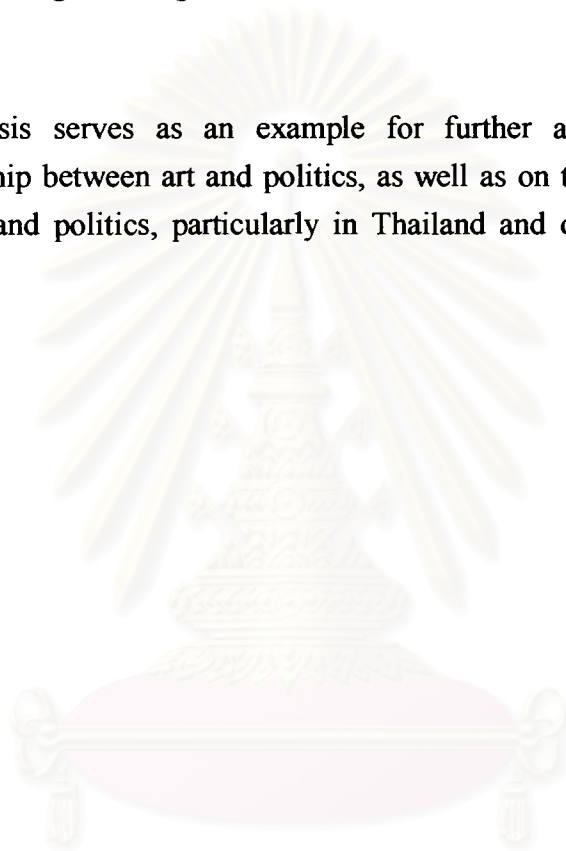
- 1.4.1 A study of the social and political background and the literary background concerning the concept of Hell and the Traiphum and of the art historical background about the representation of the cosmology in the murals is mainly based on documentary research using various written materials, including theses, research papers, books, and journal articles on the history, political science, religion, and art history pertaining to the artwork and the period during which it was created.
- 1.4.2 A textual analysis, using an art history method, is undertaken to more closely examine the form and content of the Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I. The main focus here is to analyse the scene of Hell as a constituent part of the larger scene of the Traiphum cosmology, as well as to analyse how the subject of cosmology is treated in the artwork. All the visual data analysed were collected by the author at the site concerned. Most of the information used was collected from a field examination of all the murals concerned; some of it was drawn from academic publications on art in general and more specifically on the mural of interest in this paper.

## 1.5 Scope

Mural paintings of the Traiphum made during the reign of King Rama I, and extending into that of King Rama III, the early Rattanakosin period, which remained basically unchanged in form and content. Also included are other artworks that show the strong influence of the form and content of the Traiphum mural of that period.

## 1.6 Goals

- 1.6.1 The research is designed to allow greater understanding of Thai culture, religion, politics, and history through the scenes of Hell in the Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I within the social and political context of the time.
- 1.6.2 This thesis serves as an example for further academic study on the relationship between art and politics, as well as on the relationship between religion and politics, particularly in Thailand and other Buddhist states in general.



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## **CHAPTER II**

### **SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF KING RAMA I 'S REIGN**

King Rama I founded a new kingdom in the midst of social unrest and political instability. The king undertook various activities for the reconstruction of the kingdom and, as a result of these activities, transformed a particularly unstable society into a stable one, with peace and prosperity, that successfully remained so for generations.

Quite a number of mural paintings were made to decorate the interior of the Buddhist temples by the order of King Rama I . Such works, known as temple murals, obviously constituted cultural and religious products to be presented to all people, and need to be viewed in light of the entire spectrum of activities of that age, especially the socio-political situation.

This chapter presents an overview of King Rama I 's activities that created a firm governing base in relation to the socio-political situation of the time. The overview starts with a summary of the socio-political situation from the end of Ayutthaya to King Taksin's reign, which heavily determined the direction taken by King Rama I .

#### **2. 1. Socio-Political Situation and Activities before King Rama I 's Reign**

The Burmese invasion of Ayutthaya in 1767 had a catastrophic effect on Siamese society which had already been weakened by lingering internal and external difficulties. Conflagrations and looting by the Burmese destroyed the capital of Siam. Having no support from the authorities, people were under constant threat of deprivation and death, with famine and epidemics spreading all over the land. Under these difficult conditions of survival and making a livelihood, people became increasingly immoral and engaged in a great deal of interpersonal strife. Also, the disappearance of any central authority led to the state being fragmented into numerous principalities which competed with one another for primacy.

In this chaotic situation, the person who succeeded in re-establishing central authority and restoring territorial unity was Phraya Taksin, the son of an elite-class Chinese father and a Siamese mother, who had been the governor of the province of Tak during the Ayutthaya period. Later, he became the King of Siam.

Within six months of the fall of Ayutthaya, Phraya Taksin recaptured the central plain and established a base at Thonburi, which he later made his capital. He gradually subdued other power centres and, within three years, he regained independence and reconstituted the former territories of the Ayutthaya kingdom to Siam, eventually expanding the area of Siamese influence beyond its former limits. Many of the neighbouring states, such as Lan Na, much of Lang Sang, Cambodia, large portions of the Malay peninsular, and Ayutthaya's two major Lao rivals were brought under Siamese domination and were made tributary to Siam by force.

In addition to restoring military and diplomatic security, King Taksin undertook various activities intended to restore and firmly establish an internal governmental base. While the king gave material support to the people by distributing food and other daily necessities to the stricken, he also passed several legal enactments that would eliminate arbitrary powers and secure the safety of the people. Simultaneously, the king founded an administrative base consisting of a body of able and loyal followers.

King Taksin's activities also extended to the religious sphere, which had been severely damaged with the sacking of Ayutthaya by the Burmese. The damage was serious in that it was not confined to the material side, such as the destruction of temples, of Buddha's images, and of the scriptures, but also included the spiritual side as well. Partly as a result of the destruction of these material religious icons and partly because of the lack of support from the lay community, a number of monks were forced to give up religious pursuits for survival. Even among those who remained as monks, normal Buddhist practices were no longer followed.

King Taksin undertook a number of measures to restore normalcy to the Buddhist community, or the *Sangha*. The king invited a pious and able monk from the south to be the Supreme Patriarch. He sponsored Pali examinations and awarded appropriate rewards and honours to those who excelled in them. The king also sponsored the recopying of the Buddhist scripture, Tripitaka, which had been severely damaged during and after the war.

In the meantime, King Taksin made a special effort to rid the *Sangha* of monks who failed to abide by the traditional rules of monastic behaviour. For example, from the time the Ayutthaya period ended, Buddhism's emphasis on magical beliefs became highly influential and it became an increasingly large movement, attracting particularly those who could not get protection from the existing social order. Such unorthodox practices not only disrupted the *Sangha* unity but also disrupted the social order, leading to a political crisis since the social order had traditionally been maintained through a delicate power balance between the religious and political domains. One of the most

prominent cases is found in the north, where a monk called Phra Fang, who was using super-natural powers, attracted a large number of people and conducted a kind of secular government. In order to weaken such movements, the King carried out a special campaign to purge them, sending monks who could perform proper ordinations and teach orthodox *Dhamma*. He also appointed capable governors with a view to enhancing governmental control over these areas.

However, towards the end of his reign, King Taksin himself also deviated from orthodox practices and increasingly devoted himself to magical forms of meditation through which, he claimed, he attained higher awareness on the path to enlightenment. Since this state was conventionally thought not to be attained while being a layman, his claim violated traditional thinking. In addition, the king ordered the monks to pay homage to him for the attainment of his state of enlightenment and severely punished those who refused to do so. By this order, the highest monks in the *Sangha* hierarchy, including the Supreme Patriarch, were relegated, and more than five hundred monks were sentenced to corporal punishment or menial labour.

For a man of non-hereditary rights, such as King Taksin, what could prove his ability to rule were, first and foremost, actions and activities that would show evidence of his strong leadership and personal charisma, an evidence of his being a man of merit or *phu mi bun*. King Taksin did, indeed, had strong leadership and personal charisma, assets that he used to concentrate power so as to bring Siam out of a state of chaos and to a state of stability in society. The king's claim of his superior religious status was the ultimate proof he offered of his charisma and one that he tried to use to enhance his ability to rule.

However, in fact, King Taksin's practices not only upset the orthodox Buddhists but also all those in the existing power structure, which was dominated by the established Ayutthaya old families: the noble families, the local ruling families, the Bunnags, the Brahman, and the Chinese families who had established and enjoyed substantial economic, social and political powers during the late Ayutthaya period. To them, the king's conduct was seen as a threat and led to a movement to replace King Taksin, which gradually grew, culminating finally in a revolt led by one of his officials, Phraya Sankhaburi. King Taksin was captured and put to death. Chaophraya Chakri, one of King Taksin's ablest generals, was invited to sit on the throne on 6 April 1782. Later, it was he who became King Rama I.

## **2. 2. Socio-Political Situation and Reconstruction Activities of King Rama I**

Chaophraya Chakri (1737-1809) was the son of an elite-class Thai official and his Chinese wife. Although Chakri was born a commoner like King Taksin, he was more closely and strongly associated with those in the main stream of the power structure. He was associated with a noble family in King Narai's reign and with all the leading noble families of the late Ayutthaya period, including the Bunnags, the Brahman, and the Chinese. He himself began royal service as a page during his childhood and served as the Governor of Ratchaburi until the fall of Ayutthaya. During the reign of King Taksin, he served as a supreme commander and conducted numerous important military campaigns, which promoted him to the kingdom's highest position, Somdet Chaophraya, second only to the king.

The revolt against the reigning monarch, King Taksin, led by the officials, followed by the execution of the monarch, clearly indicated the extreme vulnerability of the throne and the instability of the society at the time. Thus, in order to consolidate the throne and bring stability to society, it was seen as imperative to adopt suitable and successful means of morally enforcing and legitimising the power and position of the king and of justifying his rule. To achieve this effectively and firmly, the king attempted to find more superior and universal means to persuade the people, particularly those in influential positions, to join him in his extensive activities of reconstruction, which were comprised of five main themes: external government, administration, legislation, religion, and culture.

### **2. 2. 1 External Government: Military and Diplomatic Security**

Under the circumstances, where the threat from neighbouring countries was a matter of great concern, restoring military and diplomatic security was imperative in Siam, both in terms of restoring stability to the kingdom and proving the ability to rule. The Burmese were still Siam's principal enemy in the early stages of King Rama I's reign. They conducted a massive invasion again in 1785, when more than a hundred thousand troops crossed Thai borders at five different points, although the Thai forces compelled them to withdraw in most of the ensuing battles.

In the south, potentially an important strategic forward base for the Burmese, the king tried to enhance control over the area both via military campaigns and administrative adjustments. He directed expeditions which enabled him to regain



control over Pattani. Pattani's neighbouring states of Kedah, Kelantan, and Trengganu also became tributary to Bangkok. Nakhon Si Thammarat was demoted from the status of a vassal state to one of the provinces under Bangkok. Songkhla and the Malay tributary states were detached from under the control of Nakhon and put directly under the control of Bangkok.

In the north, King Rama I handed over Chao Kavila to the ruler of Chiang Mai and entrusted him with the task of defending the frontiers. Chao Kavila expanded the area under control of Bangkok to the furthest ever reached in the north by clearing all the Burmese out of what had previously been Siamese territory and some eastern parts of the Shan states.

The eastern frontier was in a vulnerable situation, too. Vietnam was struggling with a civil war after Tayson rebels captured the capital. Cambodia was also besieged by a civil war and a Vietnamese invasion. Through a dual policy, King Rama I helped Prince Nguyen Anh of Vietnam reunite the country and established him as the Emperor of Vietnam, while simultaneously enthroning Prince Ang Eng of Cambodia as the King of Cambodia in Bangkok. As a consequence, Cambodia was made a tributary state of Siam, while Battambang and Siem Reap were put under the direct rule of Siam.

In the northeast, Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champasak remained as Siam's vassal states without any major disturbance during King Rama I's reign.

By the end of his reign, King Rama I had restored territorial integrity to a large extent, driving the Burmese out from the north and transforming other neighbouring states into his tributary states: the Malay states in the south, Cambodia in the east, and Laos in the northeast. Such an extensive area of control allowed the king a disproportionate share of manpower control, which secured his predominant position among the constituents of the state. In order to ensure loyalty and control over these areas more effectively, certain large provinces were given supervisory functions to work both as watchdogs and mediators. Through such improved means of military and diplomatic security, threats from neighbouring countries were virtually eliminated, enabling King Rama I to concentrate more on the activities of the internal government.

## **2. 2. 2 Internal Government: Internal Political Order**

### **1) Administration**

Political crises stemming from tensions between the various royal and noble powers occurred repeatedly, at virtually every royal succession in the late Ayutthaya period, because each succession brought with it the threat that the balance of power could be radically altered by a shift in the throne. These political crises undermined the power of all concerned parties and resulted in a deterioration of manpower mobilisation, which weakened the Ayutthaya Kingdom as a whole, leading to its tragic end, the fall of Ayutthaya. Through his family background and personal experiences, King Rama I was very aware of the importance of maintaining the balance of power as he attempted the reconstruction of society. In order to establish a firm governing base, King Rama I paid careful attention to the power balance in the thorough reorganisation of the administration he undertook immediately after assuming power.

The king adopted the late Ayutthaya kingdom's administrative system and divided the positions equally among the representatives of the leading old families: the Brahmins, the Bunnags and the Chinese families. The six great ministries were headed by these families, who were also the relatives of the king, mostly by marriage. Thus, King Rama I's administration was highly centralized, consisting of his own people whom he could trust to the full, while at the same time the traditional power balance was well maintained in this order.

In the meantime, King Rama I took measures to enhance control over the available manpower. In those days, personal wealth and power were primarily measured through manpower control; therefore, it was imperative to have superior and efficient manpower to retain the predominance of the reigning government. With a view to maintaining a certain level of manpower at all times, all freemen were required to be tattooed with their identification and were required to perform corvée labour (typically, unpaid labour by a feudal vassal) for a certain period of time. At the same time, the manpower situation was continually and carefully monitored to prevent the concentration of manpower in the hands of others who might attempt to challenge the throne.

## 2) Legislation

Moral standards were very low at the time of King Rama I 's accession to the throne. Of particularly serious concern was the utter lack of morality among the nobles and officials who were supposed to set examples. With a view to raising the moral standard, particularly among these key people, the king issued over forty decrees during the initial stages of his reign, most of which were devoted to penal regulations and prohibitions specifically as they applied to the nobles and officials. These decrees were systematically organised along the lines of Buddhist tradition and added to the existing body of Ayutthaya law, which contained a number of decrees that had previously been issued by his predecessors. Together, they comprised the corpus of Siamese law.

However, the existing Ayutthaya decrees, by the time King Rama I succeeded to the throne, were in a very unacceptable state, defective and disrespectful of equity issues. This might have come about because nine-tenths of the decrees that had been in effect in Ayutthaya were destroyed when it was attacked and pillaged by the Burmese. Therefore, most of the decrees were, at the beginning of King Rama I 's reign, written from memory by surviving judges or lawyers and, in this process, some of them were greatly distorted or perverted. It was felt that such a defective compilation might damage the authenticity of the entire corpus of law and, thus, should be rectified.

In 1805, the king appointed a commission of legal experts for the revision of the entire corpus and ordered them to undertake a complete survey of all existing laws. Through the commission's efforts, all falsifications were eliminated, while at the same time some modifications were made in accordance with a more equitable sense of justice and the realities of the contemporary situation. The revised decrees, with detailed descriptions of the facts of cases and the underlying rationale, were compiled within the framework of the fundamental categories of Ayutthaya law, which were left unaltered as a whole. The revised whole, or the new corpus of Siamese laws, is commonly referred to as the Three Seals Laws.

Ayutthaya law was composed of two parts: the fundamental categories consisting of the Manu rules that trace the origin of law along the lines of Buddhist tradition; and the derivative categories consisting of decrees made by past kings. According to Buddhist tradition, the law is the supreme expression of truth and equity, an immutable, transcendental cosmic order. Based on this Buddhist belief that the law is already given and fixed, it follows that the ruler of a state cannot legislate but can only take measures to order and regulate the state in accordance with the given law. A ruler's decree can only become a proper law on condition that it is formally recognised as an

example of the given law and is in keeping with the appropriate form (Lingat 26; Dhani, Monarchy 29-30; Gesick 9, 65-70).

King Rama I's decrees, by being systematically organised along the lines of Buddhist tradition, were authorised as indisputable and eternal law proper, and were used as the supreme rule of equity for administering justice among the people. At the same time, through the Three Seals Laws, which restored the old conceptualisations of the law, the king's duty as a protector of the law, or his role as a legislator, was reaffirmed. Thus, in revising the law, the king attempted not only to restore morality but also to consolidate his position as a ruler.

### 3) Religion

Due to the prolonged state of war and resulting societal confusion, Siamese Buddhism at the time of King Rama I's assumption of power was also in a state of crisis. The monks had become ill-disciplined and were poorly educated. They were susceptible to immorality and heresy and were encouraged in this by the unorthodox practices of such personages as King Taksin and Phra Fang. The *Sangha* lost purity and was internally divided.

The basic premise of Theravada Buddhism is the existence of tight bonds among the triad: the *Sangha*, the monarch, and the populace. These bonds are upheld by the Buddhist community, the *Sangha*, who are intended to maintain and transmit the Buddhist law, the *Dhamma*. It is further believed that when the *Sangha* loses its purity, the triad system, and society itself, would be destroyed. Based on this premise, it follows that when the *Sangha* is internally divided, society would also be divided, thus undermining the society as a whole. Therefore, it was traditionally the king's role as a guardian of Buddhism and Buddhist law to maintain the purity of the *Sangha* and to uphold the *Sangha's* unity. King Rama I tried to be a good Buddhist himself as an example to his people,<sup>1</sup> and he also undertook various activities to support the *Sangha* throughout his reign along four main lines: *Sangha* administration, discipline, doctrine, and physical environment.

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<sup>1</sup> When King Rama I was not engaged in military campaigns, he passed the day as a model for the lay Buddhist. He observed precepts required for lay Buddhists, gave alms to the monks every morning, listened to sermons, and presented *kathin* to monks occasionally. He required his officials to follow his example (Ishii 27; Wenk, Restoration 10, 110).

### **A. *Sangha* Administration: Appointments**

Towards the end of King Taksin's reign, *Sangha* administration was based on the king's arbitrariness and favouritism. A number of monks who accepted King Taksin's practices were promoted to higher positions, while those who refused to do so were unfrocked or demoted, including even the most learned and pious monks. These appointments not only had an unhealthy influence on the behaviour and practices of the members of the *Sangha*, they also undermined the authority of the *Sangha* as a whole. Therefore, when King Rama I ascended the throne, he came to realize that the *Sangha* administration had to be rectified.

In order to re-establish a firm *Sangha* administrative base, King Rama I made a series of ecclesiastical appointments in accordance with the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* that would restore unity and the necessary authority within the *Sangha*. The learned and well-disciplined monks who had been deposed from their positions for opposing King Taksin were now reinstated, while those who had been promoted to higher positions because they had been in favour of the king were now expelled from the *Sangha* or demoted to a lower status. The most emblematic of King Rama I's efforts to bring back order to the *Sangha* administration were the reverse appointments he made regarding King Taksin's Supreme Patriarchs. The former Supreme Patriarch (Si), who had been demoted because of his refusal to acknowledge King Taksin's claims, was now reinstated, while the Supreme Patriarch (Chun), who had been promoted because of his support for King Taksin was now demoted to a lower status.

### **B. Discipline: The *Sangha* Laws**

The poorly disciplined and demoralised state of the monks at the beginning of King Rama I's reign was largely brought about because the *Sangha*, "a mutual benefit community that raised the efficacy of its members' religious practices" (Ishii 12) no longer guaranteed the monks' proper adherence to the *Vinaya*. This state of affairs was a result of decay within the *Sangha* as well as external events, such as the prolonged state of war and the consequent socio-political instability. Thus, to prevent the slide into laxity and to guarantee the monks' proper adherence to the *Vinaya*, disciplining the monks alone was not enough; it was essential, rather, to improve the whole situation surrounding the *Sangha*.

Therefore, soon after his accession to the throne, King Rama I issued a number of ecclesiastical laws, or *Sangha* Laws, which defined the proper behaviour and role of both monks and laymen within society, clarifying the differences between the lay life and the ascetic life. Particular emphasis was placed on lay attitudes and actions that might affect the purity of ascetic life. In fact, most of the prohibitions in the *Sangha* Laws were against the lay people, not against the monks.

In addition, the king took precautionary measures against unorthodox pursuits that might develop into political crises. To prevent the recurrence of practices and movements using supernatural powers, as had been the case with Phra Fang and other rebellious monks during King Taksin's reign, supervision and control over the *Sangha* and monks were tightened by King Rama I. In order to identify and locate those who were involved in such inappropriate activities and to encourage those who were in a supervisory position to be more responsible, all monks were required to undertake a *Sangha* registration and to carry an identification document with them all the time whenever they were out of their principality.

### **C. Doctrine: Buddhist Council and the Tripitaka Revision**

King Taksin's unorthodox pursuits and the increasing number of his followers, even after his demise and the demotion of his Supreme Patriarch, were emblematic of the decline in the knowledge of Buddha's teachings. In fact, the number of monks following the Buddhist scripture, the Tripitaka, had markedly decreased to a very small number. Even the Tripitaka itself deteriorated during the sacking of Ayutthaya and the ensuing negligence. Since the Tripitaka was the most important repository of Buddha's teachings, the deterioration of the Tripitaka led to a further decline in the knowledge of Buddhist teachings among the monks and the lay people.

King Rama I tried to reverse this process of deterioration by revising the Tripitaka. In 1788, the king convened a Buddhist Council headed by the Supreme Patriarch and sponsored a full-scale revision. Following the commencement ceremony, which officially placed the Council ninth in line since the Buddha's enlightenment, the revision was carried out by a total of two hundred and fifty of the most learned monks and laymen. Even King Taksin's favourite monks, including his Supreme Patriarch, were appointed to this council. The council collected all the available texts for this purpose and made a thorough examination. The revision ended on 9 April 1789, establishing a definitive text through which doctrinal unity, and ultimately the *Sangha*'s

unity, were reaffirmed. Soon after, this event was recorded in the Chronicle of Buddhist Councils (*Sangitiyavamsa*) as a historical event important for all Buddhists.

#### **D. Physical Environment: Buddhist Temples and Buddhist Images**

The Theravada doctrine places its ultimate goal beyond the reach of mundane occupations. Those who wish to attain this goal must join the *Sangha*, where they lead a communal life of religious practices. Thus, the *Sangha* must provide its members with the necessary environment that would raise the efficacy of religious practices.

During the Burmese sacking of Ayutthaya that ruined the city, most of the temples were destroyed. King Taksin built some temples in the Thonburi area, including Wat Arun, but the ongoing war and restoring social stability were more serious and immediate concerns. In contrast, King Rama I, particularly towards the end of his reign, carried out an extensive program of construction activities, so that the capital and the kingdom could provide an environment appropriate for a Buddhist kingdom. Apart from the construction of new temples within the capital, including the royal temple Wat Si Ratanasasadaram (Wat Phra Kaeo) built within the compound of the Royal Palace, and a huge public temple, Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho), built next to the royal palace, the king conducted a number of restoration works outside the capital, particularly in Thonburi and Ayutthaya.

King Rama I also made an effort to decorate these temples with venerated Buddha images collected from all over the land. For example, Wat Phra Kaeo was housed with the highly venerated Emerald Buddha image, Wat Suthat with the Phra Sisakayamuni from Wat Maha That in Sukhothai, and Wat Pho with the Phra Si Sanphet and the Phra Buddha Lokanat from Wat Si Sanphet in Ayutthaya, together with 394 bronze Buddha images that are lined up in both inner and outer galleries.

#### **4) Culture**

Like other various aspects in the society, products of Thai culture which had been cultivated and enjoyed by the people for centuries were destroyed at the sacking of Ayutthaya. These cultural products had always been the means by which the people found a sense of national identity and unity as well as pride and hope in themselves and their country. Furthermore, these products had traditionally been the means by which the authority relationship between those who give support and those who enjoy their support was best exemplified.

Restoring stability in the kingdom was a challenging task, especially when the people had lost pride and confidence with the fall of Ayutthaya and the ensuing, prolonged period of widespread unrest and distrust. Thus, King Rama I 's reconstructed society was obliged to not only reinstate legal and other means of enforcement but also to uplift the populace so that they could regain a sense of pride and hope. Reconstruction activities had to stimulate a sense of national identity and unity and create an image of renewal and prestige for the new kingdom. Conscious of the natural tendency of the Ayutthayans to look down upon any new culture as inferior to Ayutthaya's glorious past, and realizing that the reconstructed society would have to be perceived as tracing its cultural lineage to the old kingdom of Ayutthaya, the golden era of Siamese culture (Mattani 50), King Rama I shaped the cultural aspects of the reconstruction along the lines of Ayutthaya.

##### **A. Works of Art and Architecture**

Soon after the assumption of power, King Rama I moved the capital to Bangkok on the other side of the Chaophraya River. Bangkok had a strategic advantage in defending the capital from the east. It also had a wide expanse of vacant ground that enabled the capital to extend its precincts. Using these advantages, the capital was soon equipped to become the political, economic, military, religious and cultural centre just like the old capital Ayutthaya used to be. The physical appearance of Bangkok fully satisfied its functions as the cultural centre in the best possible way.

The layout of the capital was modelled after that of the old capital Ayutthaya, which was built as the embodiment of the divine order of the universe. The capital was fortified by the Chaophraya River, canals, and boundary walls; at the centre was the royal palace. Within the boundary, networks of canals radiated from the palace.



Buddhist temples and houses for the princes and officials were built along the canals. Just outside the boundary, there were a number of communities for various governmental services, including soldiers and craftsmen, and a commercial district.

Individual buildings also followed the Ayutthaya models. The layout of the royal palace, including the throne hall, were planned to correspond to that of Ayutthaya.<sup>2</sup> Buddhist temples were also modelled after Ayutthaya in layout, structure, and surface decoration. In order to augment a sense of successorship, some of these buildings adopted old names, while others even used building materials taken from the ruins of Ayutthaya.

Although the new capital was modelled after that of Ayutthaya, it was not merely a copy of the Ayutthaya prototype but was intended to surpass Ayutthaya at its height in times of peace and prosperity in grandeur. The palaces and temples in the capital were decorated with Hindu gods all around and covered with glittering tiles, crystal, mother-of-pearl, gold and silver, all catching the bright sunlight. This dazzling and sensual spectacle set the capital apart from the mundane realm and the capital was made to look like the earthly embodiment of the city of gods, after which it was named. Indeed, the proper name for the capital Bangkok (*Krung Thep Maha Nakhon*) can be translated as follows:

The city of gods, 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 enormous royal palaces which resemble the heavenly abode where reigns the reincarnated God, a city given by Indra and built by Vishnukarm (Rong 102).

Given the physical appearance as the city of gods, *Krung Thep*, evokes physical satisfaction among those who experience it. Just as the beings in a heavenly realm enjoy pleasure and contentment, people in this heavenly city of Bangkok, recreated here in a concrete form, would be assured the enjoyment of pleasure and contentment in real life.

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<sup>2</sup> The design of the new throne hall followed that of the former Ayutthaya throne hall, Suriyamarin.

## B. Literary Works

The active production of literary works ceased after King Boromakot's reign (1733-1758), a golden era of literary production, and was followed by a complete discontinuation after the fall of Ayutthaya. During the reign of King Taksin, who was occupied by military campaigns, no room was left for cultivating literary productions.

Traditionally, Siamese kings were not only the principal patrons of literary production but, often, they had literary inclinations and talents themselves, which would enhance their reputation. Being aware of the importance of literature, King Rama I, in the latter half of his reign, brought about a period of literary revival and development, even as he composed prose and poetry.

One of the genres that King Rama I actively revived is theatrical poetry, which had been developed during King Boromakot's reign. This included the traditional repertoires of the *Ramakien*, *Inao*, *Dalan*, and *Unarut* that deal with the theme of kingship, emphasising the virtues and bravery upheld by a king. The most highly recognised literary work of King Rama I is the monumental composition of the *Ramakien*, the Siamese version of the Indian epic *Ramayana*, the story of Rama, the ideal king, the incarnation of Vishnu associated with monarchy. This theme had been a part of Siamese literary tradition since Ayutthaya and permeated various fields, such as dance, dance-drama, architecture, and painting. King Rama I's version, however, is not just a re-edition of the Indian text but a completely Siamese version, with Siamese characters, settings and language. By this close association with the Indian *Ramayana*, the Thai king is made parallel to the ideal King Rama of *Ramakien*.

Apart from reviving the Siamese literary tradition, the king encouraged the translation of a wide range of masterpieces from neighbouring countries, most of which dealt with the theme of the ideal kingship. Among the most influential is the Chinese *Samkok*, or the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. It is a historical novel set in the age of the Three Kingdoms, describing battles, court politics, model behaviour, and, above all, the ideal relationship between masters and subjects. Among the other translated works, the one that the king personally ordered is *Ratchathirat* or the King of Kings, also a historical novel celebrating the triumph of the Mon kings of Pegu. A Persian tale of the *Duodecagon* and a chronicle of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the *Mahavamsa*, were also translated during his reign.

Most of these works were written in non-technical prose form. Even in the works in customary verse form, the language and the metres became much simpler.

Since all these techniques made reading them easy, the works from other traditions gained popularity, becoming an integral part of and enriching the Siamese literary tradition as a whole.

### C. State Ceremonies

The ideal political order of the state, or the kingship, expressed in the law and the literary works, also took visible form in political rituals or state ceremonies. Through the ritual, highly cosmologically-structured formula, where the king was formally invested with divine status, the king's omnipotent governmental power as well as his position at the apex of the hierarchy in this world was reaffirmed. By their participation in the ritual, the acceptance of this order by the participants was confirmed and through the periodical repetition of such rituals, the participants' original commitment was reinforced (Gesick 69).

Before King Rama I's reign, political rituals were not taken very seriously and often they were either abbreviated or simply discontinued. However, when King Rama I ascended the throne, he devoted himself to ritual activities. He revived and restored a number of rituals and, in addition, he elaborated ritualistic formulas and paraphernalia, such as the royal throne, the royal verge, and the funeral pyre. Among these rituals, the one that the king devoted himself to the most was the coronation ceremony. In Siam, kingship did not pass instantly from the deceased ruler to his successor. Rather, the king is the king by virtue of the ceremony of coronation (Lingat 26). Therefore, the coronation ceremony was extremely important for a king.

King Rama I had two coronation ceremonies. His first coronation was a brief "Ceremony of Victory" which was held immediately after his accession in 1782, and which was intended to confirm his accession to power. The second coronation was a full Brahmanical consecration, *borommarachaphisek*, performed three years later in 1785. During the three-year interval, the texts prescribing the ceremony practiced in Ayutthaya, particularly during King Boromakot's reign, were thoroughly studied since this period was regarded as the golden era of Ayutthaya culture, and court and state cultural activities were developed to their fullest form. When reviving the ceremony, all the original physical aspects were restored right up to the last detail (Reynolds C. 37). In reviving the ritual with its highly cosmologically-structured formula, the king restored one of the best parts of Thai culture and reaffirmed the political order and the acceptance of this order.

#### D. Dramatic Performances

Dramatic performances constituted an indispensable part of not only court life but also state ceremonies and festivals, such as the completion of the Tripitaka and the dedication of the Emerald Buddha. Classic literary works revived by King Rama I, including the *Ramakien*, were made alive by being presented in dramatic performances. He also restored many different activities related to dance-drama as had been practiced in Ayutthaya, such as the complete versions of royal standard texts as well as the *lakhon nai* (all-female dance-drama) and the *lakhon nok* (male dance-drama). The king's particular interest was in the *lakhon nai* which was created and developed during the reign of King Boromakot. King Boromakot restricted *lakhon nai* strictly to within the royal court, where the all-female troupe performed only sacred myths about kingships: the *Ramakien*, *Unarut*, and *Inao* (Mattani 54). The all-female troupe performed with particular grace and charm, compared with the other troupes that consisted of male dancers, and the possession of such a troupe was the indispensable royal prerogative of the monarchs. However, the court of King Ekathat (1758-67), the last king of the Ayutthaya dynasty, no longer possessed it, while King Taksin granted this privilege to the vassal lord of Nakhon Sithammarat (Mattani 49). Contrary to these predecessors, King Rama I restricted *lakhon nai* to the royal court strictly following King Boromakot's example.<sup>3</sup> The re-establishment of *lakhon nai* brought glitter to the king's court and to the capital,<sup>4</sup> thereby enhancing the king's majesty as well as enriching the life of the people.

<sup>3</sup>*Lakhon nai* was restricted to the royal court by the royal command of King Rama I. Even his son Chaofa Krom Luang Isarasunthon, later King Rama II, was not allowed to possess it (Mattani 55).

<sup>4</sup> While *lakhon nang nai* performed only sacred myths about kingship: the *Ramakien*, *Unarut* and *Inao*, *lakhon nok* mainly performed the Jataka tales. These repertoires, at any rate, emphasise ten kingly virtues, upheld either by Rama or Bodhisattvas (Mattani 45-6).

## Summary

The reign of King Rama I began in the midst of social unrest and political instability caused by the prolonged state of war and socio-political confusion that persisted from the end of Ayutthaya and worsened at the end of King Taksin's reign. The society at that time was in a hellish state indeed. In all his extensive activities, ranging from external government, administration, legislation, and religion to culture, King Rama I pushed forward his primary concerns: moral enforcement and legitimacy of the kingship and justifying his rule.

In the extended sphere of influence that King Rama I achieved through the activities of the external government, the King re-established and re-affirmed the authority relationship between the capital and tributary states. Through the administrative activities, the king, on the one hand, established a firm governing base with a highly centralised political order, reaffirming the authority relationship between the king and the subjects, and, on the other hand, he paid careful attention to the power balance. In the meantime, the king took preventive measures to inhibit corruption and moral degeneration among the people. The king's legislative activities, based on traditional Indian law, were intended not only to restore morality to the society but also to restore and reaffirm the ideal political order, or the Buddhist kingship, among the people.

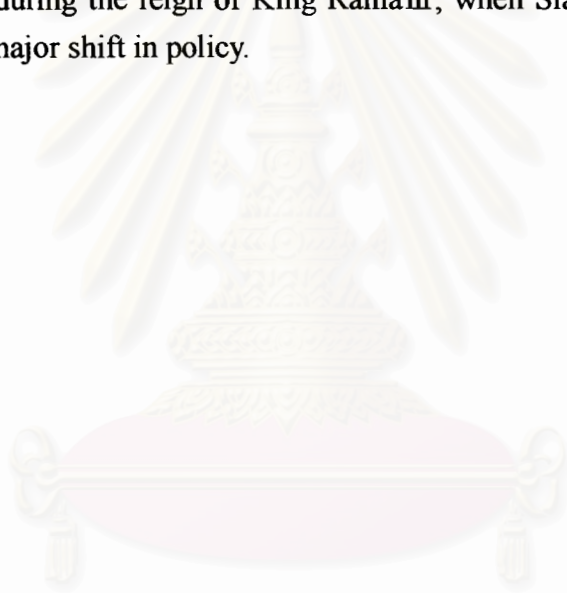
The religious activities he instituted, in accordance with the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*, were intended to restore the Buddhist situation as it had been in the time of the Buddha. His efforts not only improved morality within and outside the *Sangha* but also reaffirmed the authority relationship within the *Sangha* and within the society as a whole.

The cultural activities he introduced not only reaffirmed the ideal political order and morality through their content, but also restored the cultural richness that surpassed Ayutthaya at its height. Through such cultural richness, King Rama I stimulated the people who had lost pride and confidence, reignited a sense of national identity and unity and created an image of prestige for the new kingdom which would eventually gain recognition and respect from neighbouring countries.

The activities that King Rama I introduced were not completely new to the Siamese. However, through these activities, ultimateness was sought for. In other words, certain abstract principles or standards rooted deeply in Siamese and Buddhist traditions were applied to these activities, thereby allowing the final results to surpass those of his predecessors. These activities were, moreover, presented to his people in the best

possible way, sometimes explicitly explaining the necessity and importance of the activity concerned so that no one, including those who were members of the power structure, would disagree with any of them.

Being a commoner by origin and not having hereditary rights, King Rama I needed to present sufficient reasons to persuade the public to accept his innovations in order to accomplish the difficult task of reconstructing and consolidating the society. In this he succeeded. In fact, the activities effectively conveyed his intended goals of moral enforcement and the legitimacy of his kingship to the people. In this manner, King Rama I got the society out of a hellish state and succeeded in consolidating the throne and bringing stability to the society. These activities constituted a firm base for further development during the reign of King Rama III, when Siam enjoyed peace and prosperity without a major shift in policy.



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## CHAPTER III

### LITERARY BACKGROUND ON HELL SCENE

The concept of a state of being or place that separates the living from the dead or the virtuous from the evil is found in most religions of the world and Hell is the term that is used to describe this state of being or place for the evil that are damned to post-mortem punishment (Britannica 1002). However, views of Hell vary with differences in religious beliefs and indigenous cultures. In Western prophetic religions, such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Hell is viewed as the final dwelling place of the evil after a Last Judgement (Britannica 1002). In these belief systems, Hell is infinite and the damned suffer eternal, never-ending punishment there. In Christianity, for example, those who have lived a life of sin and die unrepentant of their sins go to Hell when life ends. It is traditionally believed that the damned endure two kinds of pain in Hell. The first is the *poeni sensus*, the pain of sense, which the damned endure as punishment for their sins. The second is the *poeni damni*, the pain of loss, which refers to the absence of God (Seymour 69-86). This last pain derives from the belief that one is deprived if one does not experience the happiness that comes from serving God (Britannica 608). In such belief systems, the concept of Hell constitutes the core of the religious teachings and whether one goes or does not go to Hell after a life ends, which is an eternal state, is a matter of serious concern for the devotees.

Eastern religions, generally not concerned with concepts of eternity like those found in Western religions, view Hell differently, and Buddhism is no exception (Britannica 1003). The concept of Hell as a state of being or a place for the evil, as opposed to Heaven as a place for the virtuous, was established in India long before the advent of the Buddha (Law appendix III). Based on the Law of *Kamma* and the concept of the Cycle of Rebirth, Hell and Heaven are viewed as only one of various possible states or realms to be reborn into in a state of continuous existence. Just as Heaven is not eternal, Hell is not eternal, and the time spent in one or more of the many Hells is limited.<sup>1</sup> The evil born in Hell must suffer until they have worked off the evil deeds committed in their past lives, at which time they can then be reborn elsewhere and

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<sup>1</sup> According to Sensening, the Buddhist concept of Hell corresponds more directly to the Christian concept of purgatory (76).

might eventually attain rebirth in Heaven after many lives. Likewise, the virtuous born in Heaven enjoy happiness only until they have used up the store of merit they accumulated in their past lives and they might, some time in the future, be reborn in Hell. All worldly beings, including those in Hell and Heaven, live through this everlasting Cycle of Rebirth.

Thus, in Buddhism, suffering derives not from the state that is permanent, as in Western beliefs, but from the state that lacks permanence. It was this state of impermanence that the Buddha thought was the cause of suffering. Therefore, transcending the Cycle of Rebirth and attaining a permanent state of final release from suffering, called *Nirvana*, is the ultimate goal of salvation, according to the Buddha.

There are a number of Buddhist literary works in Thailand that include descriptions of Hell. The most well-known of these are the Traiphum Phra Ruang, the Nimi Jataka, and the story of Phra Malay. Although they all deal with Hell within the cosmological framework, they differ in structure and content – for example, in their scope and their emphasis, the salvation goals aimed at, and the way salvation can be achieved – and, therefore, in how they view the role of Hell and how they portray it.

This chapter initially presents the role of the Hell scene in relation to the context of each of three literary works – the Traiphum Phra Ruang, the Nimi Jataka, and the story of Phra Malay – by looking at its structure and content. Next, it presents the activities of King Rama I that were associated with these literary works, and their significance in light of the situation or the trend in the society of those days.

### **3.1 Literary Works Dealing with Hell Scene**

#### **3.1.1 The Traiphum Phra Ruang**

##### **A. Background**

The Traiphum Phra Ruang (the Three Worlds Cosmology According to King Ruang) is the first literary work written in the Thai language and is the first systematic treatise on Buddhist cosmology. It is generally believed that this work was composed by King Lithai (r. 1346–74) of Sukhothai in AD 1345 when he was a second king and the heir apparent. According to Reynolds and Reynolds, as a literary work on Buddhism, the Traiphum Phra Ruang is “an almost uniquely comprehensive, colourful, and popular presentation of the most profound teaching and message of Theravada Buddhism” (5).



As a literary work on Buddhist cosmology, it is one of many styles of cosmological expression, yet, also according to them, “there is no other source, textual or otherwise, that portrays so vividly and concisely the many different aspects and dimensions of the religious universe of classical Thai Buddhism” (27).

Since its composition, the Traiphum Phra Ruang has not only served as a basis for various forms of religious instruction in the monastic context, but has also served as a primary instrument for educating the populace in other contexts as well. Because of its orthodox authority and strong popular appeal, “it was by far the most influential for Thai Buddhist” (Keyes, *Three Worlds* 315). “It contributed heavily in establishing Thai cosmological orientation and has exerted a powerful influence on the religious consciousness of the Thai, on their literary and artistic development, and on their social and ethical attitudes” (Reynolds and Reynolds 5). It is said that this influence of the Traiphum Phra Ruang has persisted to the present day.

## **B. Overall Structure and Content, and Hell Scene**

The Traiphum Phra Ruang explains the Buddha’s teachings, or the *Dhamma*, in the form of a cosmology. Using more than thirty canonical texts and commentaries, the text presents a view of the world as a part of a total spatio-temporal system of the “three worlds.” This system encompasses all modes of existence and relates these to an underlying principle, the Law of *Kamma*, the ultimate Buddhist law (Keyes, *Three Worlds* 315). While maintaining consistency with the basic principle, various cosmological elements and motifs are incorporated, making up an organic whole. For example, the architecture of the universe is explained within the framework of ancient Indian cosmography, locating the World of Men in relation to Mount Meru and its encircling mountain ranges and oceans. Such phenomena, as the movements of planetary objects, including the sun, the moon, and the stars that revolve around Mount Meru, the changing of the seasons, and biological processes are also explained within this cosmological framework.

The Traiphum Phra Ruang is fundamentally concerned with ordering all beings in a hierarchy of merit which accrues according to *kamma*, constituting a merit-determined universe. The universe consists of three worlds, or three states of existence, comprised of subdivisions of thirty-one realms. These worlds and realms are ordered in layers in terms of morality, from the lower to the higher as follows: the World of Desire (*kamabhumi*), which consists of eleven realms: the realm of Hell

beings, the realm of suffering ghosts (*peta*), the realm of animals, the realm of *asura*, the realm of men, and six realms of heavenly deities (*devata*); the World of Form (*rupabhumi*), comprised of the sixteen celestial realms of *brahma*; and the World of Formless (*arupabhumi*), comprised of the four higher celestial realms of *brahma*. While the lowest level world, the World of Desire, is a mundane level of coping with suffering, the other two worlds are transcendental levels, attainable only through the practice of meditation. Beyond all these realms lies *Nirvana*, the Buddha's sphere.

The text gives detailed descriptions of each of these thirty-one realms and of *Nirvana*, in order of morality, from the lowest to the highest, beginning with the Realm of Hell Beings. In each description, the characteristics, conditions, and possible fates of the beings are detailed in relation to moral causation or *kamma*. Particular emphasis is placed on the negative effects of human sinfulness and the positive results of man's meritorious activities. Those who have done evil deeds in their previous lives suffer from terrible punishment in Hell. Those who have done meritorious deeds enjoy the reward of pleasure, peace, and happiness in one of twenty-six levels of Heaven. The higher the realm one attains, the freer from suffering and the stronger the satisfaction and contentment one would attain.

The ascending strata of the realms reveal that one's actions are subject to the Law of *Kamma*, evoking positive moral responses. The same ascending strata also reveal that all forms of worldly existence are bounded by the everlasting cycle of death and rebirth and that, as a result, they constantly change their place within this universal order. Thus, the states of all beings and their attainment are impermanent and instable, no matter how high or low the realm one may be reborn in. As long as a being remains in this cycle, suffering continues without ceasing.

The text of the Traiphum Phra Ruang presents the solution to the problem posed by this ephemeral nature of all worldly attainments by its description of *Nirvana*, a permanent state and, thus, the state of final release from the cycle of suffering. Transcending the cycle and attaining this permanent state is the ultimate salvation goal, which can be achieved through the practice of the Buddha's teaching, the *Dhamma*. Through its comprehensive structure and content, in which every aspect of the universe is consistently correlated to the orthodox doctrinal principle, the Law of *Kamma*, the text intends to lead its readers to the ultimate salvation goal of *Nirvana*. The Traiphum Phra Ruang was King Lithai's expression of religious piety as well as his endeavour to make the *Dhamma* more accessible to all Buddhists.

### C. The Realm of Men

However, the Traiphum is not just a literary work on morals, considering the large space devoted to the Realm of Men, which alone occupies two-fifths of the whole work (Coedes 351), and its strong emphasis on the relationship between merit and power and role of the *Cakkavatti* (the Universal King), which the text describes at length. The *Cakkavatti* is the one who rules over the Realm of Men, which consists of Four Continents. The *Cakkavatti* is always born in the Jambu Continent (the southern continent). The Jambu Continent is unique in that those with great merit, such as Lord Buddha and Bodhisattva, as well as the *Cakkavatti* kings, are necessarily and inevitably born in it, never in the other three continents. While these other three continents are utopian, where life is perfect and people are equal, life in the Jambu Continent is imperfect with great variations in status, health, wealth, intelligence, physical appearance, and life-span among its inhabitants, just like the world we know. While some men, like princes and kings, enjoy pleasurable lives characteristic of the beings in Heaven, others, such as slaves and those who are in ill health, suffer conditions characteristic of the beings in Hell. Differences in the status and condition of individuals are determined by their previous deeds. Thus, the Jambu Continent, depicted as the representation of our world, has the same lineaments as the main universe, or the macrocosm, which has a hierarchical, merit-determined order.

At the apex of the Jambu Continent as a microcosm stands the *Cakkavatti* king. The status of the *Cakkavatti* king is bestowed on those who have the greatest accumulation of merit. Thus, who will be a *Cakkavatti* is already determined by their previous earned merits, but is not something that happens automatically in this life. The text states that the great accumulation of merit which earns one the status of *Cakkavatti* is what creates the “gem wheel,” one of seven kinds of treasures that are possessed by the *Cakkavatti*. This gem wheel comes into being on its own to identify who the *Cakkavatti* is (Reynolds and Reynolds 139). The relevance of earned merit and how the status of the *Cakkavatti* is attained is clearly articulated in the pronouncement made to his courtiers by the king who becomes the *Cakkavatti* king when the gem wheel appears in front of him,

“As we have heard, the respected teachers have said in the past that any ruler who has enough merit will, as a result, become a great *Cakkavatti* king who will conquer the entire universe, and the gem wheel called *Cakkaratana* will come to him by virtue of the merit he has

accumulated” (Reynolds and Reynolds 142).

Because of the supranormal power of the gem wheel, the *Cakkavatti* king attains extensive power. He conquers the entire universe (Reynolds and Reynolds 142) including all Four Continents (Reynolds and Reynolds 143). Also, the *Cakkavatti* king is able to inspire and ensure that the people in the Four Continents love one another and are united in spirit through the power of the gem wheel (Reynolds and Reynolds 139). Moreover, because of the power of the gem wheel, there is a distinctive authority relationship between the ruler who is *Cakkavatti* and lesser rulers. Lesser rulers come to pay their respects and make obeisance to the *Cakkavatti* king. After they prostrate themselves before him in an audience with him, they humbly dedicate themselves to be his subjects, saying

“Your Royal Highness, our Lord, from now on into the future, we dedicate ourselves to be your subjects. Whatever you who are our Lord wish to have, we will seek it and bring it to you who is our Lord. As for the countries over which we rule, allow us to offer them to you, to dispose of them according to your will. We entrust you who is our Lord to be gracious to us, your subjects” (Reynolds and Reynolds 147).

By reason of his superior store of merit, the *Cakkavatti* is assigned the role of the guardian of the *Dhamma*, or the Buddhist Law. By continuously living and ruling in accordance with the *Dhamma*, the *Cakkavatti* king establishes a world in which the *Dhamma* prevails, which ensures peace and happiness, stability and balance, fortune and prosperity for all the people. This suggests that in order to be able to do so the *Cakkavatti* king must first be a *Dhammaraja* (the Righteous King). Believing that the role of all rulers should be the same, in his “Sermon of Victory,” when he addresses his vassal rulers in each of the Four Continents he rules over, the *Cakkavatti* king states that the ideal rule should be in accordance with the *Dhamma* and he urges them to follow the *Dhamma* as their guideline.

“If any ruler or king, while he reigns, acts righteously, and does righteous things, the common people, slaves and free men, will live peacefully and happily; and this is because of the accumulation of merit of the one who is the Lord above all” (Reynolds and Reynolds 153).

Thus, as is evident, the Traiphum Phra Ruang is not merely a literary work on morals, but also “a veritable picture of the government of a monarchy conforming to the Buddhist ideal” (Coedes 352), that is, the Buddhist kingship. The ideal of a Buddhist kingship is further emphasised and elaborated by two historical accounts, given as examples of *Cakkavatti* kings: the story of King Asoka and his wife Asandhimitta, and the story of a treasurer, Jotika, and his two contrasting kings.

Furthermore, in his role as the guardian of the *Dhamma*, or the Buddhist Law, the *Cakkavatti* king is comparable to the Buddha. The text clearly states this in the introduction to the sermon the king delivers to his vassal rulers in each of the Four Continents he rules over:

The great *Cakkavatti* king knows merit and *Dhamma*, and teaches the people to know the *Dhamma*; it is just as if a Lord Buddha had been born and was teaching the people to live according to the *Dhamma*. At that time the great *Cakkavatti* king then teaches the rulers to live according to the *Dhamma* (Reynolds and Reynolds 147-8).

In his role as the guardian of the *Dhamma*, the *Cakkavatti* king is also compared to Indra,<sup>2</sup> who rules Tavatimsa Heaven, or the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods, which stands at the summit of Mount Meru and below which lies the Heaven of the Four Guardian Kings. Indra is a fervent follower of the Buddha and is present at all of the most important moments of the Buddha’s life. Indra’s role is the preservation of good order in the world and respect for the Buddhist Law, the *Dhamma*. Because of his superior store of earned merit, Indra has numerous subjects, including all the heavenly beings in Tavatimsa Heaven and in the Realm of Four Guardian Kings who oversee all of the heavenly and earthly cities in every place (Reynolds and Reynolds 220). As subjects of Indra, all Four Guardian Kings took their attendants and went to have an audience with Indra whenever Indra preached the *Dhamma* (Reynolds and Reynolds 231). Like the *Cakkavatti* king,

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<sup>2</sup> According to Boisselier, Indra is “the King and chief of the Thirty-Three Gods dwelling at the summit of Mount Meru, of the Four Great Kings and of all the gods of heaven and earth who depend upon them. In Buddhism he regained the importance he had had in Vedism and is known by the name of Sakra (P., Sakka). He is a devotee of the Buddha, is present in person on earth at most of the great miracles and seats the Buddha on his own throne on the summit of Mount Meru” (242).

Whenever the Lord Indra is preaching, the four guardian kings of the world bring their attendants to visit and have an audience, each one situating himself at one of the four cardinal directions of the Sudhammasabha pavilion (Reynolds and Reynolds 236).

There are a number of descriptions in the text that speak to the equality of the *Cakkavatti* king with Indra. For instance, in the description of King Dhammasoka as an example of a *Cakkavatti* king offered by his consort Queen Asandhimitta, she says:

“My Lord is the ruler, and is superior to the other rulers and kings here in the Jambu continent and also one *yojana* below this land and one *yojana* above it. *Devata*, *garuda* kings, *naga* kings, *yakkha*, heavenly musicians, the half-bird, half-human species – both male and female – the sorcerers, spirit-dogs, lions, bears, yellow wildcats, and tigers all come to pay their respects and to prostrate themselves before him. Also he has a great number of elephants, horses, slaves and freemen, troops and commoners; and he has silver, gold, and many previous possessions, plenty of clothing, huge barns full of rice, and plenty of water. My Lord reigns in the midst of the Jambu continent attended by rulers and kings, monks, *Brahmin* teachers, householders, princes and courtiers in the same way that Indra is surrounded by the *devata*” (Reynolds and Reynolds 178).

While the Traiphum Phra Ruang portrays the comprehensive structure of the universe, placing all beings in the order of a moral hierarchy, from the lowest Hell to the highest Heaven and beyond it to *Nirvana*, it also contains the Realm of Men, depicted as a microcosm which has the same moral order as the main universe. As described above, at the summit of the latter order is the *Cakkavatti*, and below him are a number of subjects, including vassal rulers. Merit determines who can occupy the position of a *Cakkavatti* and the distinctive authority relationship between the *Cakkavatti* and his subjects. Also, because of his superior store of merit, *Cakkavatti* is given the role as the guardian of the *Dhamma* and, under the rule of the *Cakkavatti*, the *Dhamma* prevails within the world. Through such a relationship between merit and power *Cakkavatti* is seen as comparable to Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and Indra. Thus, the Traiphum Phra Ruang provides an ideological framework, entirely based on the notion of merit on which a Buddhist king depends.

Given the space devoted to the Realm of Men and its emphasis on the relationship between merit and power and the role of *Cakkavatti*, one can conclude that the composition of the Traiphum Phra Ruang was not merely an expression of religious piety or an endeavour to make the *Dhamma* accessible to all Buddhists. Rather, it was also meant to serve as an effective and convincing means of educating the populace in Buddhist values, that is, enforcing morality as well as legitimising Buddhist kingship and justifying the rule of Thai kings via the explanation of *kamma*.

### 3.1.2 The Nimi Jataka

#### A. Background

The Nimi Jataka, one of five hundred Jataka tales, is one of the oldest literary works to contain descriptions of Hell. Jataka tales are stories of the Bodhisattvas, or the previous lives of the Buddha recounted in the Pali Jataka Commentary, that have been popular throughout the Buddhist world. In Siam, at least by the first half of the fourteenth century in Sukhothai, a Jataka collection was known (Brereton 41), and the Last Ten Jatakas in particular, including the Nimi Jataka, have been enormously popular to the present day. In fact, in the Traiphum Phra Ruang written in the Sukhothai period, the name of King Nimi is mentioned as the one who saw all the subsidiary Hells described in the text.

#### B. Story

The Bodhisattva, as King Nimi of Mithila, leads a pure life and earnestly earns merit by giving alms. Impressed by the king's attitude, God Indra sends his coachman Matali and carriage to invite the king to his abode in Tavatimsa Heaven, or the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods. On the way to Tavatimsa Heaven the king is taken to Hell, where he witnesses the Hell beings suffering horrifying punishments and where learns about their evil deeds that lead them to such punishments. The king is then taken to Heaven and passes various heavenly abodes, where he witnesses the marvellous conditions enjoyed by the celestial beings and learns about their meritorious deeds that lead them to such rewards. In the meantime, the king discourses with Indra at Tavatimsa Heaven and makes a resolution to renounce "this-worldly" pursuits. Returning to the

world of men, the king leads a life of asceticism, while at the same time he teaches the people to follow in his footsteps.

### C. Structure and Content, and Hell Scene

The story of Nimi Jataka conveys orthodox Buddhist teachings in the context of the story of King Nimi, a Bodhisattva or a previous life of the Buddha, who attains *Nirvana* and becomes the Buddha ultimately. The story is told within the cosmological framework set by the Traiphum, but its scope is greatly reduced and its structure much simpler. All of King Nimi's activities take place in Heaven, Hell, and the Realm of Men where King Nimi displays the virtue (resolution) that ultimately leads him to the ultimate goal of Buddhist salvation, *Nirvana*, taught by the Buddha.

In the journey to Heaven and Hell, in both realms the king sees the conditions of the beings that were brought there as a result of their past deeds. Witnessing the vast differences between lives in these two realms, enjoyment in Heaven and suffering in Hell as a result of meritorious deeds and sinful deeds, respectively, the king grasps the Buddhist truth, the Law of *Kamma*, and also becomes keenly aware of the suffering associated with being within the Cycle of Rebirth. As long as one stays in this cycle, one can never escape everlasting suffering, no matter how high a Heaven one may attain in the cycle. The only way to escape from this Cycle of Rebirth is to attain a permanent state *Nirvana*. Recognising this truth, the king makes a resolution to renounce his "this-worldly" life and start on the path to *Nirvana* with a view to overcoming the Cycle of Rebirth and, ultimately, to attaining *Nirvana*.

The story's main theme is King Nimi's effort to display virtue, or resolution, an essential and indispensable merit that leads him to attain rewards in *Nirvana*. In the pursuit of *Nirvana*, rebirths both in Heaven and Hell, which the goal is to overcome, do not have ultimate significance in themselves and differences between Heaven and Hell become only relative. However, Heaven and Hell are important in that they are what generate the process of prompting King Nimi to try to attain the ultimate reward in *Nirvana*. The harsh conditions of Hell make a stark contrast to the blissful conditions of Heaven, and the simple and concise portrayal of the universe in the story clearly and vividly conveys this message. Thus, the Nimi Jataka, with its structure and content, works as a powerful means of providing a moral lesson to all Buddhists, of enforcing morality – making meritorious deeds and abstaining from sinful deeds – and of inspiring individuals to resolve that they should follow a path to *Nirvana*.



### 3.1.3 The Story of Phra Malai

#### A. Background

Another text with vivid descriptions of Hell is the story of Phra Malai, an extracanonical treatise which originated in Sri Lanka. The story of Phra Malai has been used as a source for sermons and chanting at rituals, including festivals, weddings, and funerals. It gained immense popularity at the end of the eighteenth century, and has had a lasting impact not only on the formation of religious beliefs and ethics among the Thai but also in other fields, such as art and entertainment. It is said that this story has been one of the most important and pervasive themes in Thai Buddhism (Brereton, Klon Suat 1).

#### B. Story

Phra Malai, a monk who possesses extraordinary powers deriving from accumulated merit, travels to both Heaven and Hell. In Hell, Phra Malai bestows mercy on the beings and reduces their suffering by causing their torments to cease. These beings beg Phra Malai to ask their living relatives to undertake meritorious activities on their behalf. On his return to the Realm of Men, Phra Malai passes on this message, as requested. After their relatives perform the desired acts of merit, the Hell beings attain rebirth in Heaven.

One day, Phra Malai, on his alms rounds, receives eight lotuses from a poor man. Phra Malai takes them to Tavatimsa Heaven to pay homage to Chulamani Chedi, in which the Buddha's hair relic is enshrined. As a result of this act of merit, the poor man attains rebirth in Tavatimsa Heaven in his next life. In Tavatimsa Heaven, Phra Malai meets Indra and many other gods and learns about the various meritorious deeds in their former lives that earned them the reward of rebirth in Heaven. Finally, the future Buddha, Metteyya, appears and gives Phra Malai messages to take back to the Realm of Men. The messages emphasise the importance of engaging in meritorious activities, particularly that of *dana* (generosity) and further recommends that those who wish to

meet Metteyya should participate in the Vessantara Jataka Festival.<sup>3</sup> The message also foretells of a time of chaos, moral decadence, and the disappearance of Buddhist teachings, followed by a period of regeneration and the eventual coming of the future Buddha Metteyya in an ideal human society based on mutual good will and morality. After returning to the Realm of Men, Phra Malai tells the people about what he saw and heard both in Heaven and Hell in order to lead them to a more preferable rebirth in Heaven, and also passes on to them the messages entrusted to him by Metteyya.

### C. Structure and Content, and Hell Scene

The story of Phra Malai conveys popular Buddhist teachings in the context of the journey of a compassionate monk, Phra Malai. The story of Phra Malai rests upon the same cosmological base as the Nimi Jataka, albeit narrower in scope and with a simpler structure. It is important to note, however, that unlike in the Nimi Jataka, in the story of Phra Malai, the goal of salvation is Heaven, and not necessarily *Nirvana*. The reward of reaching Heaven can be earned without renouncing one's "this-worldly" life, unlike in the attainment of *Nirvana*. Making the goal of salvation Heaven, rather than *Nirvana*, renders it more tangible and attainable and, thus, more appealing to the majority of lay devotees who still live an earthly life.

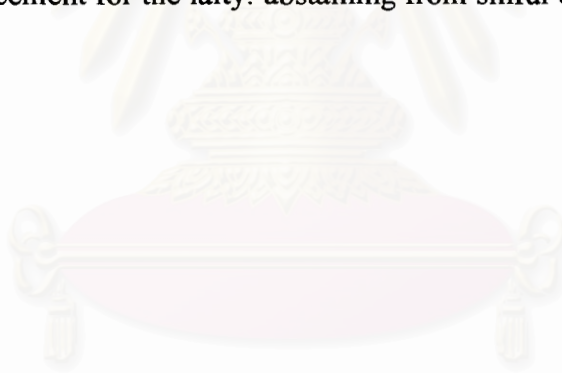
In the Phra Malai, this salvation goal of Heaven is conveyed effectively through its presentation of a more simplified structure of the universe, one that consists of only three realms (Hell, Heaven, and the Realm of Man), through its starkly painted contrast between Heaven and Hell, and by its inclusion of earthly, locally familiar, and sensationalistic images that have a more immediate and powerful impact on the mind of

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<sup>3</sup> The Vessantara Jataka, the last of the previous lives of the Buddha, is one of the most important and well-known religious treatises in Thailand. Vessantara exemplifies the perfect generosity, or *dana*, of the Buddha in his former life as prince Vessantara, who gives away all his possessions, including his royal elephant, kingdom, children, and wife. The Vessantara Jataka Festival is the occasion when the teachings of Vessantara Jataka can be put into practice, that is, performing a merit of generosity. The story of Phra Malai provides the devotees with a stimulus to participate in the Vessantara Jataka Festival and encourages them to engage in activities that can earn them a massive amount of merit by the promise of attaining rebirth during the time of Metteyya, through the words of Metteyya.

the listeners.<sup>4</sup> The whole of the activity of Phra Malai takes place in Heaven, Hell, and the Realm of Men. In the journey to Heaven and Hell, Phra Malai sees the conditions of beings resulting from their previous deeds and, through this, Phra Malai grasps the Buddhist truth, the Law of *Kamma*. Its simpler structure and context, which vividly portray Heaven as the place of reward and Hell as the place of punishment, makes it more convincing that Heaven is the place to aspire to.

However, although Heaven, rather than *Nirvana*, is posited as the goal of salvation in the Phra Malai, it leaves open the possibility of attaining *Nirvana*, essentially by practicing the meritorious act of *dana* while participating in the Vessantara Jataka Festival, which will earn them the privilege of meeting with the future Buddha, Metteyya. Thus, the state of *Nirvana*, which seems so impossibly out of reach, might actually be attainable without renouncing this-worldly pursuits, a fact that makes meeting Metteyya all the more appealing to the masses. Thus, the story of Phra Malai, through its structure and content, serves as the most powerful and convincing means of moral enforcement for the laity: abstaining from sinful deeds and engaging in meritorious ones.



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<sup>4</sup> In a version called *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, a popular chanted version often performed at funerals in the central and southern regions, the description of Hell usually occupies approximately a quarter of the text. In one of the derivatives called *Malai Prot Lok*, the story takes place entirely in Hell (Brereton, Tellings 15-20).

## 3.2 King Rama I's Activities Related to the Literary Works

### 3.2.1 Mural Paintings of the Scene of Nimi Jataka

King Rama I did not seem to have undertaken too many activities related to the Nimi Jataka. The one exception is his commissioning of mural paintings, which was a part of the entire programme of activities that he undertook regarding the decoration of the interior of Buddhist temples. The Jataka was a popular theme for temple murals as a means of conveying moral lesson via images ever since the Ayutthaya period. In the early Rattanakosin period, the Jataka gained greater importance as part of the trend of creating mural paintings and, together with the theme of the Life of the Buddha, the Jataka became the most frequently depicted theme.

Many of the early Rattanakosin temples, including the ones built by King Rama I, depicted a series of scenes from the Jataka, particularly from the Last Ten Jatakas. The scene of Nimi Jataka, one of the Last Ten Jatakas, was often placed on one of the panels on the lateral walls. Through these mural paintings, King Rama I imparted moral lessons to the people.

### 3.2.2 Ban on the Chanting of Phra Malai in Comic Fashion

The activity that King Rama I undertook regarding the Phra Malai is seen in the tenth, or the last, of a series of edicts that the king issued to restore discipline to the *Sangha*. This particular edict ordered members of the *Sangha* to stop the chanting of Phra Malai in “comic” fashion, that is, “in Cambodian, Chinese, *Farang* (Caucasian), and Mon melodies” (Brereton, *Klon Suat* 11). From at least the late-eighteenth century on, funerary entertainment in the central and southern regions featured the chanting of Phra Malai by members of the *Sangha*. The melodic chanting of the Thai-language Phra Malai, after the chanting of excerpts from the Pali Abhidhamma, introduced a welcome change and, thus, often served as a source for a comedy routine and became extremely popular.

The banned routine, known as *ok phasa* (performance in a foreign language), caricatured various ethnic groups living in Thailand. These caricatures, interspersed between segments of the Phra Malai text as part of an overall effort by some monks to hold the interest of the audience, often became increasingly elaborate, as can be seen in the following description:

Gradually, costumes, ribald jokes, and witty repartee had been added, as well as hand gestures and swaying from side to side. Some monks apparently went so far as to add comic dancing, done to the accompaniment of the rhythmic tapping of the tips of the *talabat* handles on the floor. . . . Apparently, the manner in which the chanting began and progressed heightened the comic effect. The monks would begin by chanting the opening stanzas of the Klon Suat text in routine fashion as they sat with their faces hidden behind their fans. Then, when they reached a certain point in the text that was marked by a change in rhythm and meter, they would suddenly move their *talabat* aside, revealing – to the delight of the audience – their made-up faces and costumes, complete with false moustaches, glasses, and hats (Brereton, Tellings 132-3).

The chanting of the Phra Malai, originally intended to convey moral lessons, was thus transformed into that of mere entertainment. Such comic routines performed by monks, supposedly exemplary figures in society, were obviously in violation of the rules of the *Vinaya* and were not only a bad influence on the attitudes of the laity but also undermined the authority and respectability of the *Sangha*. The chanting of the Phra Malai in such an unseemly fashion was but one factor in an entire spectrum of behaviours that needed to be reformed, which led King Rama I to ban it in the series of royal edicts he issued.

### 3.2.3 King Rama I's Version of the Traiphum

One of King Rama I's major activities concerning the Traiphum was the commissioning of a new version barely a year after his accession to the throne. Like other texts that were destroyed or scattered after the fall of Ayutthaya, the Traiphum text was not extant when King Rama I took power in 1782.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, King Rama I discovered that the monks, the most erudite in the kingdom, had an inadequate

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<sup>5</sup> King Taksin commissioned a version called the Phra Maha Chuai version in a ten-volume palm leaf manuscript in 1778 which was lost or hidden after the demise of the king (Reynolds C., *Cosmography* 56).

knowledge about the Buddhist cosmology. Consequently, in 1783, he ordered a group of monks to compile a new edition of the *Traiphum*, a process that lasted some nineteen years. However, when the king reviewed the resulting text, he found the language to be uneven and not in accord with the canon and the commentaries (Reynolds C., *Monkhood* 210). Therefore, he requested yet another revision, appointing the head of the Royal Pundits, Phraya Thammapracha, a man who had been a high-ranking monk under King Taksin, to supervise the work. In addition, many of the high-ranking monks, including the Supreme Patriarch, were made responsible for its content (Reynolds C., *Cosmography* 57).

The second revision was completed in 1802 and this more authoritative, revised text came to be known as the *Traiphumlokawinitchai*. It is much more comprehensive than any of the earlier editions, containing numerous legends and descriptive accounts not found in them. It is also far more voluminous than the others: its published form comprises 1532 pages, while King Lithai's edition comprised 373 pages (Brereton, *Image* 43). Through this authoritative and extensive compilation of the *Traiphum*, King Rama I provided the monks with an appropriate treatise on cosmology that would form an essential part of the body of knowledge that they were required to possess. Furthermore, given the intense and careful attention King Rama I gave to the text, it can be concluded that he found the *Traiphum* to have practical value, more precisely socio-political value, in consolidating the society and his power.

As was noted earlier, the *Traiphum*, through its structure and content, originally served as an effective and convincing tool for educating the populace in Buddhist values, that is, enforcing morality as well as legitimising Buddhist kingship and the rule of Thai kings, which were the main concerns of King Rama I. At the same time, the *Traiphum* was also an all-embracing treatise, covering all aspects addressed in King Rama I's reconstruction activities along five lines: external government, administration, legislation, religion, and culture. As a literary work on morals that accords with orthodox Buddhist beliefs, the text was intended to restore Siamese culture and religion. The large space devoted to the Realm of Men and the emphasis on the power and role of the *Cakkavatti* in relation to merit in the text provides evidence of its relevance for such areas as legislation, administration, and external government. Therefore, the *Traiphum* provided the textual background for King Rama I to rule as a *Cakkavatti*. In other words, in revising the text, King Rama I reasserted the justification of his rule and his efforts to re-enforce morality, using as his rationale the logical explanations offered by orthodox teachings, the Law of *Kamma*.

## CHAPTER IV

### OVERVIEW ON THAI ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Ever since prehistoric times, the Thai have maintained and developed their culture, leaving a trail of distinctive traits on the land in each historical period. This can be seen particularly in its art and architectural traditions, which have been devoted over the centuries entirely to the expression of religious beliefs and political thoughts. As an important part of this practice, the Thai continuously have paid considerable attention to representing the cosmology, projecting their view of the world and the relationship between them and the world around them in various ways. These representations have been presented to the Thai people through religious spaces, mainly consisting of art and architecture, which occupy an important part in their lives as a spiritual centre. This chapter intends to review the art and architectural tradition that was maintained and developed in the form of religious buildings and mural paintings over a period of time before the reign of King Rama I and traces the cosmological aspects represented in these works.

However, the limited number of available works make such a review rather difficult. The sack of Ayutthaya in 1767 that deprived the people of much of their material culture caused incalculable damage to the religious buildings and to the paintings in particular. Most of the works which survived were later destroyed for a variety of reasons: numerous monasteries were subjected to restorations, some paintings were whitewashed, and others were replaced by another painting without regard to the original one. As a result, only a handful of relevant works remain to this day.

As for the Thonburi period, there is not a single mural painting that can confidently be dated to this period. The Thonburi period was a time of great confusion and lasted only a short duration, a mere fifteen years. In such a situation, most of King Taksin's time and energy was devoted to the war-time and internal restoration activities, rather than to temple construction and mural production. It was only after the foundation of Bangkok that Ayutthaya craftsmen, who settled in the Thonburi area after surviving the confusion at Ayutthaya, had the opportunity to exercise their ability in the execution of temple murals (Sone 3). In fact, the vast group of paintings in the Thonburi area can be dated to the period following the foundation of Bangkok (Boisselier 74). During this period, King Taksin supported the reproduction of the illuminated

manuscript on cosmology, more precisely on the theme of the Traiphum Cosmology. Two of these manuscripts have survived to this day.

Therefore, this chapter intends to broadly trace certain trends in the cosmological aspects of the overall Thai art and architectural tradition by referring to the works available today, including the illuminated manuscripts of the Traiphum. The analysis will mainly look at the plan, structure, and surface decoration of the architectural works and at the components, composition, style, and colour of the paintings.

## 4.1 Architectural Representation of the Universe

### 4.1.1 *Chedi*

From approximately the seventh century AD, the Mon of the Dvaravati kingdom, who were originally animists and the followers of Theravada Buddhism, spread their influence on Thai culture in the western and central regions of present-day Thailand. Their influence on the culture of the Thai, who were also originally animist, was more in the religious or spiritual sphere, especially that of Theravada Buddhism. Many essentials of Mon ideas and their social and material practices were adopted by the Thai (Aasen 54).

One of the most important and distinctive practices that the Thai adopted is the creation of the *chedi*. The *chedi* is fundamentally a Buddha's relic chamber, enshrining the Buddha's bones and teeth. The domelike bell-shaped *chedi*, originally deriving from ancient Indian burial mounds, symbolises the Buddha's Death or *Parinirvana*, the highest sphere in the Buddhist universe.<sup>1</sup> The *chedi* is also a cosmographic image, with Mount Meru at its core and the heavenly realms situated at its peak, based on ancient Indian traditions which Buddhist communities accepted in the early period. Thus, the *chedi* has greatly been worshipped by Buddhists as emblematic of the Buddha's spirit as well as his life and teachings throughout Buddhist world.

In Thailand, the bell-shaped *chedi*, adopted from India through a process of cultural exchange in pre-historic times, has long been a centre of worship and veneration. In fact, each Thai capital had its own special *chedi* which constituted the

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<sup>1</sup> The early Buddhist *stupa* at Bharhut and Sanchi, built in the second century BC in India provided the prototype for varying interpretations of the Buddha's relic chamber (Maeda 53-56).



symbolic centre of the territory over which the local monarch ruled. Such *chedis* were usually built on a massive scale and enshrined the relics of the Buddha. The importance of this type of bell-shaped *chedi* in Thai life continued throughout the various ensuing periods. One of the examples is Wat Phra Si Sanphet, the Chapel Royal built in 1492 in Ayutthaya, in which a number of *chedis* were built in the temple compound. (Fig.1, 2) Another example is at Wat Saket, in which a *chedi* is built at the top of an artificial mountain, Golden Mount, the construction of which was commenced by King Rama III and completed by King Rama V.

#### 4.1.2 Khmer Temple

The Khmer, who were originally followers of Hinduism but became Mahayana Buddhists for a time after the twelfth century, were deeply entrenched in the eastern and central regions of present-day Thailand. The Khmer influence broadly transformed Thai culture, and the “relatively egalitarian, kin-based society of the Thais was made into a greatly stratified, politically organised society” (Aasen 53).

The Khmer embarked on empire building through territorial expansion and colonisation based on the ideology of absolutism and total control. Their ideological base was the Hindu-based cosmology that determines the order of the universe, or the relationship between the centre and the boundaries. In this cosmological order, the king was the centre of the universe, as the embodiment of cosmic force and influence. Among the Khmer, the cosmic existence of the king was embodied in the *Devaraja* (the God-King), who was endowed with absolute legitimacy to rule.

Khmer architecture reflects this strategic combination of religious beliefs and political practices. All major architectural works in the kingdom of Khmer were infused with the conception of the universe: the implementation of central control and giving legitimacy to the king and the state. They were “not so much reminders of a spirit but were symbols of greatness, . . . empire markers that display righteousness and inspire awe, . . . artefacts to impress the populace and imprint order on them” (Aasen 114).

Excellent examples can be found in the Khmer temples, such as Prasat Khao Phnom Rung, Phnom Rung, constructed between the tenth and the early thirteenth century and Prasat Hin Phimai, Phimai, completed by the first half of the twelfth century and restored in the late twelfth to early thirteenth century. (Figs. 3, 4) The complex consists of four main elements: the central sanctuary shrine, ponds and moats, enclosing walls, and gateways attached to the walls. In both temples, the whole complex

is within a rectangular enclosed area defined by the walls that separate the sacred entity from the secular. At the centre is the central sanctuary shrine that symbolises Mount Meru. The most sacred object, either the *linga*, the symbols of God Shiva, or the Buddha image, is enshrined here. The central shrine is a composite structure consisting of a base, redented cube-like cella, and a many-tiered superstructure in an ogival shape. The shrine has pyramidal roofs topped with a lotus-bulb-shaped finial, symbolising Mount Meru and its peaks. Antefixes and pediments at various levels of the shrine are embellished with various carved figures in the celestial regions, including the *garuda*, a mythical bird as the mount of Vishnu symbolizing the Upper World, and *naga*, a mythical serpent symbolising the Lower World. Thus, the central sanctuary shrine as a whole, with its structure and surface decoration, symbolises Mount Meru and its heavenly extensions, the abode of the heavenly beings.

Enclosing the central sanctuary is the wall that represents the mountain ranges that encircle Mount Meru. Around this are ponds and moats that symbolise the ocean that the universe rests on. The rectangular outer wall enclosing the entire temple compound represents the boundary walls that enclose the universe. At each of the cardinal points on the outer walls are entrance gates leading to the central sanctuary, which symbolises stars or openings in Heaven, through which contact between gods and humans is to be made.

In this rectangular complex, with its plan, structure, and exterior surface decoration, the concept of Mount Meru, or the central axis and the realm of the Hindu gods, is extensively explored, ensuring harmony between the world of men and the world of the gods. In other words, the Khmer temple is constructed as an earthly embodiment of divine order of the universe.

#### 4.1.3 Sukhothai Buddhist Temple

The Thai established their kingdom in the regions of present-day Thailand for the first time in the late thirteenth century. In the north, the kingdom of Lan Na was established by 1297 under the rule of King Mangrai (r.1259-1317). Most of the rest of the regions became dominions of the Kingdom of Sukhothai under King Ramkhamhaeng (r.?1279-98) by 1292. Both these Thai kingdoms inherited and adopted various aspects of their culture in the tradition of their predecessors, namely the Mon and the Khmer, while repudiating their political dominance. One of the most important changes that resulted from this process of adoption was the relationship between a ruler

and the ruled. The Thai had traditionally seen their ruler as paternal and accessible, but as a result of the Khmer influence, whose king was seen as a god, the hierarchical distinction between a ruler and the ruled was enhanced among the Thai. This distinction was further deepened by the influence of Theravada Buddhism which justifies class distinctions and a hierarchical order within society based on notions of merit and *kamma*. In fact, the concept of a patriarchal ruler, or *pho khun*, was superseded by the religio-political concept of the moral *Dhammaraja* (the Righteous King) during the reign of King Maha Thammaracha I, or King Lithai. As seen previously, King Lithai's work, the Traiphum Phra Ruang, clearly demonstrates this concept.

This shift is reflected in Sukhothai art and architecture, particularly in the Buddhist temple Wat Mahathat at Sukhothai. Wat Mahathat was constructed by King Si Inthathit (r. ?1240s-?70s), the first king of Sukhothai, and was later expanded by King Ramkhamhaeng. Later, in about 1345, King Lithai (r. 1346-74) rebuilt the central sanctuary area in order to enshrine Buddha's relic brought over from Sri Lanka. In this reconstruction, the temple focused particularly on the aspects that delineate Mount Meru, while the whole plan, with over 200 structures, followed the Khmer archetype (Fig. 5). The central sanctuary consists of nine towers that represent Mount Meru and its enclosing mountains. The central tower as the focal relic chamber has a very unique shape, a combination of a Khmer style tower and a Mon *chedi*. This tower is topped with a crowning finial in the shape of a lotus bud *chedi*, which is unique to Sukhothai architecture. In addition, among the lower eight subsidiary towers, those at the cardinal points are square Khmer-style towers, while those at the corners are almost conical, Mon *chedi*-topped towers.

In this representation, while maintaining the Khmer cosmological plan in the whole temple compound, the Thai modified and elaborated the centre in a particularly unique way by appropriating already existing styles of architecture from other cultures, namely the Mon, the Khmer, and the Sukhothai, thereby emphasising Mount Meru and the heavenly extensions. Via this cultural appropriation, the centre was imbued with the spiritual power of these sites and demonstrates, according to Khmer tradition, the symbolical as well as the actual power associated with these sites (Aasen 79-80). Thus, in this representation, the Thai expanded and elaborated the centre to conform to their own Theravada Buddhist concepts in the framework of the kingdom of Sukhothai.

#### 4.1.4 Ayutthaya Buddhist Temple

In 1438, the Sukhothai kingdom was absorbed by the kingdom of Ayutthaya, which was founded in 1350 in the southern part of the Chao Phraya River basin. Ayutthaya also gained dominance over parts of Khmer at Angkor during the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Due to the strong influence of the Theravada Buddhist and Khmer political models that Ayutthaya inherited from the Sukhothai and the Khmer Angkor, the strategic combination of religious beliefs and political practices was reinforced during the Ayutthaya period. Consequently, the notion of the paternal king waned, while that of the *Devaraja* grew. The king was conceived as a living god who was omnipotent and had absolute power. By this shift, art and architecture as a means for implementing central control and giving legitimacy to the king and the state were enhanced.

Distinctive examples that reflect this are found in Wat Ratchaburana, built in 1424 by King Borom Rachathirat II (r.1424-48), and in Wat Chai Wattanaram, built by King Prasat Thong (r.1629-56). Like the Sukhothai Buddhist temples, the basic rules for the construction of the Khmer temple were applied to these temples (Figs. 6, 7). However, the overall arrangement became simplified, and the importance of the details was further reduced; structures such as the pond, the moat, and the entrance gates became much smaller or were even eliminated; and surface decorations became less abundant. At the same time, the central area representing Mount Meru and the heavenly extensions were greatly expanded and made ever more elaborate. This is obvious in the central tower, developed as the “*prang*”, a prominent tower and relic chamber of distinctive Thai style. Like the previous towers, Thai *prang* also consists of a superstructure and its base. However, the superstructure became much elongated, transformed from the ogival tower of the Khmer to a corn-cob shape. The *prang* is further elongated by being elevated on massive tiered bases. Such prominent and monumental *prangs*, as the expanded and elaborated representation of Mount Meru and the heavenly extensions, incorporated the Khmer’s cosmologically-correct arrangement of structures, and correspond to the augmented aspect of the *Devaraja* in the kingdom of Ayutthaya.

#### 4.1.5 Thai Monastic Structure: *Ubosot* and *Viharn*

From the Sukhothai period onwards, the Thai started to build rectangular monastic structures for gatherings: the *viharn* for assembly, and the *ubosot* for ordination. These monastic structures have a much larger interior chamber than any of the other structures within a compound, enabling them to accommodate much larger numbers of devotees, including both the clergy and the laity.

As can be seen in Wat Mahathat at Sukhothai, the *viharn* and the *ubosot* were, at first, subsidiary structures in a temple compound; the *viharn* was attached to the sides of the central structure *chedi* or *prang*; the *ubosot* was built at the corner of a temple compound.<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 5) The importance of these halls was gradually enhanced and, by the end of the Ayutthaya period, in some temples such as Wat Yai Suwannaram at Petchaburi, the *ubosot* became the most important structure occupying the central place, replacing the *chedi* or the *prang*.<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 8)

The basic plan for these halls is almost the same as that of the previous ones. The whole temple compound is surrounded by boundary walls. The centre of the compound is often surrounded by enclosing walls within which various subsidiary structures are placed. The exterior surface of the hall is imbued with traditional symbolism. Gable-boards and roof finials attached to the multiple overlapping roofs display various Hindu gods and guardians, such as the *garuda* and the *naga*. Thus, the hall as a whole becomes the symbolic centre within the cosmologically correct arrangement of structures that represents Mount Meru and the heavenly extensions. This architectural composition continues to be popular. In fact, most of the temples made in the Rattanakosin period, such as the *ubosot* at Wat Phra Chetuphon and the *viharn* at Wat Suthat, follow this composition, making the *ubosot* or the *viharn* the principal structure of a temple. This fact indicates that even after Thai monastic structures for large gatherings became the main form of structure for a temple, the traditional symbolism of the centre continues to be maintained.

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<sup>2</sup> The *ubosot* is built within the enclosure of sacred ground marked by eight *sema* stones.

<sup>3</sup> At Wat Yai Suwannaram, the *ubosot* is enclosed by a gallery, while two *chedis* are placed at two corners of the *ubosot*.

## 4.2 Mural Representation of the Universe

### 4.2.1 Aspects of the Universe

#### 1) Hieratic Configuration

The earliest mural paintings in these Thai religious edifices are found on the interior walls of the *chedi* or the *prang* at the time when these structures were built as one of the main components in a temple compound. These mural paintings were not intended for human eyes since the *chedi* or the *prang* was not designed to be entered. Rather, they were made as an offering in memory of a deceased relative and as an artefact that signifies religious piety and devotion to the Buddha, thereby serving as a source of merit for the individual who commissions it (Santi, Temples 24-5).

The sources for these mural paintings were Buddhist literary works on the life and teachings of the Buddha. The major part of the walls of the *chedi* and the *prang* is occupied by figures of the Buddhas of the Past, or predecessors of the historical Buddha who reached the same degree of perfection and progressed towards the ultimate existence in which they would attain full Enlightenment. Depicted in almost archaic form, frequently accompanied by disciples in adoration, various figures of the Buddhas of the Past are usually arranged in repetitive horizontal rows that often occupy the entire surface of the interior walls. Added to this repetitive, hieratic configuration are some scenes from traditional narrative stories, namely the Jataka tales, or the previous lives of the Buddha as Bodhisatva who practiced various virtues to perfection; and the Life of the Historical Buddha, the final existence, who advanced along the path that ends in full Enlightenment.

The origins of these repetitive hieratic configurations can be traced back to the Sukhothai period, as can be seen in the mural paintings at Wat Chedi Chet Thaew at Si Satchanalai, dating from the middle of the fourteenth century. Here, the figures of the Buddha of the Past in an archaic form, alternating with disciples in an attitude of veneration, are arranged in a composition of static repetition in horizontal registers, one above the other. This tradition continued into the Ayutthaya period as can be seen in the works executed in 1424 in the crypt of the principal *prang* of Wat Ratchaburana. The crypts of Wat Ratchaburana were sealed after various precious objects were deposited, and thus could not be entered at all. The entire walls of this relic chamber are filled with paintings in eight horizontal rows. These paintings are, from top to the bottom: twenty-four Buddhas of the Past (one register, six figures on each wall), episodes from

the Life of the Buddha (two registers), the eighty Great Disciples (one register, twenty figures on each wall), and various episodes from the Jataka tales (four registers). (Fig. 9)

This repetitive motif in the displays of the figures of the Buddha and his disciples has significant cosmological implications. Various figures of the Buddhas of the Past symbolise various states of Buddhahood, or various realms in the universe. The juxtaposition of these figures symbolises the co-existence of various realms in which human beings live an ever-lasting cycle of rebirth until they attain the ultimate state of *Nirvana* (Wenk, Mural XLVI). Thus, through the repetition of the figures of the Buddha and his disciples who pursue lofty ideals, aiming at higher realms of various Heavens and *Nirvana* beyond, the relationship between continuous meritorious activities and rewards in Heaven, and *Nirvana* ultimately, is demonstrated in an implicit and abstract way. At the same time, such hieratic configurations that manifest the greatness of the Buddha's cosmic achievement and the significance of being on the Buddha's Path create a subdued and solemn atmosphere within the interior space. Through the creation of this symbolic space as offering in memory of a deceased relative, the patron honours the deceased and is merited for doing so.

## 2) Hieratic Configuration and Narrative themes

The *ubosot* and the *viharn* are rectangular halls, specifically designed for larger gatherings of both the clergy and the laity, for purposes of observing Buddhist rituals, including participating in ordination ceremonies, chanting the *Dhamma*, listening to sermons, and paying homage to the Buddha and his teachings. Like other structures within a temple compound, these monastic structures enshrine images of Buddha which symbolise great events in the life of the Buddha via their postures, serving as a visual scripture that reminds viewers of the life and the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>4</sup> In the subdued and solemn atmosphere emanating from these images of Buddha, the teachings of the Buddha were effectively conveyed to and appreciated by those who assembled there to observe the rituals.

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<sup>4</sup> The Buddha is represented in the postures referring to events in the life: in meditation (seated with hands folded); subduing the forces of delusion and attaining Enlightenment (seated with the right hand pointing down); teaching (standing); and in death (lying down).

Initially, these halls were either open-sided, supported by pillars, or enclosed by thin walls pierced at regular intervals. In those days, the wall behind the principal Buddha image was painted in solid black or red, sometimes with floral motifs that symbolise various Heavens. As can be seen at Wat Mahathat at Phitsanulok,<sup>5</sup> these paintings were solely intended to highlight Buddha's images as the focal point, emphasising the pre-eminence of the Buddha and augmenting the subdued and solemn atmosphere of the hall dedicated to the Buddha. (Fig. 10)

After solid walls were made on either side of the Buddha's image, the entire surface of the interior walls were covered with mural paintings.<sup>6</sup> Although these mural paintings were a form of offering, they were also designed to serve as a visual sermon that makes the Buddhist scriptures accessible to all devotees through the pictorial images that complement the monks' oral sermons. Thus, the paintings had to be easily recognizable and intelligible to anyone with merely an elementary knowledge of Buddhism.

The mural paintings that adorned the walls of these halls inherited the repetitive motif of hieratic configuration adopted in the paintings at the *chedi* and the *prang*. However, there was a gradual transformation in the choice of themes and the overall arrangement of murals. The figures of the Buddhas of the Past were replaced by the figures of heavenly beings, or *thep chumnum*, kneeling in semi-profile and turning in homage to the principal Buddha image at the centre. These were composed on a number of horizontal registers along the entire length of the rectangular panels on both lateral walls. Furthermore, the wall behind Buddha's image was now covered with floral motifs that symbolise various Heavens, while the opposite wall, a huge panel on the wall facing Buddha's image, began to feature a single scene from the Life of the Buddha: the Defeat of Mara (symbolising delusion and ignorance) or the Enlightenment of the Buddha by Calling the Earth to Witness it. This scene usually depicts the Buddha overcoming the temptations of Mara through meditation, represented by the onslaught of Mara and his forces, and eventually attaining Enlightenment, which is witnessed by the Earth Goddess Maetorani.

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<sup>5</sup> Phitsanulok was the eastern cardinal city for Sukhothai.

<sup>6</sup> In the north-eastern region, the exterior walls of the *ubosot* and the *viharn* are sometimes covered with mural paintings, e.g., Wat Na Phra That, Nakhon Rajasima region and Wat Sra Bua Kaeo, Khon Kaen (Jean 32; Santi, Temples 119; Pairote).



This arrangement is found in the *ubosot* at Wat Yai Suwannaram, Phetchaburi, dating back to the mid-seventeenth century, in which the entire lateral walls are divided into five registers, each of which features rows of life-sized heavenly beings, all kneeling with hands joined in worship, facing the Buddha image at the centre. (Fig. 11) It can also be found at the *viharn* of Wat Mai Prachum Phon, Ayutthaya, made at the beginning of the seventeenth century, where each register features rows of worshipping heavenly beings separated by the *chedis*. (Fig. 12) The gathering of these heavenly beings in the gesture of adoration towards the Buddha represents the sequence of events from the Defeat of Mara to the Enlightenment of the Buddha (Santi, Mural 96-99).

Through the juxtaposition of the scenes of the Defeat of Mara and the displays of repetitive horizontal rows of adoring celestial beings, the interior space as a whole focuses on portraying the specific process of the Buddha's Enlightenment as a series of events: the continuous meritorious act of meditation, subduing the forces of delusion through meditation, attaining Enlightenment, and the celebration of the event by the heavenly beings. This process, in other words, manifests the relationship between merit and reward in a specific way; as a consequence of the meritorious act of meditation, the reward of *Nirvana* is attained.

By emphasising scenes from the Life of the Buddha that portray the attainment of *Nirvana* in relation to specific meritorious acts of the Buddha within the temple space, it is no longer merely a symbolic space that conveys the significance of the Buddha and his Enlightenment in an abstract way, but becomes a more practical space that, through the mural art work, gives specific guidelines to be followed in order to attain *Nirvana*. Thus, the transformation towards more specific themes and arrangements was a means to lead the devotees to *Nirvana* in a more appealing way than was apparent in the repetitive motif of hieratic configuration in the earlier murals of the *chedi* and the *prang* which conveyed the relationship between merit and reward in a more abstract and implicit way.

### 3) Narrative Themes

In the later Ayutthaya period, there was a further shift towards even greater specification in the choice of themes and in the arrangement of these themes. In addition to the scene of the Defeat of Mara, an increasingly large number of scenes from narrative stories, namely the Life of the Buddha and the Jataka tales, adorned an increasingly larger proportion of the interior walls of the *ubosot* and the *viharns*. Sometimes, these scenes adorned all four walls, while the figures of the Buddhas of the Past or the Celestial Assembly adorned only the uppermost of the lateral walls.

Unlike the figures of the Buddhas or the Celestial Beings composed in static repetition, now each of these scenes was arranged in panels or areas demarcated by various dividers, including zigzag *sawtooth* bands, vertical narrow-strip bands, and conventional horizontal bands. The combination of these dividers not only makes each scene more independent but also accentuates each scene, drawing more dynamic eye movements in the beholders. The use of such dynamic and independent compositions was intended to make each scene, with its own specific message, be more easily recognised and identified than was possible with the static repetition, thus enabling them to convey the message more effectively.

One such example can be seen at the *ubosot* of Wat Chong Nonsi, on the outskirts of Bangkok, made in the later Ayutthaya period. In this hall, the wall facing the Buddha image features the scene of the Defeat of Mara, while the opposite wall, or the wall behind the image, features the scene of Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven, also an episode from the Life of the Buddha. In the meantime, almost the entire surface of the lateral walls is occupied by various scenes from the Jataka tales, each of which is placed in a panel divided by both vertical bands of stylised floral motifs and zigzag *sawtooth* bands, while the uppermost part retains a horizontal row of various figures of the Buddha of the Past. (Fig. 13)

Another example can be seen at the *ubosot* of Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam, Phetchaburi, dating to 1734. In this hall, large rectangular panels on the lateral walls are occupied by various scenes from the Life of the Buddha, alternating with ornate *chedis* of Buddha in niches, depicted in a number of triangular areas demarcated by extremely tall, almost flame-like, zigzag *sawtooth* bands extending almost from the floor to the ceiling. (Fig. 14) The uppermost part of the same walls depicts adoring celestial beings in a row. The wall behind the Buddha image features the scene of the Defeat of Mara, while the wall facing the Buddha image features the scene of the Traiphum.

Later, when window openings were introduced on the lateral walls, independent spacious areas or panels were created between the windows.<sup>7</sup> Usually, each of these panels was adorned with a mural painting, usually a scene from narrative stories, as can be seen in the Pavilion of Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn at Wat Buddhaisawan in Ayutthaya. Here, each of the panels between windows is adorned with a single scene from the Jataka tales or the Life of the Buddha. Each scene from the narrative stories represents each specific meritorious act and activity of the Buddha in the framework of human life. By adopting familiar settings and lively personages, the scenes give a sense of greater immediacy and reality to the story, serving as a more effective guideline to attaining rewards in *Nirvana*.

By juxtapositioning these narrative scenes in the temple space in this manner, various ways of attaining *Nirvana* are presented to the audience at simultaneously in a more concrete and specific way in relation to specific meritorious acts and activities. The scenes get more easily recognised and identified by being presented in a more dynamic and independent composition which gives them a more extensive area for detailed description. This new arrangement of the murals, with its greater specificity, made it possible to convey the relationship between various ways of earning merit and of attaining reward in *Nirvana* more effectively. It is thought, as Matics noted, that the general trend towards specification, from hieratic configuration to narrative themes, reflects an increasing ecclesiastical concern for the moral improvement of the lay community (Introduction 9).

While most of these narrative scenes only suggest a cosmic sphere *Nirvana* in an implicit and abstract way in the context of merit and reward, some of the specific cosmic realms are actually illustrated as the settings for the scenes of the narrative stories that unfold in a cosmic framework. One of the most frequently depicted scenes of such stories is the scene of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven, an episode from the Life of the Buddha.<sup>8</sup> At Wat Chong Nonsi, this scene is confined to

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<sup>7</sup> In the Bangkok period, most temples have panels for murals between the windows on the lateral walls. Quite often, a scene from the Jataka tales, especially the last ten Jatakas, occupies a whole panel between the windows. Sometimes, certain stories, particularly the Vessantara Jataka, are depicted over a series of panels, incorporating many scenes and making them more detailed, e.g. Wat Ratchasittharam and Wat Suwannaram.

<sup>8</sup> Buddha's mother, who was reborn in Tusita Heaven, descends to Tavatimsa Heaven to listen to Buddha's sermon.

the scene of Tavatimsa Heaven, consisting of Indra's gem palace, the figure of Buddha sitting on Indra's throne placed at the centre, and his attendants sitting below him. (Fig. 15) As the setting for an episode from the Life of the Buddha, the scene of Tavatimsa Heaven signifies the place to which Buddha's act of merit leads him where he is rewarded with *Nirvana*. Within this context of merit and reward, Tavatimsa Heaven as a realm does not have ultimate significance in itself since it is the place that is ultimately to be subjugated. However, the supreme scene of Tavatimsa Heaven, which is on the long path towards *Nirvana*, still serves as a reminder of the importance of performing an act of merit in order to be on the path to *Nirvana*.

Another frequently depicted scene is from Nimi Jataka, which is usually depicted on one of the panels on the lateral walls. This scene is portrayed in a broader framework and consists of the scenes of Tavatimsa Heaven and Hell. At Wat Prasat, the painting is divided into two parts. (Fig. 16) The lower part depicts the scene of Hell, to which King Nimi is taken in a huge heavenly carriage in a pyramidal shape, while the upper part depicts the scene of Heaven, where King Nimi gets off the carriage and enters the heavenly assembly in horizontal rows. As one of the scenes from the Jataka Tales that emphasizes the attainment of *Nirvana*, the scenes of Heaven and Hell are meant to signify the places that prompted King Nimi to undertake acts of merit that lead him to attain reward in *Nirvana*. In this context, Hell as well as Heaven are places that must be overcome in the pursuit of *Nirvana*, not places to be either aspired to or avoided. However, these scenes, with the great contrast between them, give stimulus to the audience to perform an act of merit and abstain from committing sinful deeds so that they may be on the path to *Nirvana*, just as King Nimi is depicted as doing.

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## 4.2.2 Representation of the Traiphum

In the overall trend towards specification, there seems to have been a growing tendency to represent the view of the world within the context of a more specific and independent framework. Thus, the Traiphum cosmology, which had often been adopted as the subject matter or theme for illuminated manuscripts, was also adopted as the theme for the mural paintings that decorate the interior walls of the *ubosot* or the *viharn*, at least before the end of seventeenth century.

### 1) Illuminated manuscript of the Traiphum

The Traiphum was the earliest and the most important theme for illuminated manuscripts, and representing the Traiphum had already been a more or less established tradition, at least in the mid-Ayutthaya period and into the Thonburi period. Numerous compositions were made in the Ayutthaya period<sup>9</sup> and, during the Thonburi period, two illustrated manuscripts were made in 1776 by a monk called Phra Maha Chuai under the patronage of King Taksin.<sup>10</sup> All the illuminated manuscripts of the Traiphum have almost the same form and content. They are usually divided into two sections: the main section and an additional or secondary section. The main section depicts the geography of the whole universe, or macrocosm, from a vertical perspective centring on Mount Meru. All thirty-one realms are composed on facing leaves of a continuous paper folded in accordion-like strips. Each realm, depicted in great detail, is treated almost equally in terms of size, style, and colour and they are presented in a sequence of moral hierarchy from leaf to leaf, from the highest to the lowest, beginning with *Nirvana* (Fig. 17) and ending with Hell, after layers of Heaven have been depicted over a number of leaves. (Fig. 18) Through this visual display, a sense of classification and hierarchy within the whole universe is conveyed.

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<sup>9</sup> An early sixteen-century manuscript is preserved in The National Library, Bangkok (Matics, Hell 143).

<sup>10</sup> One of the Traiphum manuscripts is preserved in the National Archive in Bangkok, while the other is kept in the Berlin Museum.

This sense of classification and hierarchy is also at work in the representation of each realm. In the Realm of Hell Beings, elements that constitute the realm – the sphere of King Yama who rules over Hell and judges the sinners, (Fig. 19) the sphere of Hell wardens who administer torture to the sinners, the eight major Hells where sinners are administered the torture, and *Lokantha*, an outer Hell situated between the universes – are depicted in order of moral hierarchy from the highest to the lowest. Moreover, each of the eight major Hells is depicted on each of the facing leaves. At the centre is a square-shaped compartment surrounded by smaller squares on each of the four sides, representing a major Hell and surrounding subsidiary Hells respectively.<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 20) In each of these squares, faces of men are shown suffering a specific type of punishment, such as fire, mountains of lances, or spiky lotus plants. Around these squares are several, detailed vignettes of torture, among them men being boiling in a hot iron cauldron; men and women climbing up and down a kapok tree full of thorns; men being burnt in the middle of a coal mountain which they are squeezed into. Each major Hell is characterised by one to four specific vignettes of these tortures. Through such depictions in the main sections of the illustrations of the structure of the whole universe that emphasises a sense of classification and hierarchy, the concept of ascending planes or states of existence in the Three Worlds is represented simply and graphically in reverse order. Thus, it is a graphically-depicted reminder of the fate of all in the Three Worlds or thirty-one levels of existence into which one will be reborn according to one's former merits.

The secondary or additional sections of the Traiphum illustrations expand and elaborate on one of the realms in the main universe, the Realm of Men, by visualising the geography of the Realms of Men extensively from a horizontal perspective. First, the section illustrates the Realm of Men in relation to various cosmic elements, such as the central axis Mount Meru and the seven mountain ranges and oceans that encircle it, the sun and the moon that rotate around Mount Meru, and the Four Continents that belong to the Realm of Men. (Fig. 21) Then, it elaborates on the geography of one of the Four Continents, the Jambu Continent, or the southern continent, which is the dwelling place of humans and the representation of our world that corresponds to the Indian Sub-Continent. The scene of the Jambu Continent is confined to a view of the Himavant

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<sup>11</sup> According to the Traiphum Phra Ruang, the Realm of Hell Beings consists of eight major Hells, each of which is surrounded by sixteen subsidiary Hells. Each of these subsidiary Hells are further surrounded by four minor Hells. In the Traiphum text, sixteen subsidiary Hells in the *Sanji* major Hell are described in detail.

Forest, the Heaven of Brahmanical-Buddhist conception, the idyllic celestial region of the universe which alludes to the Himalayan regions of Buddha's time. Depicted over a number of leaves are various natural elements, such as an ocean, rivers, and lakes, including Anotatta Lake (Fig. 22) that constitute the forest, together with its inhabitants – including real and mythical creatures such as the *kinnari* and the *kinnara*, a half-bird half-human creature, *garudas*, *hamsas*, lion, bulls, horses, and elephants. Also, various scenes from the narrative stories, namely the Life of the Buddha and the Jataka tales, as well as the geography of South-East Asia and the Indian Ocean, are added at the end of this section. All these elements depicted over a large number of leaves together constitute parts of a view of the Himavant Forest, in which perfect harmonious order among gods, nature, and men is portrayed. In this scene of the Himavant Forest, shown as the representation of the Realm of Men and depicted as part of the whole universe, or a macrocosm, the concept of an earthly embodiment of divine order of the universe as a microcosm is represented. In this order, *Cakkavatti*, who stands at the apex of the Realm of Men and the Jambu Continent, appears allusively as an ideal ruler, one who is equal with the Buddha.

## 2) Mural Painting of the Traiphum

As for the Traiphum mural, only a couple of works are dated to the Ayutthaya period with any certainty and no works from the Thonburi period have survived. Therefore, we do not know whether the two Ayutthaya Traiphum murals mark the beginning of this style and theme of painting or whether a longer period of development of this type of painting had preceded them. We also do not know whether the Traiphum mural was actually made during the Thonburi period. However, it is certain from the two remaining works that the representation of the Traiphum cosmology in the form of mural painting began at least before the end of the seventeenth century.

## A. The Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn at Wat Phutthaisawan

### Background and Mural Arrangement

The earliest remaining mural painting that represents the Traiphum is the one at the Pavilion of Wat Phutthaisawan, a monastery built by the founder of Ayutthaya. The pavilion was built by King Phra Phetracha (1688-1703) for his spiritual mentor, the Supreme Patriarch Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn. The interior walls of the pavilion are covered with paintings of both traditional and less common themes. The huge panel on the south wall features the scene of the Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree, below which is depicted scenes from the *Ramayana* and of various Disciples. A number of panels between windows on the west wall are covered with various scenes from the Jataka tales. The themes on the east wall are less common: various legends regarding the footprint of the Buddha and the *stupas* adored by gods and men. Even scenes of rather personal themes, such as the Journey of Phra Buddha Kosacharn to Ceylon and a Royal Procession to a Place of Pilgrimage are included on this wall.

### Description

The theme of the Traiphum is represented on the large panel on the north wall. (Fig. 23) The vast area in the centre, from the upper middle to the lower right, is occupied by the scene of the Realm of Men, consisting mainly of a depiction of the Himavant Forest, the idyllic celestial region associated with the Buddha. Elements traditionally depicted in the illuminated manuscript include the Five Rivers that flow into the dwelling places of humans, (Fig. 24, 25) the Anotatta Lake, (Fig. 26) the Four Rivers that flow from the lake, the Five Mountain Ranges near the lake, including Kailasa, a silver mountain where the Supreme Lord Siva resides, with huge herds of real and mythical creatures, such as half-bird half-human *kinnaras* and *kinnaris*, (Fig. 27) *garudas*, *hamsas*, lions, bulls, horses, and elephants that inhabit in the vicinity. These are scattered all over the area, creating a panoramic view of the Himavant Forest. In addition, in some parts of the forest, a few scenes are inserted from the Vessantara Jataka, with the figures of King Vessantara, Maddi, and their two children. (Fig. 27)



In the upper part, above the scene of the Himavant Forest and occupying a relatively small portion of the painting, there are a number of rock-like narrow vertical pillars, each diminishing in size, which symbolise Mount Meru and the seven mountain ranges in a cross-section style. (Fig. 28) At the summit of each pillar are pavilions housing guardians of the directions of the universe. At the foot of these mountains are concave lines that represent circular orbits. To the left of the mountain ranges is a chariot that symbolises the sun.

The uppermost part above the mountain peaks is the scene of Heaven. There are two separate horizontal rows of heavenly palaces of the same size and shape, inside each of which is a seated celestial being in the posture of adoration. (Fig. 29) A slightly larger palace above the central pillar represents Tavatimsa Heaven, or the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, which is the realm ruled by God Indra, the king of all thirty-three gods. Within this palace, Indra and his two attendants are seated on the throne, although Chulamani Chedi and a tree called Parijataka, which are usually included in the scene of Tavatimsa Heaven in the illuminated manuscripts, are not depicted here. Everything depicted in these scenes of the Realm of Men and Heaven is painted in reddish earth colours, against a background of almost the same tone of colour, and there is no obvious boundary between the scenes of Heaven and the Realm of Men, thus constituting an organic whole.

In the deteriorating lower left corner below the dividing zigzag lines is the scene of Hell. (Fig. 30) Although severely damaged, a number of vignettes of tortures that can often be found in the illuminated manuscript are barely discernible. A major part of the area is occupied by intersecting rows of square-shaped compartments symbolising major Hells and surrounding subsidiary Hells, in which Hell beings are usually constrained. Around these squares are some traces of vignettes of tortures (Fig. 31): a vignette of a huge iron cauldron; the figure of a man with an animal face and of a woman being hanged from a tree; the vignette of one man stabbing another with a rod in his hands. The entire scene of Hell is painted in drab, dark colours and all the figures are depicted in rough brushwork.

## Analysis

Using various elements from the illuminated manuscripts, the mural painting at Wat Phutthaisawan portrays the universe on a large expanse of plane surface of a wall as an independent, complete representation of the Traiphum. However, this painting is not an accurate illustration of the Traiphum as described in the text. In terms of components, objects traditionally depicted in the illuminated manuscript are much abbreviated in this mural painting. The illuminated manuscript depicts the sphere of *Nirvana* and all thirty-one realms that belong to the Three Worlds universe, namely the World of Desire, the World of Form, and the World of Formless. This includes all twenty-six realms of Heaven and eight levels of major Hells, all of which are depicted one after the other in moral order from leaf to leaf. Unlike in the illuminated manuscript, however, this painting depicts only the three realms within the World of Desire, namely Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell, but all the realms of transcendental states and *Nirvana* are excluded. Thus, this painting, which is confined to the World of Desire, represents the universe within the secular framework, while the manuscript represents a more comprehensive structure of the universe based on the orthodox framework.

In terms of composition and proportion, the focus is different in the illuminated manuscript and this painting. The manuscript places its focus on the sense of classification and hierarchy within the universe through the composition in which all thirty-one realms and *Nirvana* are placed in order from higher to lower realms from leaf to leaf. This painting, on the other hand, places its focus on the scene of the Realm of Men which occupies a disproportionately large area in the central place, while the scene of Heaven, represented by two rows of heavenly palaces, and Mount Meru and the encircling mountain ranges that constitute part of an organic whole with the scene of Heaven, occupy a relatively small area at the uppermost part of the panel. Moreover, the scene of Hell is depicted in the left corner below the scene of the Realm of Men. Thus, the composition and proportions of the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell, as well as Mount Meru and encircling mountain ranges, suggest the relative geography of the Realm of Men in relation to these realms, presenting a representation of the universe in which the focus is on the Realm of Men.

Having been designated such an extensive area, the Realm of Men explores its geography to the fullest extent. The scene of the Realm of Men extensively explores the Himavant Forest which is entirely confined to a horizontal perspective. The panoramic view of the Himavant Forest includes real and mythical creatures, such as the *kinnari*, an inhabitant of Mount Kailasa, the abode of Siva, who live harmoniously among

mountains, rivers, and lakes including the Anotatta Lake, over which all the mountains, including Mount Kailasa, loom. In this panoramic view, the Realm of Men is represented as a place full of happiness and enjoyment. In particular, the harmonious scene of *kinnari* among the mountains and lakes suggests the great enjoyment at Mount Kailasa under the rule of Siva, the Supreme Lord among the gods of the Realm of Men. The relevance of an ideal state to an ideal ruler is suggested in the description of Mount Kailasa in the Traiphum, which states that the degree of enjoyment in Kailasa is comparable to that of Tavatimsa Heaven under the rule of Indra, the Supreme Lord among the thirty-three gods.

The Mountain range called Kelasa [Kailasa] is replete with silver, and at its peak there is a city replete with silver and gold; and there are *kinnari* living there. In this city – which is the city where the great Siva lives – there is great enjoyment just as there is in the city of the thirty-three *devata* [heavenly beings] (Reynolds and Reynolds 294).

Inserted in this ideal state of the Realm of Men are some figures from the Vessantara Jataka which tells about a righteous, ideal ruler King Vessantara as the last life of the Buddha, or Bodhisattva. By the insertion of the figures of this righteous ruler in the ideal state of the Realm of Men, the scene of the Realm of Men, and the representation of the Traiphum as a whole, ultimately become one of moral implications, suggesting that the one who stands at the apex of the Realm of Men is righteous and thus is a legitimised ruler *Cakkavatti* (the Universal Monarch), equal with the Buddha.

It becomes apparent that the Traiphum mural painting at Wat Phutthaisawan places its focus on the illustration of the ideal kingship as one based on morality, or the Buddhist kingship. This focus on the Realm of Men and the ideal kingship, as well as the fact that the painting was displayed in the interior of the private pavilion of the then incumbent Supreme Patriarch, indicates that it was meant to reassert his position in relation to the Buddhist community or even the kingdom as a whole, rather than solely as a moral lesson to the public.

## B. The *Ubosot* at Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam

### Background and Mural Arrangement

Another representation of the Traiphum, found in the *ubosot* of Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam, Phetchaburi, was made in 1734 A.D.<sup>12</sup> The choice of themes and the arrangement of the mural paintings at this temple is quite similar to that found in other temples. The lateral walls are adorned with various scenes from the Life of the Buddha, alternating with ornate *chedis* with Buddha in niches. The uppermost part of the same walls depicts adoring celestial beings in a row. The large panel on the wall behind the Buddha image depicts the scene of the Defeat of Mara, while the opposite wall, or the wall facing the image, features the scene of the Traiphum.<sup>13</sup>

### Description

The central part of the panel is occupied by Mount Meru and seven mountain pillars, (Fig. 32) which are relatively much larger than those at Wat Phutthaisawan, which are quite tiny and narrow. In the area above the central pillar of Mount Meru, to the top of the panel, are six heavenly palaces, in different shapes but of the same size, laid in vertical layers, one after the other. (Fig. 33)

One of the heavenly realms that is slightly different from the rest is Tavatisa Heaven, located at the summit of Mount Meru and below all the rest. While other heavenly palaces do not depict the figures of their inhabitants within, the scene of Tavatisa Heaven depicts the figure of the Buddha seated on the central throne, instead of the customary figure of Indra, flanked by Indra and Brahma. Moreover, Chulamani *chedi*, the Buddha's relic chamber built by Indra, and Parijataka, the gigantic coral tree,

<sup>12</sup> Phetchaburi was one of the principal cities of the time and was the provincial centre of artistic activities.

<sup>13</sup> The locations of the scene of the Defeat of Mara and the scene of the Traiphum cosmology are contrary to most of the later paintings on the same themes. However, some scholars, such as Sone Simatrang, suggest that, considering the landform and the architectural plan of the temple, the principal Buddha image should originally be located at the opposite side, facing the other direction, and thus these two paintings originally adorned opposite walls (According to an interview by the author, 6<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2003).

are placed on either side of the palace.

At both edges of the panel are lengthy pillars, which represent the boundary walls of the universe. In the area between the boundary walls and the mountain pillars are the sun, moon, planets, stars and constellations rotating around Mount Meru. Some lines displaying the zodiac are also depicted here. In addition, at the uppermost part of the painting is a row of heavenly beings in a state of reverence, intersected with *stupas*.

The scene as a whole is plain in style and colour. All objects are outlined with faint brushwork. The colour scheme is limited, with only a few earth colours, and the whole scene is painted against a white background. The part below the middle of Mount Meru was whitewashed a long time ago. Therefore, we do not know what it originally featured. However, based on an analysis of the composition and components of the surviving part, the proportion of the lost part to the whole mural panel, which is about twenty-three percent,<sup>14</sup> the composition, components, and proportions of the Traiphum mural in later periods, and the structure of the universe described in the text, it is quite probable that it once depicted the Realm of Men and other lower realms, including the Realm of Hell Beings.

## Analysis

Like the painting at Wat Phutthaisawan, the Traiphum painting at Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam also focuses on the World of Desire and does not depict *Nirvana* and other transcendental realms in the World of Form and the World of Formless. However, considering the differences between the painting at Wat Phutthaisawan and this painting, in terms of composition, style, and colour, an entirely different inspiration is seemingly at work here.

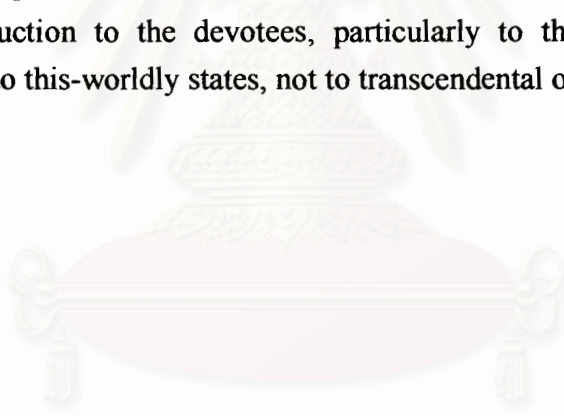
As described above, Mount Meru and the seven mountain pillars in this painting are much larger and more dominant compared to their depiction in the painting at Wat Phutthaisawan. All the other cosmic elements, including the sun and the moon, are depicted on both sides of Mount Meru. Mount Meru, the axis of the universe, marks

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<sup>14</sup> The width of the panel is 280cm. The height of the panel is 507cm. The height of the mural panel (deducting the lower part that does not have any painting) is 430cm. The remaining part is 332cm. The lost part is 98cm (Measured by the author, 1<sup>st</sup> Dec. 2004).

the axis of the composition, creating a symmetrical, vertical picture centring on Mount Meru. As for style and colour, the painting does not show a clear distinction among the realms.

The composition, style, and colour of this painting suggest that it does not place its focus on any particular realm, unlike the painting at Wat Phutthaisawan which places its focus on the Realm of Men. From its structure – all six heavenly realms within the World of Desire presented in different shapes but in the same size, one following the other in vertical layers in a symmetrical, vertical composition centring on the axis Mount Meru – this painting seems to portray the universe in a simple, diagrammatic form from a vertical perspective, with the emphasis on the classification of the realms and the hierarchical order among these realms. This structure of the visual display portrays the concept of ascending planes or states of existence in which one will be reborn, thus reminding all viewers of their fate. In addition, the fact that the painting adorns one of the principal walls of the *ubosot* indicates that it was meant to serve as a means of moral instruction to the devotees, particularly to the laity whose main concerns are confined to this-worldly states, not to transcendental other-worldly states.



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Fig.1 Exterior, Wat Phra Si Sanphet, the Chapel Royal, Ayutthaya

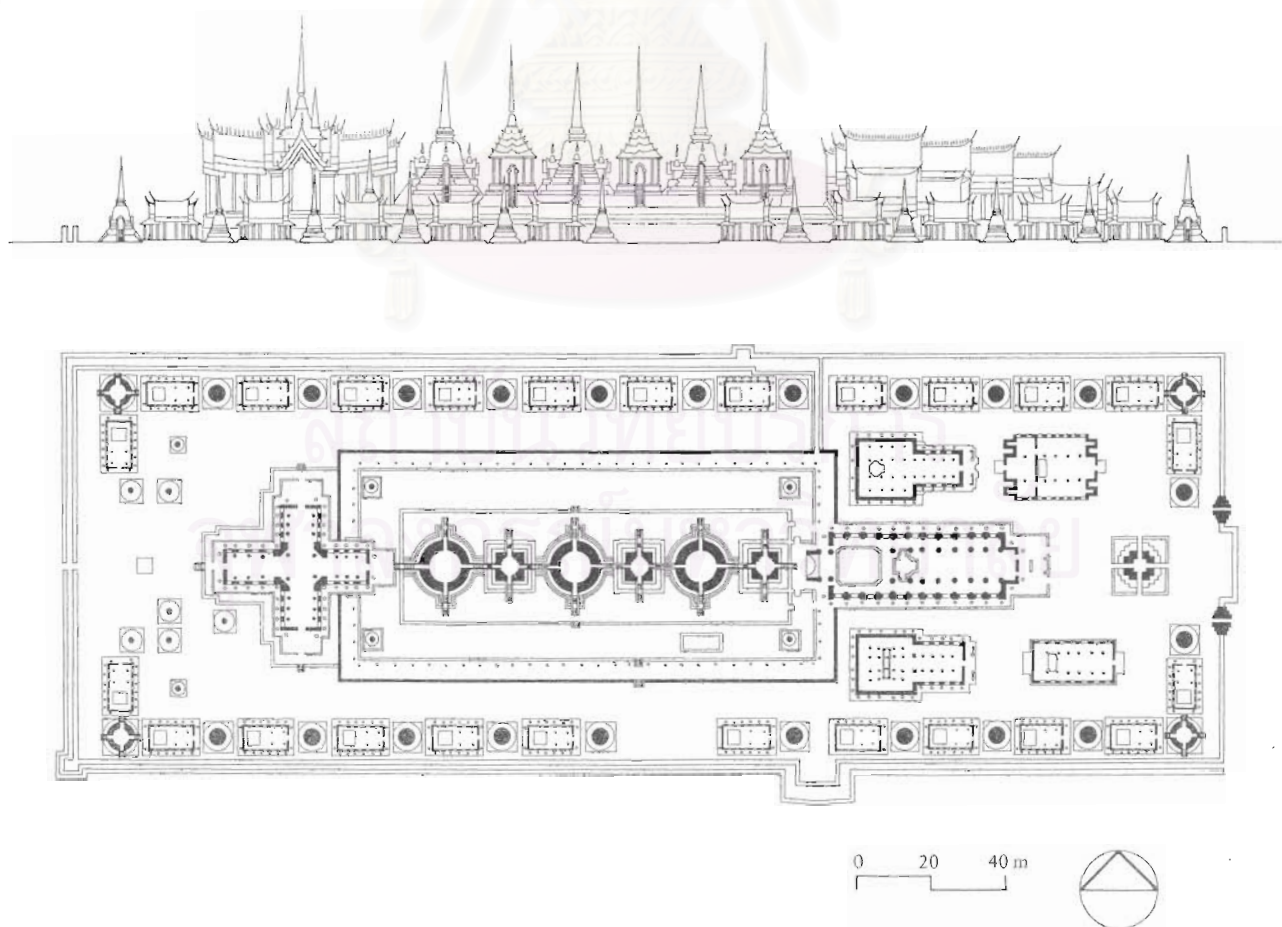


Fig.2 Plan, Wat Phra Si Sanphet, the Chapel Royal, Ayutthaya

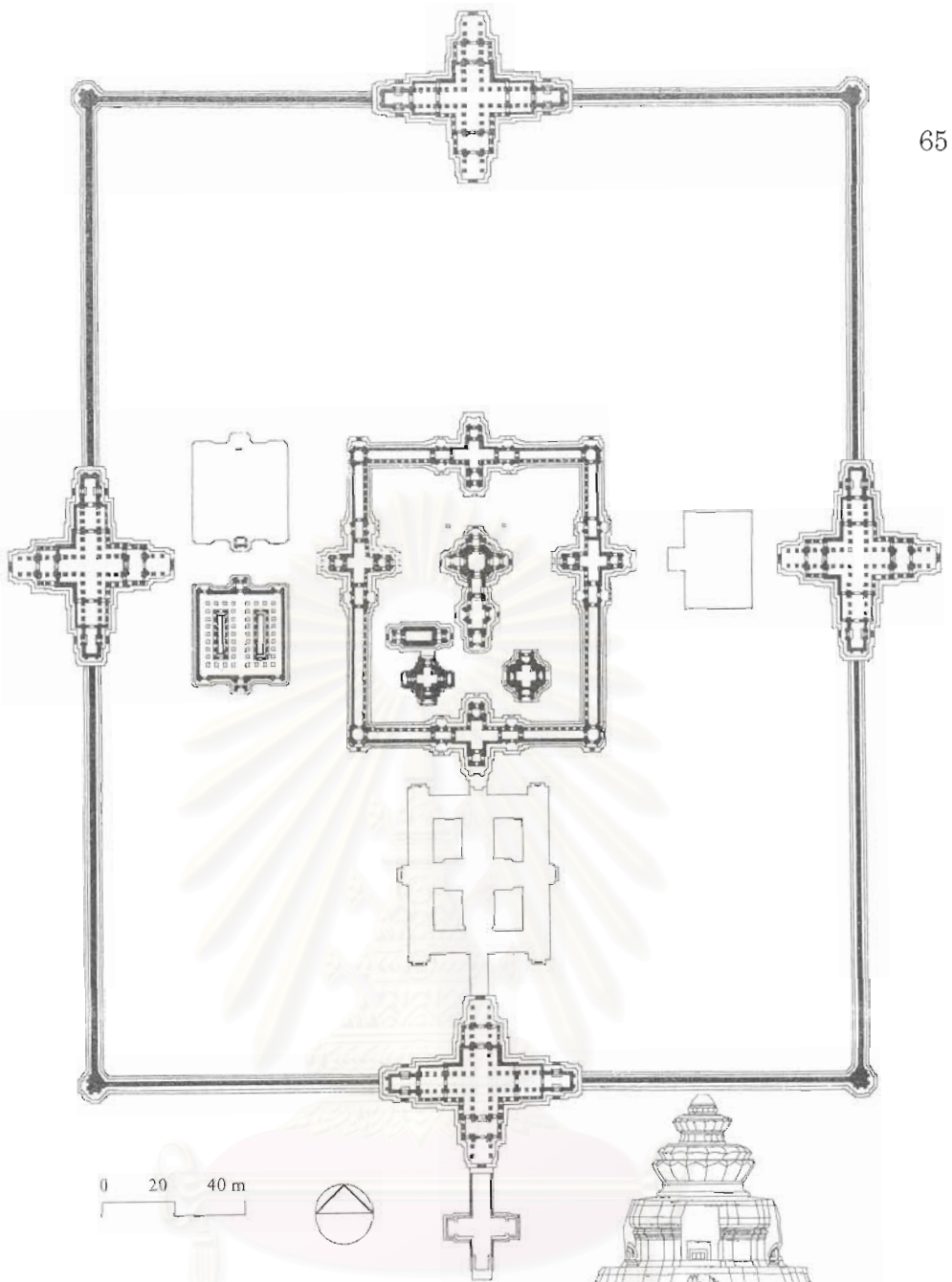


Fig.3 Plan, Prasat Hin Phimai, Phimai



Fig.4 Elevation, Prasat Hin Phimai, Phimai



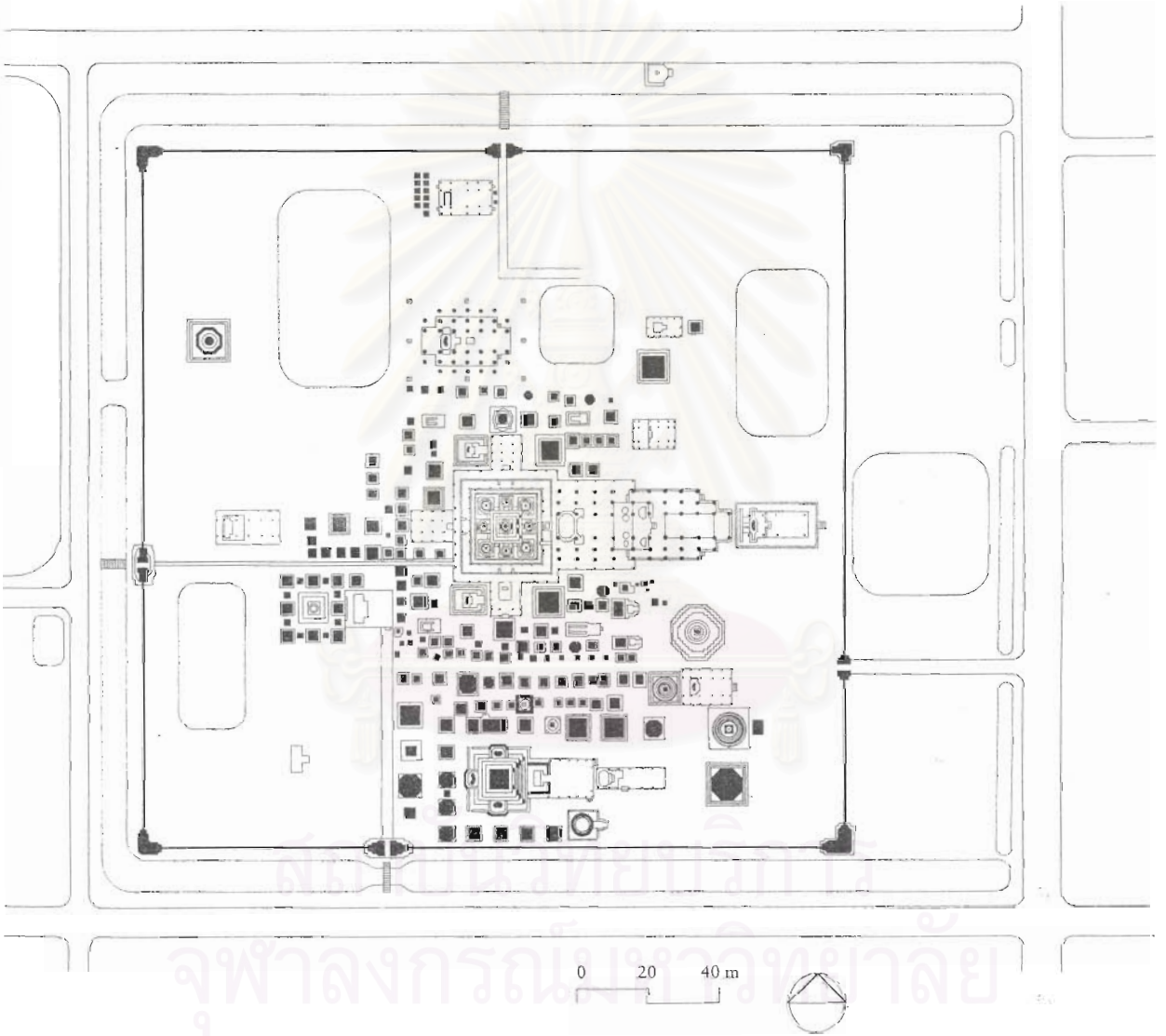


Fig.5 Plan, Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai



Fig.6 Exterior, Wat Chai Wattanaram, Ayutthaya

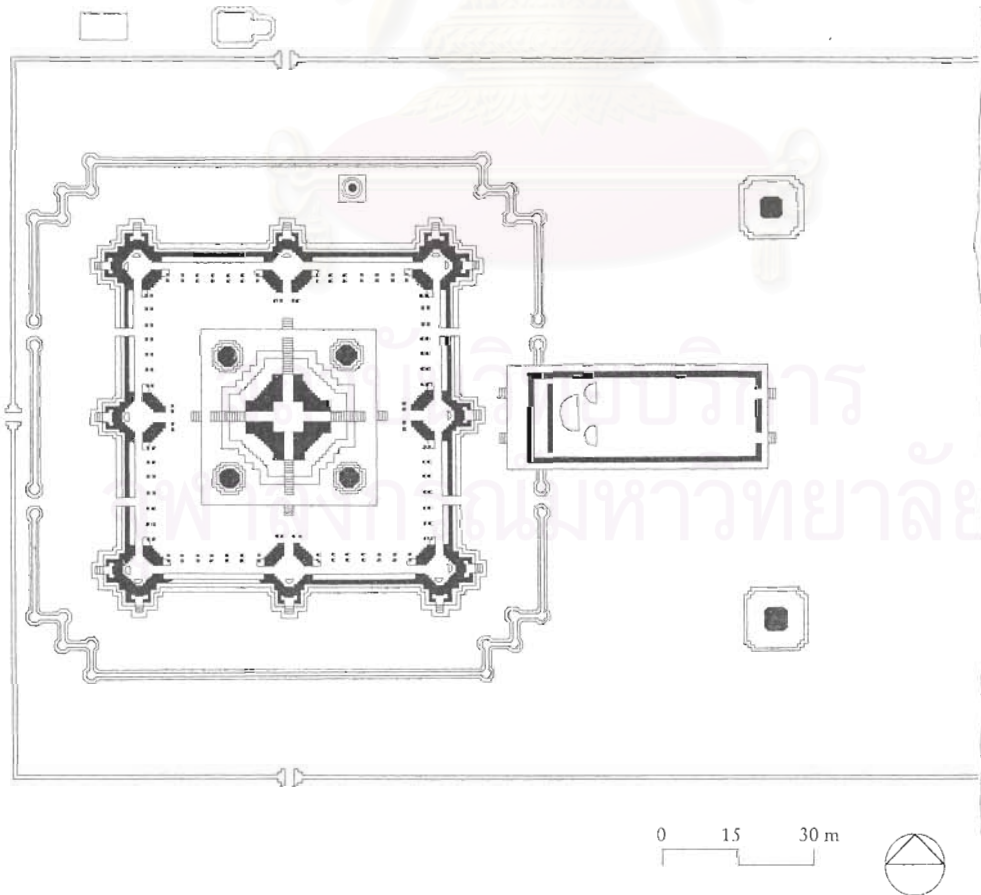


Fig.7 Plan, Wat Chai Wattanaram, Ayutthaya

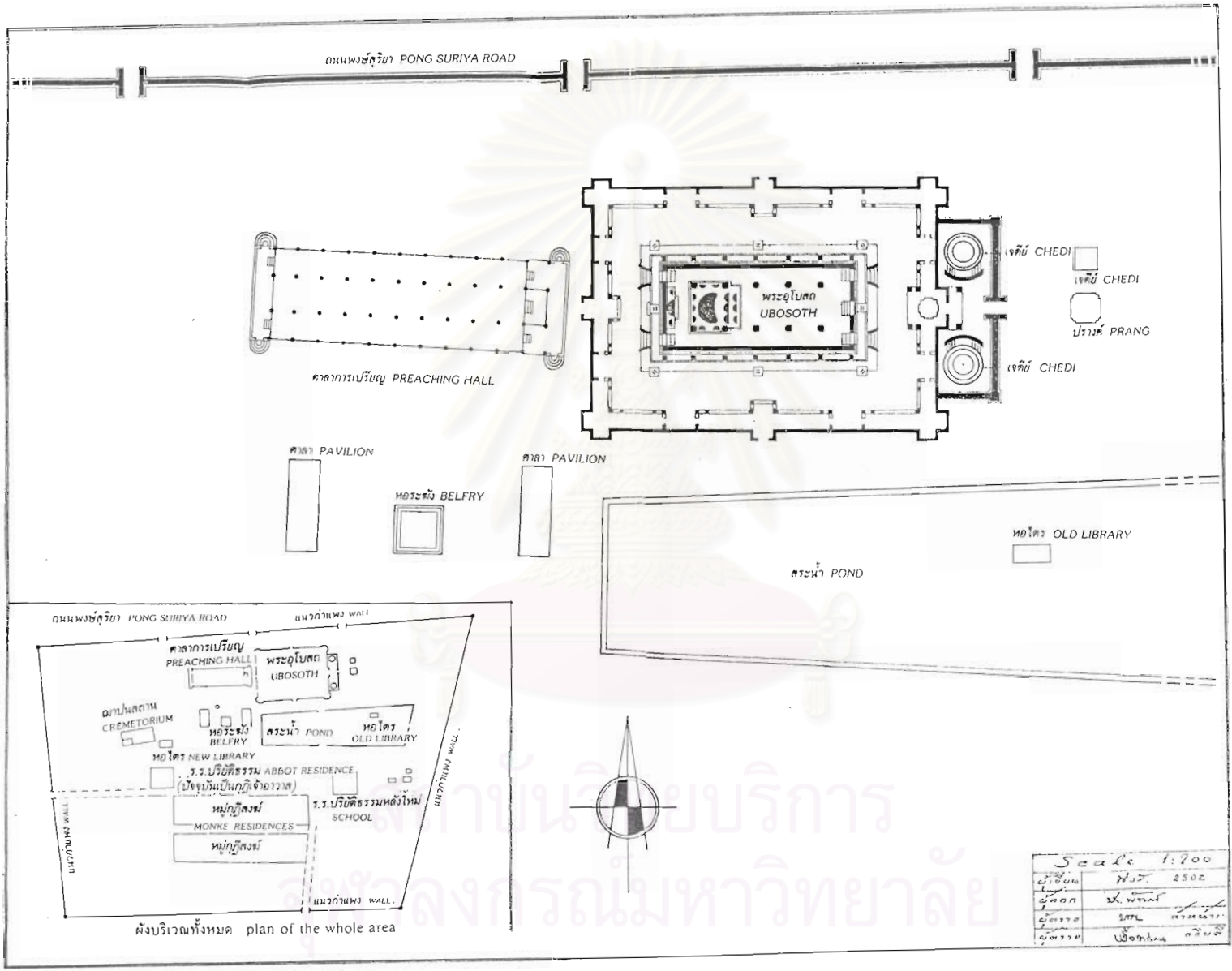


Fig 8 Plan, Wat Yai Suwannaram, Phetchaburi



Fig.9 Figures of Standing Disciples, Wat Ratchaburana

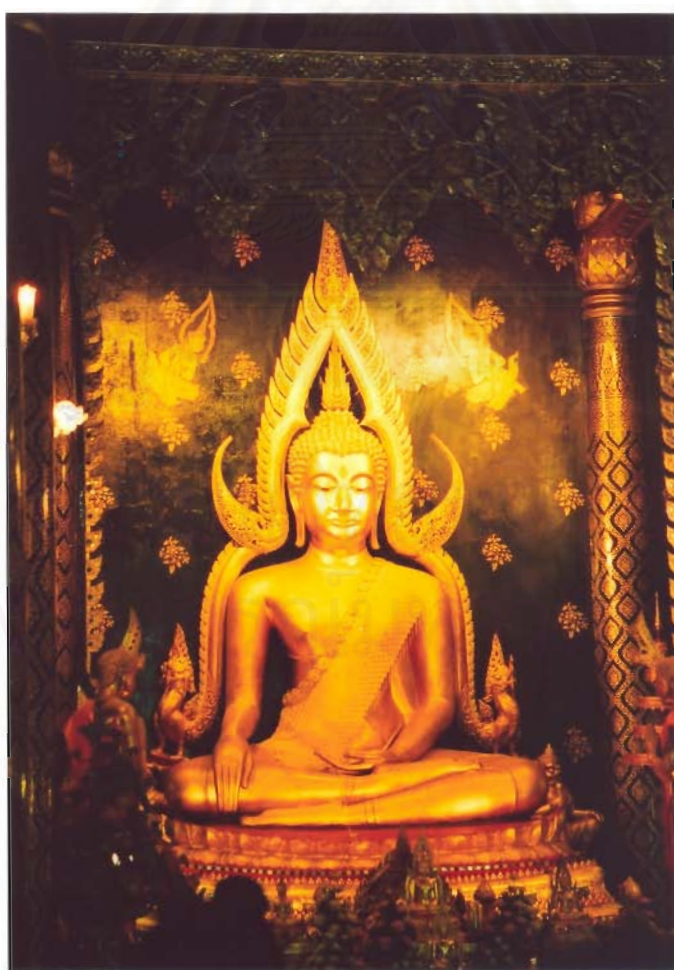


Fig.10 Floral Motifs, Wat Mahathat, Phitsanulok



Fig.11 Figures of Worshipping Heavenly Beings, Wat Yai Suwannaram, Phetchaburi



Fig.12 Figures of Worshipping Heavenly Beings, Wat Mai Prachum Phon, Ayutthaya



Fig.13 Various Scenes from Narrative Themes, Wat Chong Nonsi, Bangkok



Fig.14 Various Scenes from Narrative Themes, Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam, Phetchaburi



Fig.15 The Scene of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven,  
Wat Chong Nonsi, Bangkok

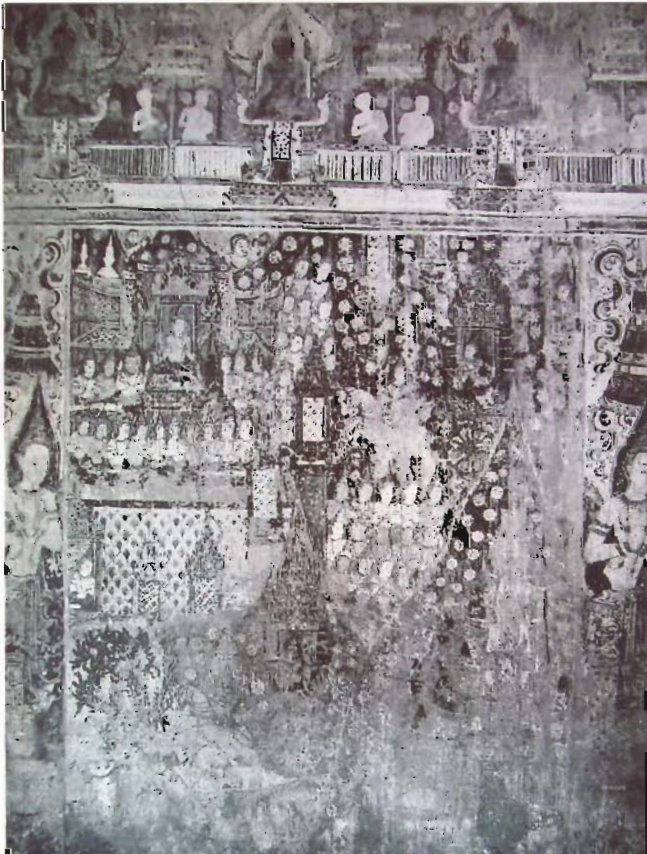


Fig.16 The Scene of Nimi Jataka, Wat Prasat, Nonthaburi



Fig.17 The Scene of *Nirvana*, Illustrated Manuscript of the Traiphum



Fig.18 The Scene of Heaven (Tavatimsa), Illuminated Manuscript of the Traiphum





Fig.19 The Scene of King Yama's Sphere, Illuminated Manuscript of the Traiphum



Fig. 20. The Scene of a Major Hell, Illuminated Manuscript of the Traiphum



Fig.21 The Scene of Mount Meru and Encircling Mountain Ranges and Oceans, Illustrated Manuscript of the Traiphum



Fig.22 The Scene of the Anotatta Lake, Illustrated Manuscript of the Traiphum



Fig.23 The Whole Scene, the Traiphum, Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya



Fig.24 The Scene of the Himavant Forest, Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya

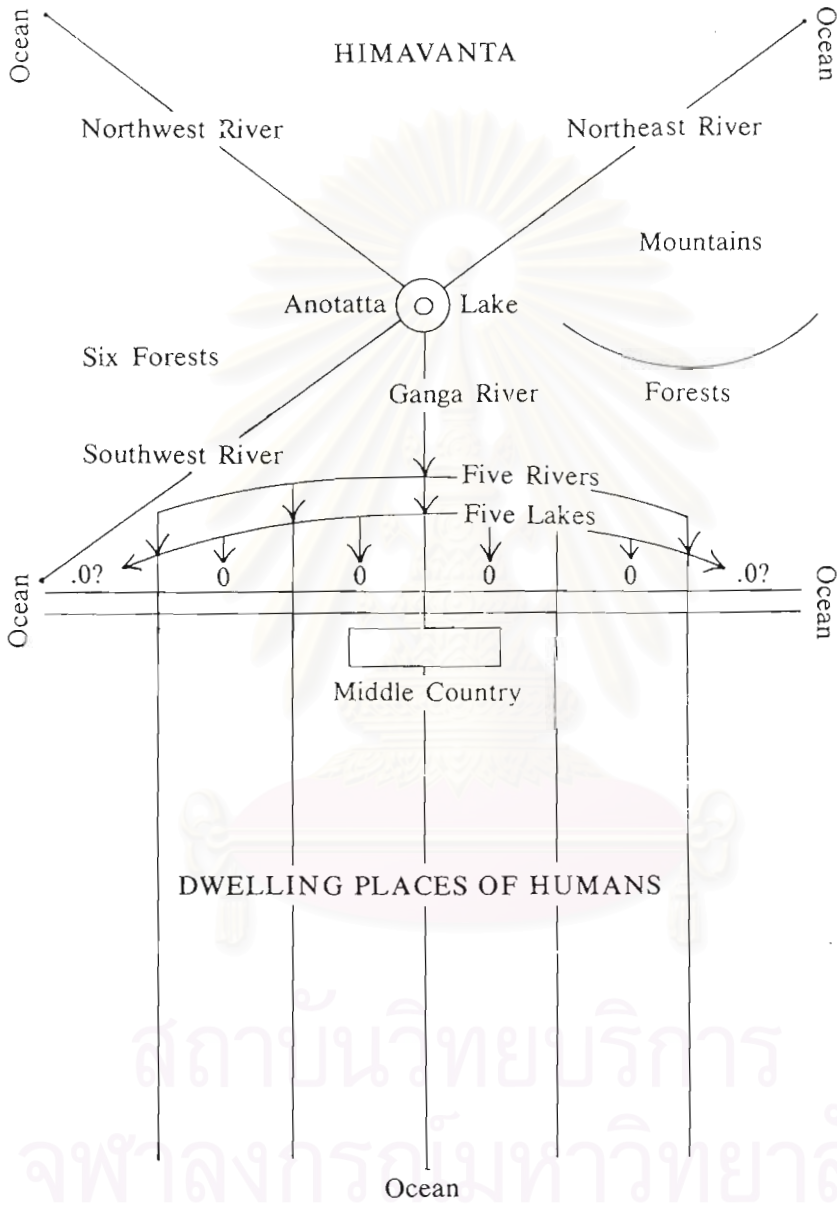


Fig.25 The Geography of the Jambu Continent



Fig.26 The Scene of the Anotatta Lake, Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn  
at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya



Fig.27 The Figures of *kinnara* and *kinnari*, and the Scene of the Vessantara,  
Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya



Fig.28 The Scene of Mount Meru and the Mountain Ranges, Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya



Fig.29 Horizontal Rows of Heavenly Palaces, Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya



Fig.30 The Scene of Hell, Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn  
at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya



Fig.31 Vignettes of Tortures, Pavilion for Somdet Phra Buddha Kosacharn  
at Wat Phutthaisawan, Ayutthaya



Fig.32 The Whole Scene, the *Ubosot* at Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam, Phetchaburi

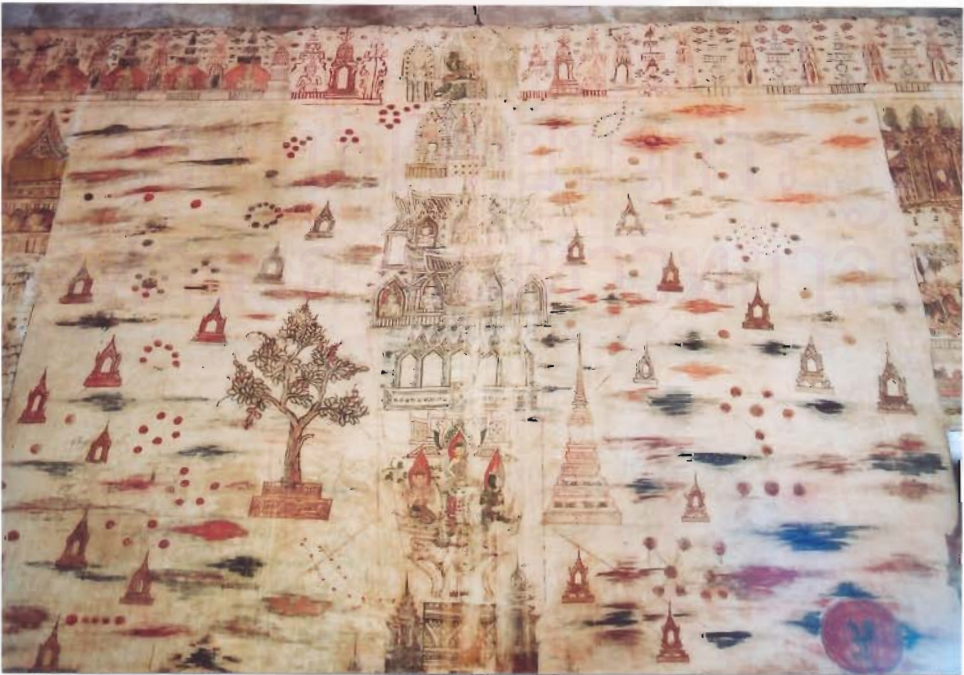


Fig.33 The Scene of Heaven, the *Ubosot* at Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam, Phetchaburi



## CHAPTER V

### TRAIPHUM MURAL PAINTINGS OF KING RAMA I'S REIGN

As part of the reconstruction of a new country, King Rama I built and restored a number of temples within and outside the capital. Thippakorawong records the names of the temples that were built and restored by King Rama I: Wat Phra Sri Ratanasasdam, Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho), Wat Saket, Wat Ratchaburana (Wat Liap), Wat Rakhang (Wat Baangwayai), Wat Khuhasawan (Wat Sala Sri Na), Wat Ratchasittharam (Wat Phlap), Wat Suwannaram (Wat Thong), Wat Samorai, Wat Jaeng, Wat Taitalat, Wat Khokrabu, Wat Suwan (Thippakorawong 301). However, this list omits many other temples built or restored by the king, such as Wat Suthat in Bangkok, Wat Suwandaram in Ayutthaya, and Wat Phra Phutthabat in Saraburi. In order to decorate the interior of these temples, King Rama I commissioned many mural paintings of the Traiphum which adorned the walls of many of the temples. In the words of a European visitor to the capital in the early Bangkok period, the walls of one of the monasteries, he says:

“were completely covered with representations of Heaven, earth, Hell, and one of the stars of which their books speak. There were angels, men, and monkeys, foreigners, or caricatures of white men, and dignified natives – scenes of gaiety and sadness – by land and sea – of war and peace – temples and brothels, with almost every sketch which could be framed from their sacred books, or conceived by their versatile limners ... My informant, the prince, remarked that the object of these paintings was to instruct the illiterate, through the medium of their senses” (Abeel 258).

Although royal support for the composition of the Traiphum manuscript ended before the reign of King Rama I, the execution of the Traiphum mural, supported by both royalty and commoners, has continued through the present time, except for the period of the reign of King Rama IV who denied the Buddhist cosmology. It is said that it is mainly through these murals, rather than manuscripts or sermons, that the Traiphum concept became known to all. It is believed that the pictorial representation of the

cosmic hierarchy in the murals “had a significant impact on the formation of popular Buddhist ideas” (Ishii 24).

This chapter intends to analyse the characteristics of King Rama I’s Traiphum mural paintings by examining their form and content and how the choice of form, location, arrangement, composition, style, and colour works in relation to the significance of the Hell scene in the Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I. However, analysing King Rama I’s Traiphum murals is made difficult because of the paucity of good examples. It has been more than 200 years since King Rama I started his programme of constructing religious structures, and it is extremely rare to find a wall painting that is still in its original condition. Many were seriously damaged in the course of time. Some have been lost completely, either because they were whitewashed or covered over by another painting, while yet others have undergone several restorations. Consequently, only a few mural paintings can be found in their original state, at least that of compositional balance.

For these reasons, the analysis includes, in addition, works commissioned by King Rama II and King Rama III. In fact, religious structures that were begun in the reign of King Rama I were not finished until the reign of King Rama III, both of whom were faithful to King Rama I’s original concept in completing these works. In addition, King Rama II and King Rama III followed in King Rama I’s footsteps with respect to his policies and activities in various fields without making any major changes. Thus, the successive periods from King Rama I to King Rama III are generally jointly referred to as the “Early Rattanakosin Period” for their continuity in policy and activities. All three kings commissioned quite a number of art works, including religious structures and mural paintings, as part of their broader policy. In this time of intense artistic activity, although the art works increased in sophistication over the years, they followed King Rama I’s basic form and content. In fact, paintings in the reign of King Rama I have been regarded as “the Best of the Rattanakosin Art,” while those of the reign of King Rama III are referred to as “the Golden Age of the Rattanakosin Art” because of their higher level of sophistication (No Na Paknam, Paintings 449).

Also included in the analysis in this chapter are art works made during the reigns of the three King Ramas but not supported by the royal court. Works commissioned by royalty often were the best representations of the period in question because their creation was supported by a rich supply of financial and human resources. They also occupied a very prestigious position. Such works stimulated artisans and patrons outside the court and exerted a considerable influence on their artistic activities. As a result, the form and content of the works in the capital extended to many

provinces.

The analysis in this chapter tries to determine the overall trend of the Traiphum paintings from King Rama I through to King Rama II and King Rama III via an examination of the fundamental features of form and content. The paintings to be analysed include those commissioned by King Rama I in the *ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, in the *ubosot* at Wat Ratchasittaram, and in the northern *viharn* at Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho), those commissioned by King Rama II and King Rama III in the *sala kan parian* at Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho), in the principal *viharn* at Wat Suthat, in the *ubosot* at Wat Suwandararam, and in the *ubosot* at Wat Suwannaram, and those made by others in the *ubosot* at Wat Yai Intharam, and in the *ubosot* at Wat Chaiyathid.

Among these works, the painting at Wat Dusitaram, commissioned by King Rama I, is considered to be very near to its original state and thus regarded as pure in form and content. Moreover, it has been praised as one of the best works of King Rama I from all those that have survived to this day. Therefore, this work will be analysed in great detail, and the others will be analysed mainly in comparison with it.

## 5.1 The *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram

### Background

Wat Dusitaram is a third-rank royal temple, situated on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, in Bangkok Noi district. The temple was founded during the Ayutthaya period,<sup>1</sup> but was enlarged and renovated by King Rama I's fifth daughter, Cau Fa Krom Luong Si Sunthonthep,<sup>2</sup> by command of the king. She built a new *ubosot*, an enclosure gallery, a belfry, and two groups of monks' quarters; murals were painted in the *ubosot*. Restoration projects were carried out during the reign of King Rama II, and also during the reign of King Rama III, but the *ubosot* was untouched. Silpa Bhirasri, an artist and scholar of Thai art who conducted an extensive study on Thai murals in the 1950s, opined that the mural paintings in the *ubosot* of Wat Dusitaram can be considered among the best in the art of Thailand, "comparable with the mural paintings of Wat Suwannaram" (39). Although some parts of it have already peeled off, the Traiphum mural at Wat Dusitaram is still in a state of more or less complete

<sup>1</sup> In those days, the temple was called Wat Sao Prakhon.

<sup>2</sup> Cau Fa Krom Luong Si Sunthonthep is the fifth daughter of King Rama I and Queen Amarindra.

preservation.

### **Architectural Plan**

The *ubosot* of Wat Dusitaram is, following in the long-standing tradition, built within the cosmologically correct plan of structures. The *ubosot* is located at the centre of the compound, surrounded by an enclosure gallery whose entrances are located at the four cardinal points, representing Mount Meru and its heavenly extensions. The exterior of the *ubosot* is decorated with various Hindu symbols.

### **Mural Arrangement**

All four walls of the *ubosot* are covered with mural paintings, all of which have themes with moral implications. On the upper half of the wall, above the entrance doors opposite the principal Buddha image, is the scene of the Defeat of Mara. (Fig. 34) The bays between the windows on the lateral walls and between the doors in front are painted with various scenes from the Life of the Buddha, arranged clockwise in sequence. Each of the door and window panels depicts celestial guardians. Above the windows on the lateral walls are heavenly beings in three registers, and above these registers is another register that depicts hermits, magicians and sorcerers in a row. (Fig. 35) All these beings are depicted in the act of worshipping, with their faces towards the presiding Buddha image at the centre. Above these registers on the uppermost part of the wall are floral motifs painted against the dark background.

### **Description**

On the wall behind the presiding Buddha image, opposite the scene of the Defeat of Mara, is the representation of the Traiphum. This Traiphum painting is composed of three main parts: Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell. These three realms are connected to each other in a vertical order by Mount Meru and seven encircling mountain ranges, which are placed at the centre of the panel. (Figs. 36, 37) At the upper part of the wall is the scene of Heaven, placed above Mount Meru and the mountain ranges that rise from the cosmic ocean at the foot. These mountains are depicted in the

traditional cross-section style as seven rock-like vertical pillars, each diminishing in size, but they are much loftier and thicker than the mountains in the Ayutthaya Traiphum murals. (Fig. 38) At the summit of each pillar are pavilions housing the guardians of the directions of the universe, and at the summit of the central pillar Mount Meru is a much more prominent pavilion or palace representing Tavatimsa Heaven. Indra's palace with a walled court rests on the plateau broadened out of the summit of Mount Meru. (Fig. 39) Indra, as customary with a green complexion, is seated on the throne at the centre of the palace, while his attendants who are paying their respects to him are seated on the floor below him. In the airy space above the mountain pillars are rows of floating heavenly mansions, in each of which a heavenly being is seated, as well as a group of heavenly beings flying in the air. Just below them is the sun-god Phra Athit on his chariot which is being pulled by the king-lion towards the left, and the moon-god Chandra on his chariot which is being pulled by horses towards the right.

The figures and buildings in the scene of Heaven are highly stylised. All the heavenly beings are depicted in profile and have restrained gestures. They are in royal attire with magnificent head-dress and accessories, indicating that they are superior beings. All the heavenly palaces are multi-tiered in shape, stressing the sharp and rigid zigzag outline, indicating that they are abodes for superior beings. Everything depicted is outlined with fine but decisive brushwork and painted in an earth-colour against a bright red background, which accentuates the entire scene of Heaven.

Below the scene of Heaven is the scene of the Realm of Men. Within the cosmic ocean on the right and the left of the mountain ranges are four different kinds of flat shapes, representing the Four Continents that comprise the Realm of Men. Below the ocean is the Jambu Continent represented by the view of the Himavant Forest. Natural elements, such as Anotatta Lakes, Phanjamahanati or the Five Great Rivers, hillocks, trees, plants, and real and mythical creatures constitute the scene of the Forest. (Fig. 40) These elements are depicted naturalistically both in style and colour.

The whole area at the lowermost part of the wall, below the narrow band at the lower edge of the Realm of Men, is the scene of Hell. (Fig. 41) At the upper right corner within the scene of Hell is the palace of King Yama, Hell's ruler who investigates the deeds of the recently dead and passes judgements on them. (Fig. 42) King Yama is a common figure in Khmer temples, such as Angkor Wat, and is profusely carved, together with the scenes of various levels of Hell, with each individual vignette of torture. King Yama's palace is a multi-tiered structure surrounded by a walled court, to which gates and watchtowers are attached. Within this enclosure, the king, in royal attire, is seated on the throne at the centre. Some men are entering the compound through the

gates, while others in front of the king awaiting the investigation. Just outside the compound are scenes depicting the places of torture that the sinners are to be taken to. Some are being dragged with ropes by the slaves of Hell, others are petitioning the Hell wardens. (Fig. 43) At the lower part of the panel are square-shaped compartments representing major Hells, surrounded by subsidiary Hells which are arranged in longer, intersecting rows. (Fig. 44)

A vast area of the rest of the scene of Hell consists of various vignettes of tortures, each of which corresponds to the sins committed in previous lives. Many of these vignettes are standard motifs, repeatedly depicted in illuminated manuscripts and mural paintings. One of the most prominent scenes is that of a kapok tree covered all over with sword-like thorns. A naked man and a woman are shown climbing up and down the tree, bleeding at various parts of the body from being pricked by the thorns. (Fig. 45) This torture is given to those who committed sexual misconduct in their previous lives. Another prominent scene is a huge iron cauldron, in which a number of naked men are being boiled in agony. (Fig. 46) This punishment is for those who beat precept-keeping monks and *brahmins* in their previous lives. Other scenes in this area include a person being slashed on the chest by an axe; another whose tongue is being pulled out by an iron clamp; and yet another whose head is being sliced by two men with a saw.

Above the sinners in the iron cauldron is the figure of Phra Malai,<sup>3</sup> which had never appeared in the Traiphum mural paintings. (Fig. 47) Phra Malai, in his usual red costume, is surrounded by an ornamental halo, similar to a flame or leaf, which marks off the sacred area. He is hovering with a view to not only giving them temporal release from the torments but also to granting them a better salvation – a chance of rebirth in Heaven and, ultimately, *Nirvana*, while the sinners are looking up him with the *wai* gesture in hope and reverence.

In addition, there are other beings whose punishment takes the form of physical deformity or an exaggerated frightful appearance of various sorts. These beings are *preta*, or suffering ghosts of the departed dead. Some of them include an extremely tall man, having the height of around 1.30m in the painting, who has an excessively

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<sup>3</sup> In the early nineteenth century, there was a growing production of the Phra Malai theme in illuminated manuscripts and on the lacquer boxes containing such texts. They were presented by those who commissioned them as a way of making merit and were used as a preaching text for funerals and weddings. The paintings depict key scenes from the story and usually include one or two views of hell (Ginsburg, *Thai Art and Culture* 78).

enlarged testicle drooping down nearly to the floor; (Fig. 48) a man with his belly immoderately swollen; an extremely thin man, emaciated to the point of being just skin and bones, with sunken cheeks and deep-set eyes; a man with no head but a face at the abdominal area; a man with extremely long arms and large hands; and men with the head of an animal, such as a frog, a horse, or a serpent. (Fig. 49) All these ugly and grotesque beings are naked and are bleeding at various parts of the body, including the head, chest, arms, legs, and genitals, with flames dart out from these parts. All of them have dreadful faces, in terror with their eyes wide open, and some are pleading for mercy in despair. Also added to the scene are a group of vultures flying in the air; some are holding hands and legs of children, adults, and even a monk in the mouth, some are pecking at them from above. (Fig. 50)

All these beings are depicted naturalistically, based on actual movements of human beings, using rough brushwork to augment their exaggerated frightful appearances. They are painted monotonously, with only beige for flesh and partly red for flame and blood, and the entire scene of Hell scene, except the sphere of King Yama, is painted against a dark brown background, making the flesh colour of sinners stands out. All these elements are placed in an unstructured, asymmetrical composition.

## Analysis

The Traiphum mural at Wat Dusitaram is not an exact and impartial portrayal of the three domains in the Traiphum, namely the World of Desire, the World of Form, and the World of Formless. It is the representation of the universe, focusing on three realms in the World of Desire: Tavatimsa Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell. A horizontal perspective, as adopted in the scene of the Realm of Men at Wat Phutthaisawan, is also incorporated in the scene of the Realm of Men in this painting, which consists of symbols of the Himavant Forest. However, the scene is greatly reduced in space and content; the Himavant Forest consists of a much smaller number of symbols and occupies a much narrower area below the scene of the ocean.

On the other hand, a vertical perspective, as adopted in the painting at Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam, is explored at greater length in this painting. This can clearly be seen in the composition where the three realms are connected in a strict vertical order centring on Mount Meru, the axis of the composition, creating ascending strata of the realms in a simple diagrammatic form. Like the painting at Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam that explores a vertical perspective, the hierarchical structure of the universe that centres on

Mount Meru and the underlying concept of *kamma*, and the concept of rebirth into progressively higher spheres of the universe, is simply and graphically depicted here. In this vertical diagram of ascending levels or worlds of existence, Heaven and Hell, placed above and below the Realm of Men, respectively, are depicted as possible places for rebirth in the next lives for us beings in the Realm of Men.

The difference between Heaven and Hell as possible places of rebirth is vividly portrayed by the clear division and contrast made between these scenes in terms of depicted components, composition, style, and colour. As for the scene of Heaven, unlike the painting at Wat Phutthaisawan where two horizontal rows of small-sized heavenly palaces of almost the same size and shape are depicted above Mount Meru, or the painting at Wat Ko Kaeo, where six heavenly realms are depicted equally one above the other from the summit of Mount Meru to the top of the panel, this painting depicts Tavatimsa Heaven prominently at the centre above Mount Meru, and other smaller heavenly palaces and beings are depicted beside and below Tavatimsa Heaven. All the other components of the scene of Heaven are also arranged in an orderly fashion in this symmetrical composition, centring on the vertical line created by Mount Meru and Tavatimsa Heaven, rendering the entire upper part of the painting of “Tavatimsa Heaven – Mount Meru” dominant. The highly stylised figures and buildings outlined in fine brushwork as well as the bright colour scheme, particularly the bright red background, provide a sense of brightness and glamour, magnificence and elegance, as well as order and balance to the scene, augmenting the splendour and awesome dignity of Tavatimsa Heaven and of its ruler Indra.

The scene of Hell, on the other hand, is much more expansive and elaborate in various ways than that found in Wat Phutthaisawan. In terms of proportion, the scene of Hell in this painting is depicted over a much larger area, occupying the entire lower panel below the Realm of Men, though the same scene at Wat Phutthaisawan was depicted only on the lower left part next to the window. As for composition, in the scene at Wat Phutthaisawan, square-shaped compartments that symbolise major and surrounding subsidiary Hells occupy a vast area at the centre, while the vignettes of individual tortures were placed in the bits of spaces around these squares. In the scene at Wat Dusitaram, however, the squares as abstract images of Hell are reduced in size and are placed at the lower part of the scene of Hell and, thus, are no longer the centre of the composition within the scene of Hell. Instead, a more extensive array of elements, namely King Yama and his palace, Hell wardens, major and subsidiary Hells, various vignettes of tortures, and the figure of Phra Malai, are spread over the whole area, constituting a single unified scene of Hell. This unified scene represents a more concrete



and extensive picture of Hell, portraying the process that all sinners go through in a specific way, from the entrance to the sphere of death, from the investigation of to the passing of judgement on past deeds, and from torture and agony to salvation.

Among these elements, the most expansive and elaborate are the more detailed vignettes of individual tortures, which occupy a vast area at the centre of the scene of Hell. Various forms of tortures, disproportionately large in number, are described in great detail with concrete images and are depicted one next to the other. In addition to traditional vignettes of tortures, such as men and women climbing up and down a kapok tree full of thorns, or men being boiled in a huge iron cauldron, a number of other vignettes which are not found in the previous paintings are included here. One such example is the *preta*, whose punishment takes the form of physical deformity. *Preta* overlaps *phi pret* in Thai popular beliefs as those who perpetually suffer from exceeding hunger and thirst and thus are dependent for their comfort and betterment on the offerings of their living relatives. In the Traiphum Phra Ruang, *preta* originally belong to a separate realm, the Realm of *Preta*, which is located below the Realm of Men between the Realm of Demons (*asura*) and the Realm of Animals. In this painting, however, *preta* are included in the scene of Hell without any distinction from Hell beings. Also added are some of the seemingly extraneous tortures, such as vultures devouring children, adults, and a monk. Here, all sorts of cruelties imaginable, each of which exhibits intense suffering, constitute part of a continuum of punishment in Hell. An alignment of such extensive vignettes of tortures with each concrete image recreates something like a “catalogue” of crimes and punishments within the scene of Hell.

All the elements adopted in the scene of Hell – a naturalistic way of depicting the various objects, the use of rough brushwork, the dark colour scheme with the dark background, and an asymmetrical, unstructured composition – augments the originally fearful image of Hell, transforming a mere “catalogue” of crimes and punishments recreated in the lower part of the panel to a chaotic state of “*Avici*”, or the Great Hell of Suffering without Respite (the lowest Hell among the eight Major Hells, and the lowest level of all in the hierarchy of the Traiphum). Such a concrete and extensive scene of Hell that contains a great profusion of vignettes of tortures and that is full of emotion and drama, not only evokes terror but also has a more immediate, powerful, and compelling impact on the beholder regarding the frightful consequences of committing sins.

The vivid contrast between the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell is augmented by the differences deriving from the locations of these scenes. Located on the wall behind the Buddha image, the Heaven’s pyramidal shape, or a large equilateral

triangle, created by Mount Meru and mountain ranges in descending heights topped by Tavatimsa Heaven, overlaps the shape of the principal Buddha image in front of it. This type of pyramidal shape painted against the red background works like a halo or aureole and serves to make the Buddha image stand out in the dark, with limited light from outside coming in through small windows set in the lateral walls. This not only makes the Buddha image look more prominent and auspicious but also augments the brightness and magnificence of the scene of Heaven.

On the other hand, the scene of Hell, being located at the lowest and the deepest place within the hall, cannot be seen from the audience floor. However, when walking behind the principal Buddha image, the scene, located at the lowermost part of the panel which is at the level of an adult's eyes, gradually appears out of the dark and the details of each torture as well as the whole picture of Hell is gradually visible. The experience of seeing such an originally frightful scene of Hell in such a situation is enough to make an unforgettable impact on them. During a sermon or chanting, such a fearful scene of Hell would dramatically be recalled through the glittering scene of Heaven in front of us. Such a hidden but recalled scene of Hell has an even more fearful impact on the audience, imprinting indelibly on their mind the contrast between Heaven and Hell. Through the use of such a vivid visual contrast, Heaven and Hell can be seen not just as abstract places for reward and punishment, but as more tangible places representing the goal of salvation (Heaven) and the obstacle to that goal (Hell).

Based on the structural presentation of the three realms within the World of Desire and how they are laid out in the painting – in vertical layers, in a symmetrical, vertical composition centring on the axis Mount Meru, it becomes apparent that the Traiphum mural at Wat Dusitaram intends to portray the universe in a simple, diagrammatic form, emphasising the hierarchical order among these realms, with Tavatimsa Heaven at its apex. Through such visual display, the concept of ascending planes or states of existence in which one will be reborn is vividly conveyed to the devotees, particularly to the laity whose main interest is confined to this-worldly states, rather than to transcendental other-worldly states.

Moreover, by including an expanded and elaborate scene of Hell, in starkly vivid contrast to the scene of Tavatimsa Heaven, the Traiphum mural, with its hierarchical structure, reminds the devotees of the fate awaiting them in the most graphic way. Unlike most of the other narrative stories, it does so very effectively by depicting not only the relationship between merit and reward, but by presenting, very dramatically, the relationship between sin and punishment.

The structure of the painting puts Tavatimsa Heaven at the apex of the moral hierarchy of the universe, so that Indra, who rules over Tavatimsa Heaven, appears allusively as the most righteous, ideal ruler. Thus, this representation of the Traiphum portrays the ideal kingship based on morality, or the Buddhist kingship. Through this representation, as well as by the symbolic association of the Thai king with Indra, the king's position at the apex of the Realm of Men is reasserted.

One can conclude, based on its form and content, as well as the fact that the painting adorns one of the principal walls of the *ubosot*, the most public religious space, that the Traiphum mural at Wat Dusitaram was meant to serve as the most powerful and convincing means of enforcing morality as well as legitimising the kingship to the people, particularly to the laity.

## 5.2 The *Ubosot* at Wat Ratchasittharam

### Background

Wat Ratchasittharam, formerly known as Wat Phlap, was founded during the Ayutthaya period on the northern bank of Khlong Bangkok Yai. King Rama I rebuilt this temple in a major restoration in 1783, just one year after his accession to the throne with a view to accommodating his religious instructor Yannasangwon (Suk).<sup>4</sup> Ever since that time, this monastery has kept strong ties with the monarchs. In fact, King Rama II built a residence pavilion in the compound of the monastery for his eldest son, later King Rama III, who received Buddhist ordination at the monastery. King Rama III further renovated it extensively and bestowed upon it its present royal name, Wat Ratchasittharam. Presently, it is ranked as a royal temple of the second class.

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<sup>4</sup> Yannasangwon (Suk) was the King's religious instructor in residence at Wat Tha Hoi at Ayutthaya. In 1782, the king appointed him Phra Racha Khana, and later, the Supreme Patriarch ((M.L.) Surasawasdi 30).

## Mural Arrangement

Mural paintings were made in the *ubosot* when King Rama I rebuilt it. All four walls of the building are covered with mural paintings, which are still maintained in their original state. The basic arrangement of the murals at Wat Ratchasittharam differs only slightly from that of Wat Dusitaram. The interior faces of the leaves of the wooden door and window carry paintings depicting the Celestial Guardians. In the bays between the windows on the south wall, there are murals depicting various scenes from the Vessantara Jataka, while in the bays on the north wall and the east wall, there are murals depicting scenes from the Life of the Buddha, including the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven. Above them, going all the way up to the ceiling, on the north and east walls, is a painting of the Celestial Assembly divided into four tiers. Above the two entrance doors facing the presiding Buddha image is a large mural depicting the scene of the Defeat of Mara. Opposite the painting of the Defeat of Mara, on the entire wall surface behind the presiding Buddha image, or the west wall, is the representation of the Traiphum.

## Description

The Traiphum mural at Wat Ratchasittharam is similar to that of Wat Dusitaram. Just like the painting at Wat Dusitaram, this painting mainly consists of three realms in the World of Desire, namely Tavatimsa Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell. (Fig. 51) At the centre of the painting are Mount Meru and seven encircling mountain ranges, on top of which lies Tavatimsa Heaven. (Fig. 52) The throne in Indra's palace is occupied by the figure of Buddha, instead of the customary figure of Indra, implying that this is the scene of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven. At the right and left of Indra's palace are some celestial palaces in each of which celestial beings are seated paying homage to the Buddha. To the right and left of the mountain ranges, the sun and the moon are floating in the air in circles. All these elements are painted against a red background and are depicted in a triangular area demarcated by zigzag dividers. Higher up on the wall, outside the triangle, are other celestial beings in two registers, gathering together to pay homage to the Buddha.

Below the scene of Heaven is a white-painted area representing the cosmic ocean, from which Mount Meru and mountain ranges rise. Within the ocean on both sides of the mountain ranges are four kinds of flat shapes, representing the Four

Continents that belong to the Realm of Men. Below the ocean is the Jambu Continent, the representation of our world. The scene of the Jambu Continent is, however, not detailed, represented only by valleys and hills painted in brown which stretch out for the width of the panel.

The area below the Realm of Men is occupied by the scene of Hell, depicted in two layers. At the centre of the upper layer is King Yama's palace, where King Yama is seated on the throne flanked by his attendants. (Fig. 53) Some men are entering the king's compound through the gate, while others are awaiting the sentence that is to be passed upon them by the king. Some of them have shackles on their necks, sometimes on their hands and legs as well. (Fig. 54)

To the right and left of King Yama's palace are various vignettes, which can often be found in the scene of the Realm of *Preta* in the illuminated manuscripts of the *Traiphum*. To the right are illustrations of a monk engaged in a series of acts: a monk in the woods scoops water from a river into a bowl, carries it in his hands to a dying man who is extremely thin and tall, and pours the water into the mouth of the man. Also depicted in this area are a number of men having the head of an animal. To the left are also a few scenes: a man and woman riding on an elephant's back; a man sitting in a humble carriage made of rods being carried by four men; men with the body of a buffalo pulling a plough; and a man in the shape of a serpent rolling on the ground. (Fig. 55)

The lower layer below the zigzag divider is a scene painted against a black background, where various vignettes of tortures are depicted. Although the lower part of this section has already been destroyed to a considerable extent, fragments of some of the vignettes are still visible. Just under King Yama's palace are square-shaped compartments in vertical layers in which sinners in torment are constrained. (Fig. 56) Around them are other vignettes of tortures: men placed in a long hollow that occupies a space from the top to the bottom of a mountain; a man with no head but a face at the abdominal area being pecked at by a vulture at the shoulder. Additional vultures are spread over the scene: a huge vulture is standing on a tall tree at the left, while others are gnawing at a man's hand, leg, and face while flying in the air. Also, there are big and small fire balls flying around in the dark.

## Analysis

Like the painting at Wat Dusitaram, this painting consists of three parts: Heaven, mainly represented by Tavatimsa Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell; the three realms are connected to each other in a vertical order centring on Mount Meru. In this painting, however, the Realm of Men is excessively reduced, to the size of just a horizontal strip representing valleys and hills. By this reduction, the contrast between Heaven and Hell as the places for rewards and punishments for the beings in the Realm of Men is enhanced.

The contrast is further enhanced by the composition, style, and colour of individual scenes. As for the scene of Heaven, while overall composition is simplified, the magnificence and elegance of Tavatimsa Heaven is augmented by the triangular divider depicted at the upper part that accords with the triangular shape comprised of Tavatimsa Heaven and the mountain ranges and of the presiding Buddha image in front of it. Also, the placement of the Buddha figure on the throne at the centre, instead of the figure of Indra, implying that it is the scene of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven, enhances the significance of Tavatimsa Heaven in relation to the Buddha.

As for the scene of Hell, the lower part of the painting has already been lost and thus we cannot know how the whole picture of the scene of Hell was originally constructed. However, like the scene of Hell at Wat Dusitaram, this scene depicts an extensive and general picture of Hell by including figures associated with Hell, such as King Yama and the Hell warden, while maintaining the aspect of “catalogue” and “*Avicī*” by the inclusion of extensive vignettes of tortures, including some not found at Wat Dusitaram. Just like the painting at Wat Dusitaram, such an elaborate scene of Hell is made in vivid contrast to the scene of Heaven above.

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

### 5.3 The Northern *Viharn* at Wat Phra Chetuphon

#### Background

Wat Phra Chetuphon, commonly known as Wat Pho, was formerly a public temple called Wat Photharam, dating back to the late Ayutthaya period. Located at the rear to the south of the Grand Palace, Wat Pho was re-established by King Rama I when he constructed the capital on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River. The king enlarged Wat Pho as the biggest temple in Bangkok, accessible to all the people, thereby providing them more extensive opportunities for engaging in religious practices (Matics, Wat Phra Chetuphon 417). Presently, Wat Pho is a royal temple of the first class and enshrines King Rama I's relic.

Wat Pho has one of the biggest collections of mural paintings since the beginning of the early Rattanakosin period, but at one time it had even bigger collections of mural paintings. During the reign of King Rama I, mural paintings were made in many buildings, including the *ubosot*, the *viharn*, the cloister that surround the *ubosot*, the four directional *viharns* attached to the cloister, the *mondop* (scripture repository), and the surrounding pavilions. Although many of these paintings have disappeared or been replaced by another a long time ago, a few written records provide information on the details or the memories of the original paintings (Boisselier 28; Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon).

#### Architectural Plan

King Rama I had a rather small original *ubosot* dismantled and a more impressive structure built at the site. The king enshrined an Ayutthaya Buddha image, the Phra Buddha Deva Pratimakorn brought from Wat Sala Si Na (Wat Khuhasawan), Thonburi, in the new *ubosot*, while the original image of the old *ubosot* was enshrined at the *sala kan parian* (the study hall) at the south-west corner of the temple compound which was constructed by the king specifically for this purpose. The king also constructed various buildings in which hundreds of images, brought from different provinces, are housed.

In the renovation of Wat Pho, the temple was made to follow the cosmological model as the symbolic representation of divine order of the universe in this world. The large number of buildings and decorative elements constitute part of this symbolism.

There are two parts in the ecclesiastical section of the monastery. (Fig. 57) The eastern part represents the main part of the cosmology. Here, the new *ubosot* is enclosed by extensive cloisters, to which four *viharns* are attached in each of the four directions. *Chedis* and L-shaped *viharns* are placed in each corner, beyond which are enclosing walls that surround the entire monastery. The *ubosot* and the cloisters represent Mount Meru. The four directional *viharns* represent the Four Continents, while the enclosing walls represent the boundary walls of the universe.

The western part of the monastery represents the subordinate parts of the cosmology. The great *chedis* and the library represent various parts of this world, or the Jambu Continent. Sixteen small pavilions built at the periphery represent subsidiary regions. The *sala kan parian* built at the south-west end of the area represents "Hell" (Smerchai 121; Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon 1-43).

### Description and Analysis

Many of the buildings at Wat Pho were adorned with mural paintings. The Traiphum cosmology adorned the interior of the northern *viharn*, one of the four directional *viharns* built between the cloisters. While three of these directional *viharns* house important Buddha images brought in from the temples in the provinces, the northern *viharn* houses a new Buddha image, Phra Phuttha Palalai, which King Rama I specially ordered to be cast and housed at this particular *viharn*<sup>5</sup> (Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon 177). All four *viharns* used to be adorned with mural paintings. Most of these paintings are of traditional themes: the eastern *viharn* illustrates the scene of the Defeat of Mara, and Ten Meditations upon Ten Kinds of Vileness, or Ten Stages of Decomposing Corpses; the southern *viharn* illustrates various scenes based upon the Buddha's sermons, including the First Sermon and the Sermon to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven; and the western *viharn* illustrates the story of the Hair Relic of the Bodhisattva. In the northern *viharn*, on the other hand, the walls were painted with conventional representations of the Traiphum cosmology, consisting of Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell. However, the details of the illustrations are not available to us because they were whitewashed a long time ago (Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon 365).

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<sup>5</sup> The image is shown seated in a western fashion on a small mound of artificial rocks, with an elephant holding a jug and a monkey holding a honeycomb on either side (Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon 177).



Although the northern viharn is not the principal structure within the whole temple compound, considering the particular interest paid to this viharn, the Traiphum mural painting adorned at this viharn is considered to be of particular importance to the king in those days.

#### 5.4 The Sala Kan Parian at Wat Phra Chetuphon

##### Background

Ever since its foundation, Wat Pho has continuously been supported by every monarch, particularly during the reign of King Rama III, a pious Buddhist who spent most of his free time constructing temples and supervising other religious works. It was during his reign that Wat Pho was extensively renovated and enlarged. Many of the buildings at Wat Pho had been in a deteriorating condition when King Rama III visited in 1831. Also, the *ubosot* constructed by King Rama I according to Ayutthaya prototypes was thought to be too narrow and cramped. In order to make the entire monastery more extensive and glorious than ever, the king ordered a comprehensive restoration, which lasted for 16 years, from 1832 to 1848.

Through this restoration, the total area of the temple ground was extended to twenty-two acres, while old buildings were renovated and a few new buildings added. The main works in the restoration were: the enlargement of the *ubosot*, the construction of the *viharn* for the reclining Buddha image, the reconstruction of the *sala kan parian*, the erection of two great *chedis*, and the restoration and enlargement of the residential quarters for the monks. Also, all architectural components were refurbished to clarify the symbolic nature of the complex created by King Rama I.

Furthermore, although King Rama III was faithful to King Rama I's desire to make Wat Pho the religious centre, he expanded its scope considerably. Instead of its previous focus on a strictly religious sphere, he made it the country's religious and cultural centre which provided comprehensive knowledge about all fields for the benefit of the greatest number, particularly for the lay devotees who might not otherwise have the opportunity to attain such knowledge (Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon 41-3; Boisselier 105) The king collected and compiled various kinds of information, which covered a wide range of subjects, such as medicine and astrology. In order to preserve and communicate such information, the use of visual images increased tremendously. Various art forms, such as engraving on stone, black and gold lacquer, mother-of-pearl

inlays on wood or lacquer, as well as mural paintings were adopted to convey information about such an expanded range of subjects effectively. They were all intended to contribute to the enhancement of the symbolic nature of the entire temple complex. The mural paintings on the walls of the extensive buildings that the king constructed and restored, including the *ubosot*, the *viharn* for the reclining Buddha, and the four directional *viharns*, are along the same lines.

### **Architectural Plan and Mural Description and Analysis**

Among these murals, the Traiphum cosmology was illustrated in the *sala kan parian*, a preaching hall first built by King Rama I to house the venerated Phra Phuttha Satsada image that had been enshrined at the original *ubosot*. At that time, the hall was made to symbolise “Hell” within the temple complex’s architectural representation of cosmology. During King Rama III’s restoration, while the hall maintained this symbolic nature, its simple wooden structure of an open pavilion was renovated into a much more enlarged and permanent monastic structure with solid walls. Once it had such a solid structure, just like the *ubosot* or the *viharn*, the hall became the scholastic centre within the monastic complex, augmenting the original function of the building of being the *sala kan parian*, or the teaching hall, to be used for religious instructions (Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon 33-4).

The new *sala kan parian* was adorned with mural paintings, unlike the previous one. Although these paintings have all disappeared, it is known that the entire interior of the hall was covered with scenes of Hell which were especially famous for their vivid illustrations of various vignettes of tortures (Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon 38). According to the graphically eloquent descriptions of a few Occidental who visited there, the Hell scene in the restored structure maintained the same characteristics as those found in earlier paintings of the scene of Hell during King Rama I’s time. Sir John Bowring describes the scenes of torments in the Hell scene at the *sala kan parian* as follows:

“...One man was undergoing the operation of eating his private parts, as a punishment for incontinence; a glutton was seen reduced to starvation; a wine-bibber was laid on his back, exposed to the burning sun; a liar had his tongue cut out; an incompetent doctor was being squeezed to death under the stone with which they prepare their

medicines. Flaying, scalping, burning alive, and multitudinous other horrid forms of death, were being inflicted, most of them having reference to some particular crime committed in the body...” (Bowring, Journal, II: 284-285; Matics, Wat Phra Chutuphon 380)

Such a depiction of the scene of Hell in the interior of the teaching hall, which in itself symbolises “Hell” within the complex’s architectural representation of cosmology, further contributes to enhance the symbolic nature of the temple. Undoubtedly, with such lively depictions of sins and punishments in the teaching hall, moral lessons would be more effectively conveyed to its audience.

## 5.5 The Principal *Viharn* at Wat Suthat Thepwararam

### Background

Wat Suthat Thepwararam, a first-rank royal temple, is one of the largest monasteries in the capital, located right in the heart of Bangkok. Construction of the monastery was started in 1807 by King Rama I and was continued by King Rama II and King Rama III. It was completed towards the end of King Rama III’s reign in 1851.

### Architectural Plan

King Rama I intended this temple to be the central monastery of the capital and for its architectural layout to correspond to the cosmologically correct arrangement of structures. The principal *viharn*, made to enshrine Phra Sakayamuni, is the central structure enclosed by walled galleries, representing Mount Meru and the surrounding chains of oceans and mountains.

### Mural Arrangement and Description

The interior of this principal *viharn* was covered with mural paintings on the theme of Traiphum cosmology during the reign of King Rama III. All four walls of the *viharn*, almost from the floor to the ceiling, are adorned with scenes from the lives of

twenty-seven Buddhas of the Past. (Fig. 58) Each of the twenty-seven lives is depicted individually in a separate heavenly palace setting, which are arranged successively on all four walls in a clockwise direction, beginning with the wall facing the presiding Buddha image. An alignment of these heavenly palaces creates a minutely detailed panoramic view of celestial regions within the interior.

The beams which run on both sides above the presiding Buddha image are covered with the scene of Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven. In the middle of one of the beams is Indra's palace flanked by a row of heavenly palaces. Opposite Indra's palace on the other side of the beams is Chulamani Chedi, also flanked by a row of heavenly palaces.

Mural paintings also adorn the surface of eight huge square columns; four each in two rows on both sides of the Buddha image. Each of the four faces of the square column is 1.5 meters wide; they depict various features of the worlds according to the Traiphum cosmology. The upper part of these columns is covered with various cosmic elements. While the first two columns nearest the entrance represent Mount Meru, the rests represent the surrounding ranges of mountains and the walls of the universe. Simultaneously, the first two columns nearest the entrance depict cities, lakes, and parks that belong to the Jambu Continent and the next two depict the sun and the moon.

The lower parts of these columns illustrate the scenes of the Realm of Men and the lower realms in the World of Desire. The first column nearest the entrance, on the right row, has the scenes of the Four Continents that float on the cosmic ocean. The lands and inhabitants of these continents are meticulously and richly drawn. The first column on the left row is covered with the illustration of the Realm of *Asura*. The columns in the middle of the rows depict various scenes from the Himavant Forest. A number of lakes and mountains as well as real and mythical animals, such as *kinnara* and *kinnari*, *singh*, and elephants, constitute the vision of the idyllic heavenly land of Himavant Forest. (Silpa 42)

The last columns, nearest to the back wall, have the scenes of Hell and the Realm of *Preta*. Within the scene of Hell, the sphere of King Yama, who rules over the Realm of Hell Beings, is depicted in the upper part. (Fig. 59) Below it are various vignettes of tortures, most of which can also be found at Wat Dusitaram: men and women on a tree covered with thorns (Fig. 60); men being boiled in a hot iron cauldron (Fig. 61); men being piled up in a vertical hollow in a mountain; a man being slashed at the chest by an axe; a man being cut at the head by a saw; a man having his tongue pulled out by an iron clamp. Next to the iron cauldron stands the figure of Phra Malai. (Fig. 61) Various kinds of *pretas* are also included: a man having the face of an animal;

a man having no head but a face at the abdominal area.

## Analysis

The Traiphum cosmology provides the major theme for the paintings that decorate the interior of the *viharn* at Wat Suthat. However, the cosmology is not illustrated in the usual way, that is, on a two-dimensional plane surface of the wall behind the presiding Buddha image. Instead, the entire interior of the *viharn* represents a cosmological model, with the walls and columns covered with paintings representing various aspects of the Traiphum. As such, it is a spatial representation of the Traiphum.

The major part of the temple's enclosed interior surface, namely the surface of all four walls, the ceiling, and the timbers are covered with an alignment of minutely detailed representation of celestial regions, rendering the entire surrounding area of the interior into a representation of the panorama of the celestial globe cut into half. Here, the minutely detailed individual scenes are no longer discernible in detail to the eyes of the beholders. All that remains is an impression of the continuation of colours. In its entirety, the scene of Heaven creates an impression of solemn and overpowering grandeur within the interior.

The upper part on each of the eight columns represents the Jambu Continent and various cosmic elements surrounding Mount Meru. The location and distance of these columns from the columns that portrays Mount Meru, which is located nearest the entrance, is a symbolic representation of the relative location and distance of these realms and elements from Mount Meru.

The lower part on each of the eight columns represents the Four Continents and the Himavant Forest that belongs to the Realm of Men as well as the lower realms in the World of Desire, namely the Realms of *Asura*, the Realm of *Preta*, and the Realm of Hell Beings. Like the upper part, the location and distance of these columns from the columns that portray Mount Meru, which is located nearest to the entrance, is a symbolic representation of the relative location and distance of these realms from Mount Meru. In this spatial arrangement of columns from the centre to the periphery, the descending strata of the universe, primarily within the World of Desire, or the relationship of the higher to the lower realms, is represented.

The scene of Hell and the scene of the Realm of *Preta*, with the profusion highly detailed vignettes of tortures, placed next to each other at the end of the row nearest to the back wall, which is the deepest and the darkest place within the hall,

maintains the aspects of “catalogue” as well as “*Avici*”. Such a scene of Hell in the midst of a panorama of celestial regions creates a vivid contrast between these two regions.

## 5.6 The *Ubosot* at Wat Suwandararam

### Background

Wat Suwandararam, formerly called Wat Thong, is a royal temple of the ancestry of the Chakri Dynasty. The temple was built in the late Ayutthaya period by the father of King Rama I on the grounds of the family home located within the city wall of Ayutthaya, which was abandoned after the fall of Ayutthaya. Three years after his accession to the throne, King Rama I entirely renovated the temple with the help of his close younger brother, Somdej Krom Phra Rajbavorn Mahasurasinghanad. The temple was redone to follow the traditional architectural composition, consisting of the *ubosot*, which is surrounded by an enclosing walls, the *viharn*, the *chedi*, and the *sala kan parian*. Since its completion, apart from its normal use for religious purposes, the *ubosot* was used for oath-taking ceremonies by successive kings during the period of absolute monarchy.

### Mural Arrangement

Mural paintings at the *ubosot* of Wat Suwandararam were originally made in the reign of King Rama I but were repainted in the reign of King Rama III. The entire interior surface of the *ubosot* is painted in the traditional theme, composition, and style. The panels between windows on the lateral walls depict scenes from the Jataka tales. Above these panels are the paintings of the Celestial Assembly in registers. The east wall, or the wall facing the principal Buddha image, is adorned with a large painting depicting the scene of the Defeat of Mara, while the opposite wall is adorned with the painting of the Traiphum.

## Description

The upper part of the Traiphum mural contains the scene of Heaven, painted against a red background. (Fig. 62) At the centre are Mount Meru and the surrounding seven mountain ranges. At the summit of Mount Meru is an oval-shaped land, on which Tavatimsa Heaven lies. At the centre of Tavatimsa Heaven is Indra's palace, flanked by Chulamani Chedi to the right and the Parijataka tree to the left. Over the vast area above the mountain ranges are a great number of celestial palaces, all of the same size and shape.

The area below these mountain ranges, or the area that the mountain pillars rise from, is the ocean represented by stylised wave patterns painted in white. In the middle of the ocean is a tunnel-like narrow, hollow strip connected to Hell below at both ends. In this hollow, a number of naked men, some with the face of an animal or another with huge testicles, are crawling forward to escape from there. (Fig. 63)

Below the ocean, at the lowermost section of the painting, is the scene of Hell. At the centre of the Hell scene is a triangular area in which King Yama's sphere is depicted. (Fig. 64) This triangle is much bigger in size than that of Wat Ratchasittharam, occupying a vast area in the middle of the scene of Hell. King Yama's sphere consists of various elements that we have already seen in the paintings at Wat Dusitaram and Wat Ratchasittharam. At the centre is King Yama's palace; he is seated on the throne flanked by his attendant subjects. To the left are Hell wardens and groups of sinners awaiting judgement, while to the right are some women performing various activities both inside and outside a pavilion.

The area on both sides of the triangle is occupied by various vignettes of tortures painted against a black background. Only a few square-shaped compartments in which sinners are constrained are placed sparsely in some parts of this area. (Fig. 65) The rest of the area is occupied by a large number of vignettes of tortures, most of which can also be found in the painting at Wat Dusitaram. Some of the prominent features are: a man and a woman climbing up and down a tree full of thorns (Fig. 66); men being boiled in a huge iron cauldron (Fig. 65); men piled up in a vertical hollow made in a rocky mountain, a man having his tongue pulled out by a clamp, and a man having his body cut by an axe. The *pretas* added to these vignettes are: a man with huge testicles, a man with no head but a face at the position of the abdomen; and men with the face of an animal.

## Analysis

In terms of the composition of the whole scene, the painting at Wat Suwandararam is further simplified compared to that of Wat Dusitaram or Wat Ratchasittharam. This painting focuses on two realms; only Heaven and Hell are depicted, but the Realm of Men is not included. The scenes of Heaven and Hell are placed in the upper and lower sections of the painting respectively, demarcated by a straight horizontal strip painted in white representing the cosmic ocean. Within the ocean, on either side of the mountain ranges, there is no illustration of the Four Continents. In the area below the ocean, there is no illustration of Himavant Forest either. Instead, a narrow strip is depicted in the middle of the ocean in which a number of vignettes of tortures are depicted. This scene is thought to be continuous with the scene of Hell below it. By excluding the scene of Realm of Men and by expanding the scene of Hell, the painting places its focus more on the contrastive relationship between Heaven and Hell.

In terms of content, the contrast between these two scenes is also enhanced. As for the scene of Heaven, the composition becomes much more simplified, while decorative elements are reduced or even excluded. All the surrounding celestial palaces, much greater in number, are depicted exactly in the same size and shape. No celestial beings are depicted in these palaces nor are they shown flying in the air. Even the sun and the moon are not placed in the air on either side of the mountain ranges. Thus, its focus is quite simple: a rather bland scene of Heaven, the Tavatimsa Heaven, in relation to Mount Meru.

Such simplification is not found in the scene of Hell. Concrete images show further elaboration and expansion, especially the dominant composition of the sphere of King Yama and the extensive illustrations of the vignettes of tortures, while squares, as abstract images of Hell, are further reduced in size and number. The continuous scene of Hell represented by a narrow strip full of vignettes of tortures also contributes to the expansion of the scene of Hell. By such expansion and elaboration, the Hell scene enhances the aspects of both “catalogue” and “*Avici*”.

In this painting, therefore, the contrast between the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell are made both by the whole composition, which is limited to scenes of only Heaven and Hell, and by the vivid contrast in the content of these two realms.



## 5.7 The *Ubosot* at Wat Suwannaram

### Background

Wat Suwannaram, located in Thonburi, has been in existence since the Ayutthaya period and was formerly known as Wat Thong, “the Golden Monastery”. King Rama I had the old monastery pulled down and a completely new establishment erected. The *ubosot* and the enclosing wall and a number of other structures were built at this time. After its erection, Wat Suwannaram was particularly important for holding royal cremation ceremonies for the nobility and other officials. King Rama III, a pious supporter of Buddhist temples, built and restored many temples, both within and outside the capital.<sup>6</sup> As part of this program of construction activities, the king renovated Wat Suwannaram in 1831. At this time, the *ubosot* was completely reconstructed and the old mural paintings executed during the reign of King Rama I were replaced by other paintings in due course. These new paintings were made by the reign’s best muralists working for King Rama III: Luang Wichit Chetsada (Thong Yu) and Luang Seni Borirak (Khong Pae), and are said to be the best among the paintings made during the reign of King Rama III, reputed to be “the Golden Era of Thai Mural Painting” (Sangaroon, Wat Suwannaram 26-31).

### Mural Arrangement

The mural paintings in the *ubosot* of Wat Suwannaram are arranged in the same layout as in many other temples from the Rattanakosin period. Above the window on the lateral walls is the Celestial Assembly in four registers. Beneath them between the windows are the mural bays depicting the Ten Jatakas; the first nine of the Ten Jatakas are illustrated on the northwest wall, while the tenth Jataka, the Vessantara, is profusely illustrated on all bays on the other side of the lateral wall and on some parts of the front and back walls. On the front wall above the door is the scene of the Defeat of Mara. Below it between the three doors are two large mural bays that depict scenes from the

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<sup>6</sup> In 1832-3 King Rama III had simultaneous celebrations in honour of nine monasteries in his building activities programme: Wat Ratchaorotsaram, Wat Ratchasitharam, Wat Phakhini Nat, Wat Moli Lok, Wat ARun Ratchawararam, Wat Rakhang Khosittharam, Wat Phraya Tham, Wat Suwannaram, and Wat Saket.

Life of the Buddha; one depicting the Birth and the other the Great Departure. In addition, the interior faces of the leaves on all doors and windows depict the Celestial Guardians. The wall behind the presiding Buddha image above the doors, where customarily the Traiphum cosmology is illustrated, is adorned with a composite scene of episodes from the Life of the Buddha: the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven, and the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven. However, aspects of the Traiphum cosmology are also illustrated in this composite scene.

### Description

The whole composition of this painting is very similar to that of the Traiphum mural. The upper part consists of Mount Meru and seven concentric mountain ranges and oceans. (Fig. 67) At the top of Mount Meru is Tavatimsa Heaven, at the centre of which is Indra's palace with a walled court. Here, the Buddha is seated on the throne at the centre, while the celestial beings are seated below him, depicted as paying respect to him. (Fig. 68) This scene represents the episode of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven. In the airy space on both sides of Mount Meru are a number of celestial beings gathering together to listen to Buddha's sermon. Also depicted in this area are the sun and the moon rotating around Mount Meru.

Below the ocean at the foot of Mount Meru is the scene of the Realm of Men, which consists of various scenes of the lives of the Buddha and the devotees, both the clergy and the laity, instead of the customary scene of the Himavant Forest. At both ends of the panels are two huge palaces surrounded by woods, where the nobles and commoners are engaged in various activities. Between these palaces are a few familiar scenes depicting episodes from the Life of the Buddha; all of the activities in the episodes originally took place in the Realm of Men at the time of the Buddha. They include the scenes of the Great Miracle of the Double Appearances, of the Collapsing Towers that Opponents of the Buddha Built to Demonstrate their Superior Power, and of the Buddha Giving Sermons to the Kings and Deities. (Fig. 69) In a small hollow beneath the earth, at the lowest part just in the middle, is the scene of Hell. Here, a few Hell beings, all naked, are petitioning with their hands in *wai* gesture. (Fig. 70)

In addition, from the higher level of Tavatimsa Heaven scene to the middle level of the scene of the Realm of Men, just above the scene of Hell, are long staircases connecting the scenes of Heaven and the Realm of Men. There are three staircases, and the Buddha is shown as descending the staircase in the middle,<sup>7</sup> while a number of celestial beings and Buddha's disciples are attending him. This scene represents the episode of the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven.

### Analysis

What is unique about this painting is that the composite scenes of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven and the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven are illustrated in the framework of the Traiphum cosmology. As can be seen in the painting at Wat Chong Nongsi, the episode of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven was already depicted during the Ayutthaya period, although not within the cosmological framework. In this painting at Wat Chong Nongsi, this episode was represented only by the figure of Buddha seated on the throne at the centre of Tavatimsa Heaven, but other cosmic elements, such as Mount Meru and other realms, are not juxtaposed with the figure of the Buddha. (Fig. 15) At Rattanakosin temples, such as Wat Ratchasitharam, the same scene was also symbolised by the figure of Buddha, instead of the figure of Indra, seated on the central throne intended for Indra within the usual representation of the Traiphum.

As for the episode of the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven, an example is found in a cotton banner at Wat Dok Ngon Chedi, Chiang Mai, made in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>8</sup> This painting is depicted in a much narrower cosmological framework. The central part of the banner is occupied by a huge triple staircase, and the Buddha is descending the staircase from Tavatimsa Heaven, depicted at the uppermost part, to the Realm of Men at the bottom. On either side of the staircase and on its lateral flights are a gathering of heavenly beings celebrating this event. (Fig. 71) The focus is on the act of Buddha descending the staircase from Heaven to the Realm of Men. Scenes of Heaven and the Realm of Men that exhibit the relative location of these realms are small in

<sup>7</sup> According to the Life of the Buddha, the staircase in the middle is a crystal one for the Buddha, while the one on his left is a golden one for Indra and the other one on his right is a silver one for Brahma.

<sup>8</sup> The banner is stored in the National Gallery, Bangkok.

proportion and there is no illustration of the scene of Hell.

In the painting that focused on the episodes of the Life of the Buddha that take place in Heaven and the Realm of Men, Hell is originally a subsidiary component. In fact, the scene of Hell in this painting is relatively small in proportion, occupying only a small portion in the lower middle part. Also, there are far fewer vignettes of torture. Moreover, the variety of the vignettes is also reduced, showing only naked men in the gesture of petitioning.

However, by the inclusion of the scene of Hell at the lower order, the painting clearly demonstrates that the episodes are, in fact, structured within the framework of the Traiphum. In this framework, the episodes from the life of the Buddha are conveyed clearly in relation to the moral hierarchical order.

## 5.8 The *Ubosot* at Wat Yai Intharam

### Background

Wat Yai Intharam, founded in Chonburi at the end of Ayutthaya, is one of the important non-royal monasteries in eastern Thailand. According to Silpa, the paintings in the *ubosot* were created during the reign of King Rama I and were restored in 1914 (20).

### Mural Arrangement

The interior is decorated with the paintings in the usual arrangement. The mural bays between the windows illustrate the Jataka stories, while the upper part of the lateral walls has the Celestial Assembly in three registers. The wall facing the Buddha image carries the scene of the Defeat of Mara, while the opposite wall, the wall behind the image, has a mural depicting the Traiphum. According to Silpchai Chinprasert, the last two murals were originally made during the reign of King Rama III.

## Description

The upper part of the painting is the scene of Heaven, painted against a bright blue background. At the centre are Mount Meru and the surrounding mountain ranges. (Fig. 72) At the summit of these mountains are celestial palaces, all in the same size and shape, in each of which three celestial beings are seated. The one slightly bigger than the rest at the centre represents Tavatimsa Heaven, in which Indra, in customary green complexion, is seated in the middle flanked by two celestial beings. (Fig. 73) On the body of Mount Meru are large palaces representing the Realm of Four Guardian Kings. Above the mountain ranges are several celestial palaces floating in the air.

The wide white area from the upper level of the mountain ranges to the level below the mountain ranges represents the cosmic ocean that the universe rests on. Within the ocean on both sides of the mountain ranges are four different kinds of flat shapes that represent the Four Continents.

Below the ocean is the scene of the Realm of Men. Various elements, including lakes, rivers, mountains, and animals, such as *kinnari* and elephants, constitute the scene of Himavant Forest. (Fig. 74)

The whole area below the scene of the Realm of Men is the scene of Hell painted against a black background. (Fig. 75) To the left is King Yama's palace surrounded by a walled court. Here, King Yama, seated on the throne, is giving judgements in front of a group of men.

The rest of the area is composed of various vignettes of tortures. A number of square-shaped compartments containing an extensive number of human faces are spread over the whole area. The vast area around these squares is occupied by more detailed vignettes of tortures. These vignettes are smaller and are more or less in the same size, style, and colour, but much greater in number and variety. These vignettes do not include some of the most common depictions, such as men and women climbing on a tree full of thorns, men being boiled in a huge iron cauldron, nor do they contain *preta*, exaggerated deformed beings. Instead, the vignettes of tortures explore the relationship between sinners and the Hell warden, or in other words the tortured and torturer, for example, a man being thrown into the square by a Hell warden; a man in one of the squares being stabbed by a warden; a man having his testicle stabbed by a warden with a spear; a man having his head cut by a warden; men with faces of an animal pulling a plough and being stabbed by a warden with a spear; men tied to each other at the neck by a rope, pulled forward, and tied at the poll by a warden.

## Analysis

In terms of composition and proportion, the illustration of the Traiphum at Wat Yai Intharam is more or less the same as in other temples. It mainly consists of three realms. The uppermost part is the scene of Heaven painted against a bright blue background, and the lowermost part is the scene of Hell painted against a black background. Between these two realms is a narrow strip of area in which the Realm of Men is represented. The axis of the composition is Mount Meru, symbolised by a vertical pillar, and these three realms are connected to each other by Mount Meru. In this composition, the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell are made to contrast.

The contrast between these scenes is further enhanced by the content of each scene. As for the scene of Heaven, the composition is greatly simplified and decorative elements reduced excessively. All the celestial palaces at the summit of mountains and in the airy space above these mountains are almost in the same size and shape. In the airy space, there are no celestial beings flying around. Even, the sun and the moon are not depicted there. On the other hand, Mount Meru and the mountain ranges are much thicker and more ragged, occupying a vast area in the middle of the panel. Moreover, Mount Meru is further elaborated by having large palaces representing the Realm of Four Guardian Kings on its body. These prominent mountain pillars emphasise the loftiness of Heaven and its distance from the Realm of Men. Thus, what is focused on in this quite simple, rather bland, scene of Heaven is Tavatimsa Heaven in relation to Mount Meru, augmenting the significance of Tavatimsa Heaven.

As for the scene of Hell, it consists of King Yama, square compartments, and various vignettes of tortures. These vignettes are smaller but greater in number and variety. Here, the scene of Hell scene is expanded and elaborated by enhancing the aspect of “catalogue”. In addition, the alignment of the vignettes that emphasise the relationship between the ruled and the one who rules or between the tortured and the torturer effectively conveys the hierarchical order in relation to morality. By including such a scene of Hell, the hideousness of Hell is demonstrated in a more specific way, which enhances the aspects of “*Avici*”. Such an elaborated scene of Hell is in stark contrast to the scene of Heaven above.

## 5.9 The *Ubosot* at Wat Chaiyathid

### Background

Wat Chaiyathid, located in Thonburi, was founded at the time of Bangkok's establishment and is one of the earliest Buddhist communities of the Rattanakosin period. (No Na Paknam, Wat Chaiyathid 7) Mural paintings were originally executed at the time of its foundation but were restored during the reign of King Rama III. (Wenk, Mural Paintings LXX; No Na Paknam, Wat Chaiyathid 14)

### Mural Arrangement

The paintings are arranged more or less in the same manner as in other temples. The panels between the windows on the lateral walls are painted with various scenes from the Life of the Buddha, including the scene of the Defeat of Mara. The Celestial Assembly is painted on the lateral walls above the windows. On the wall behind the Buddha image, the Traiphum is depicted. However, on the wall facing the image one does not find the customary scene of the Defeat of Mara, but the composite scenes from the Life of the Buddha; the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven, the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven, the Cremation of the Buddha, and the Distribution of the Relics. The mural of our interest in this section is the composite scene of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven and the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven.

### Description

The wall above the entrance door facing the Buddha image consists of three separate paintings depicting four scenes from the Life of the Buddha. The paintings on the right and in the middle depict a single scene each – the Cremation of the Buddha and the Distribution of the Relics, while the one on the left is a composite painting depicting two scenes in one area – the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven and the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven. It is this last painting that is of particular interest and relevance to this discussion.

The whole area at the upper half of the painting is occupied by Tavatimsa Heaven painted against a red background. (Fig. 76) Tavatimsa Heaven lies above Mount Meru and is surrounded by a walled court. At the centre of the compound is the palace, in which the Buddha is seated on the throne flanked by Indra and Brahma. Before the Buddha are a great number of celestial beings in the gesture of paying homage to the Buddha. This scene represents the episode of the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven.

The whole area below the scene of Heaven is the scene of Hell. (Fig. 77) Constrained in a huge hollow made within a large rocky mountain are a number of Hell beings. All these beings, naked and extremely thin, are in the gesture of asking for mercy. There are a few forms of tortures: men with the face of an animal, such as a buffalo; a man with the body of an animal; and a man having three horns on his head.

In a tiny area at the far right corner is the Realm of Men. Here, a few men are looking upward, showing their respect to the Buddha.

On the right of the painting, from the scene of the Realm of Men up to the level of Tavatimsa Heaven, there are staircases that connect these two realms. The Buddha is descending the staircase at the centre to the Realm of Men, while groups of celestial beings, including Indra, attend the Buddha. This scene represents the episode of the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven.

## Analysis

The themes of this painting – the Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven and the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven – are also depicted at Wat Suwannaram. Like the painting at Wat Suwannaram, the scenes of the Life of the Buddha are depicted within the framework of the Traiphum cosmology. However, these paintings are quite different to each other in terms of composition and proportion.

This painting consists of three realms, namely Heaven, represented by Tavatimsa Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell, but they are not arranged in a vertical order nor are they connected by Mount Meru and the mountain ranges. There is no depiction of Mount Meru and the mountain ranges, and the dominant scenes here are the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell placed in vertical layers. Arranged next to the scene of Hell, not above it, is the scene of the Realm of Men. However, the scene of the Realm of Men is small in size and content and is placed at the far right corner.



The compositional structure and the proportions of this painting transform the scene of Hell, originally a subsidiary component according to the story of the Life of the Buddha, into a major and dominant component, which vividly contrasts with the scene of Heaven depicted above.



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Fig.34 The Scene of the Defeat of Mara, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.35 Figures of Celestial Beings, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi

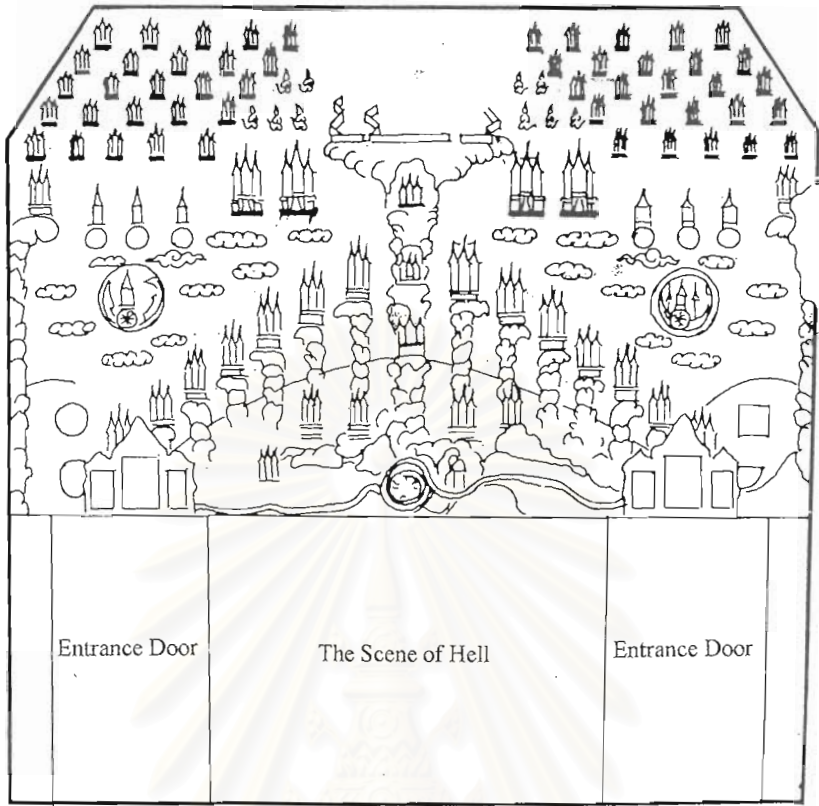


Fig.36 The Whole Scene of the Traiphum, The *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi  
 Sketched by Sone Simatrang



Fig.37 The Whole Scene of the Traiphum, The *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.38 The Scene of Mount Meru and the Mountain Ranges,  
the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi

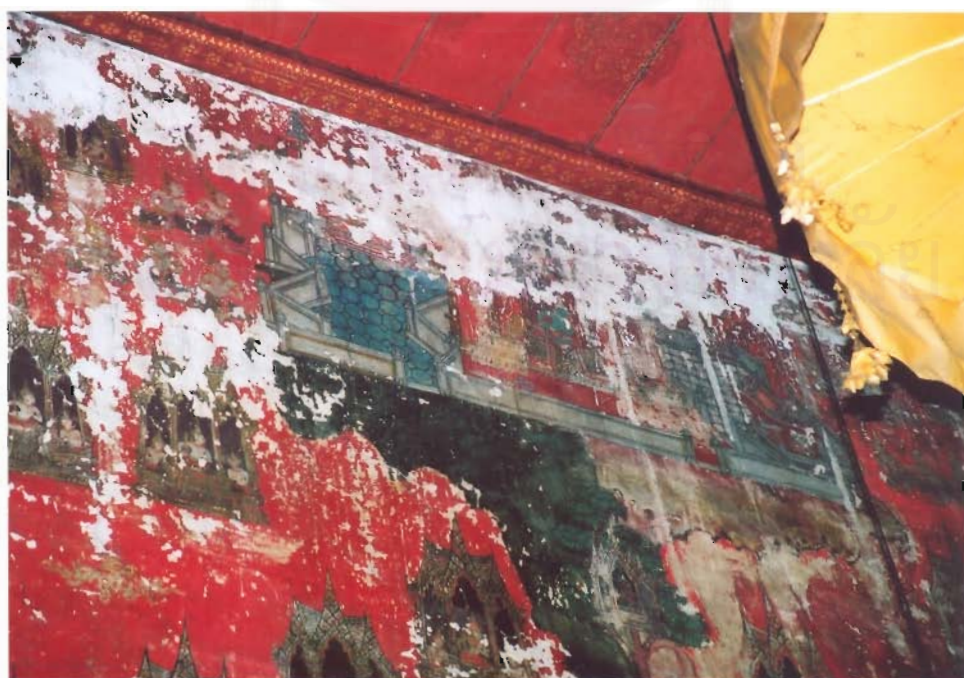


Fig.39 The Scene of Tavatimsa Heaven, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi

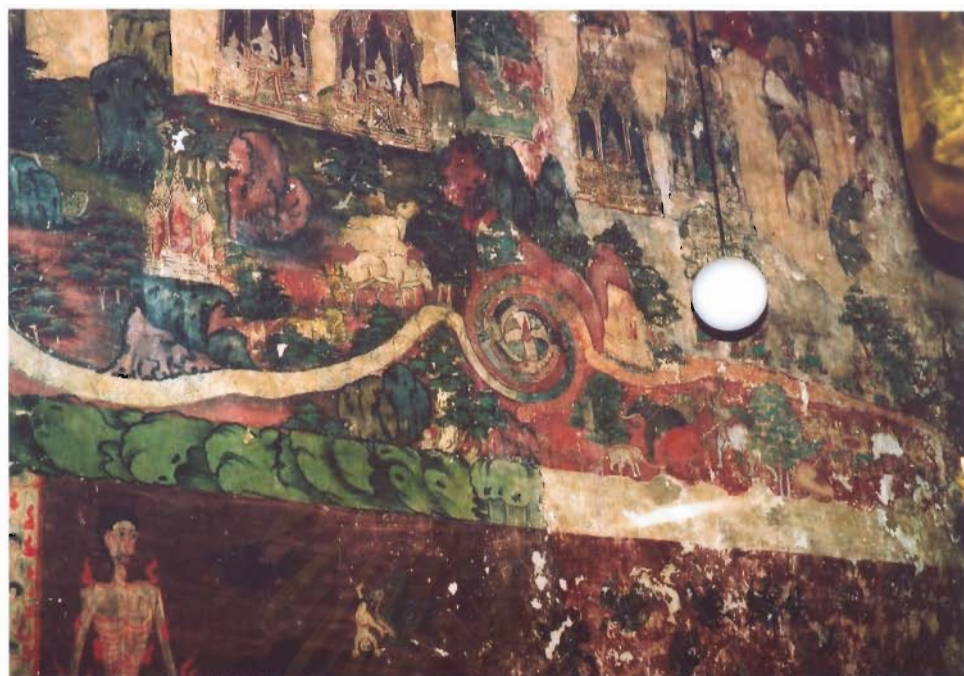


Fig.40 The Scene the Realm of Men, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.41 The Scene of Hell, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.42 The Palace of King Yama, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.43 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.44 Major and the Subsidiary Hells, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.45 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.46 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.47 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi





Fig.48 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.49 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.50 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Dusitaram, Thonburi



Fig.51 The Upper Part of the Scene of the Traiphum,  
the *Ubosot* at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi



Fig.52 The Scene of Mount Meru and Heaven,  
the *Ubosot* at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi



Fig.53 The Palace of King Yama, the *Ubosot* at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi.



Fig.54 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi



Fig.55 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi



Fig.56 Major and the Subsidiary Hells, the *Ubosot* at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi

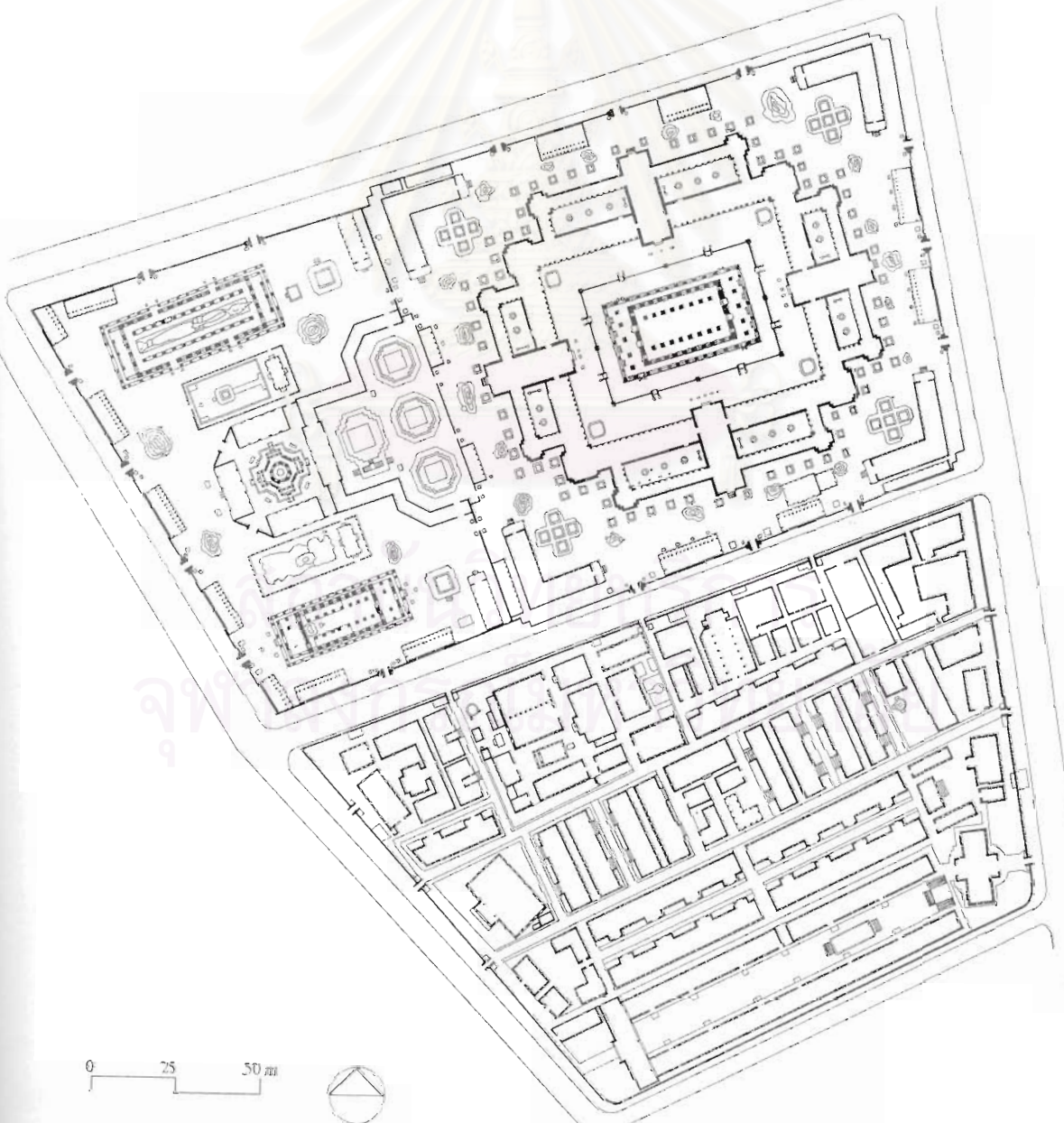


Fig.57 Plan, the Northern *Viharn* at Wat Phra Chetuphon, Bangkok



Fig.58 Figures of Twenty-Seven Buddhas of the Past,  
the Principal *Viharn* at Wat Suthat Thepwararam, Bangkok



Fig.59 King Yama's Palace, the Principal *Viharn* at Wat Suthat Thepwararam, Bangkok



Fig.60 Vignettes of Tortures, the Principal *Viharn* at Wat Suthat Thepwararam, Bangkok



Fig.61 Vignettes of Tortures, the Principal *Viharn* at Wat Suthat Thepwararam, Bangkok



Fig.62 The Upper Part of the Scene of the Traiphum,  
the *Ubosot* at Wat Suwandararam, Ayutthaya



Fig.63 The Scene of Hell, the *Ubosot* at Wat Suwandararam, Ayutthaya





Fig.64 The Palace of King Yama, the *Ubosot* at Wat Suwandararam, Ayutthaya



Fig.65 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Suwandararam, Ayutthaya

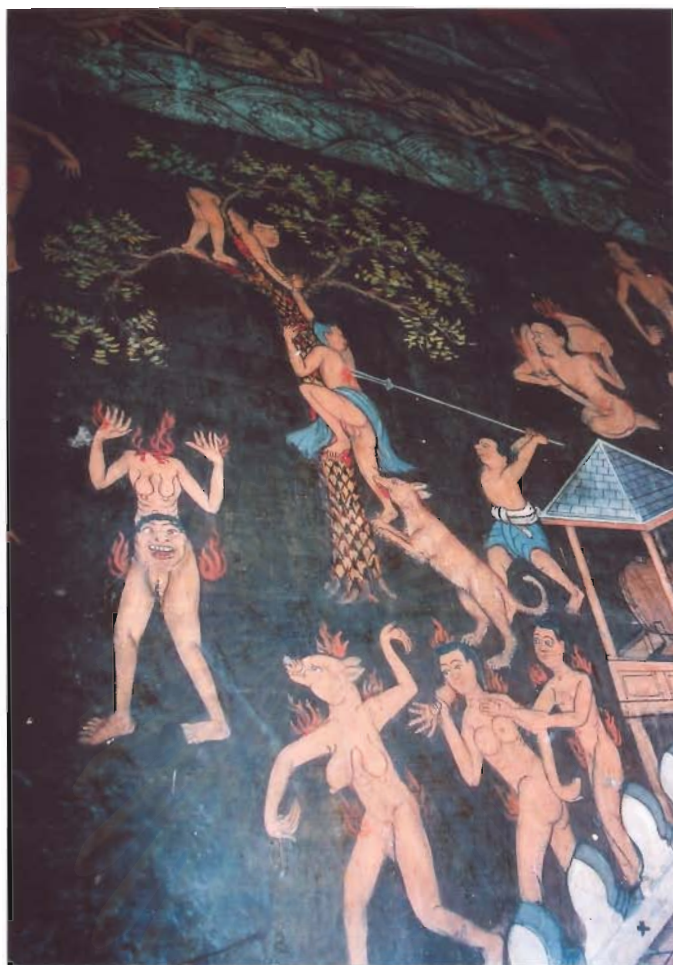


Fig.66 Vignettes of Tortures, the *Ubosot* at Wat Suwandararam, Ayutthaya

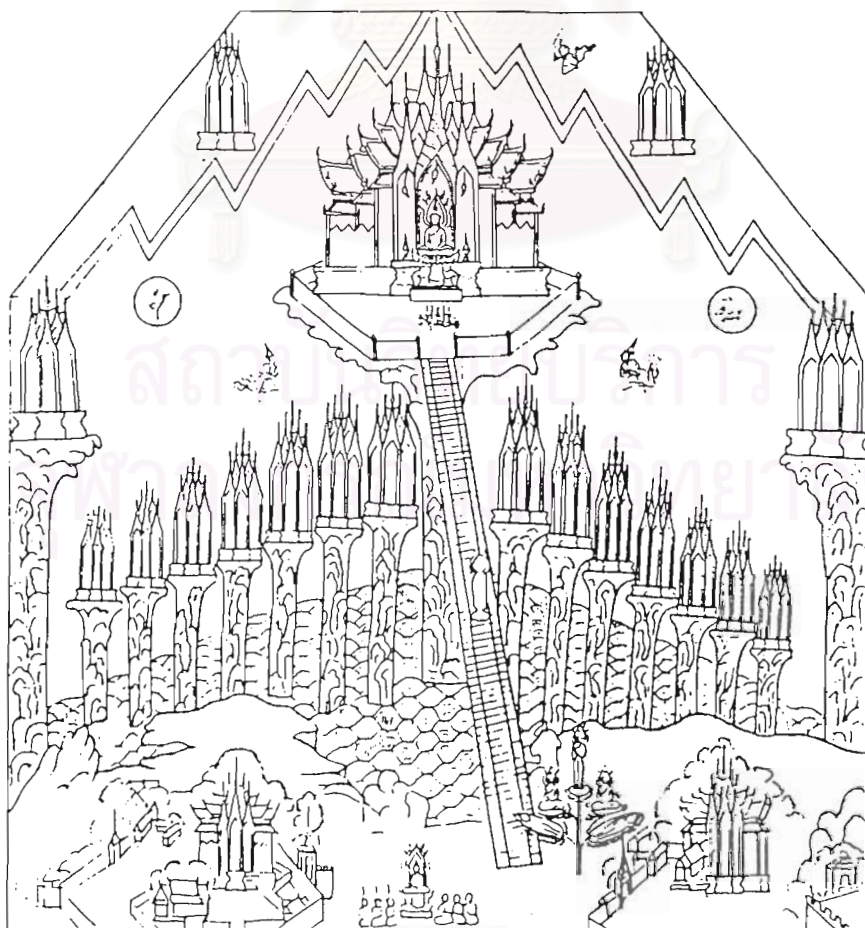


Fig.67 The Scene of Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa, and Descent from Tavatimsa, the *Ubosot* at Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi, Sketched By Sone Simatrang



Fig.68 The Scene of Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven,  
the *Ubosot* at Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi



Fig.69 Various Scenes from the Life of the Buddha,  
the *Ubosot* at Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi

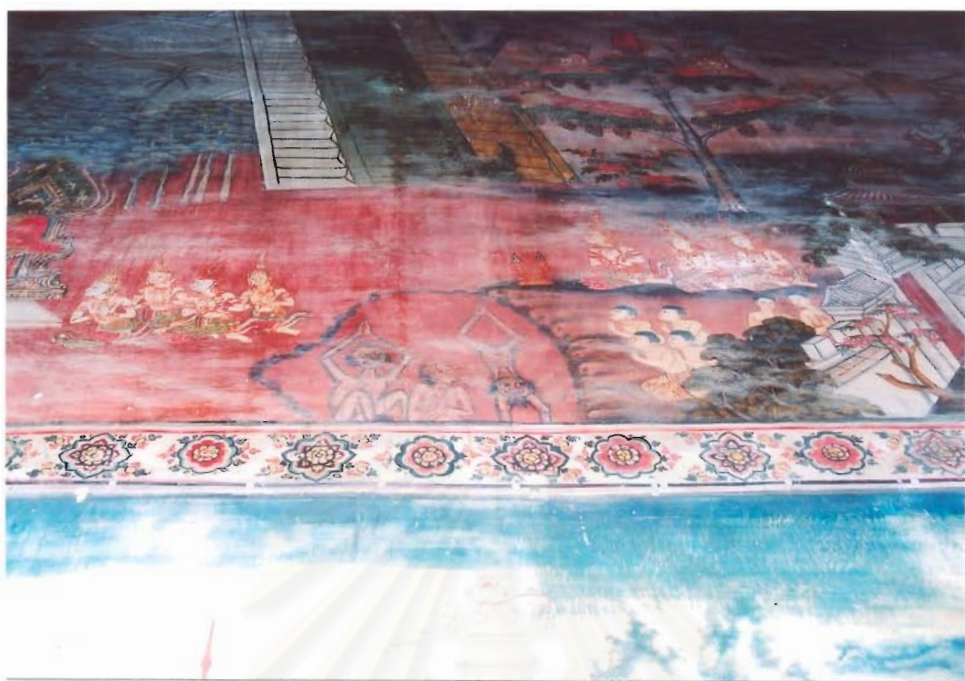


Fig.70 The Scene of Hell, the *Uposot* at Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi



Fig.71 The Scene of Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven, Banner, Wat Dok Ngon Chedi, Chiang Mai (Stored in the National Gallery, Bangkok)



Fig.72 The Upper part of the Traiphum, the *Ubosot* at Wat Yai Intharam, Chonburi



Fig.73 The Scene of Tavatimsa Heaven, the *Ubosot* at Wat Yai Intharam, Chonburi



Fig.74 The Scene of the Realm of Men, the *Ubosot* at Wat Yai Intharam, Chonburi



Fig.75 The Scene of Hell, the *Ubosot* at Wat Yai Intharam, Chonburi



Fig.76 Composite Scene of Buddha Preaching to his Mother at Tavatimsa Heaven, and the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven, the *Ubosot* at Wat Chaiyathid, Thonburi



Fig.77 The Scene of Hell, the *Ubosot* at Wat Chaiyathid, Thonburi

## CHAPTER VI

### SIGNIFICANCE OF HELL SCENE IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

This chapter presents the significance of Hell scene in the Traiphum mural paintings in the socio-political context.

#### 6.1 Medium

##### 6.1.1 Form

King Rama I commissioned a new edition of the Traiphum and actively supported the Traiphum in the form of mural paintings, but not in the form of illuminated manuscripts. Both illuminated manuscript and mural painting are a form of offering and a medium for the transmission of messages to the people, both the clergy and the laity, by means of the image as visual language. Visual images, richly coloured and animated, are “more powerful than words to convey a complex mass of information and ideas. (Pointon 7) . . . [and have] “superior power in arousing immediate and strong responses”, (Pointon 54) especially among the illiterate or poorly-educated, as were most of the Thais in those days. Having such power of visual image, both illuminated manuscripts and mural paintings serve as a powerful means of instruction via visual scriptures or sermons. Also, as a form of devotion and source of merit, they serve as the proof of righteousness for those who commission them.

There are, however, notable differences between these two mediums – illuminated manuscripts and mural paintings – in their targeted audience, size, and content. An illuminated manuscript is usually presented to a monastery and is stored within the monastery compound, often in a scripture cabinet. Moreover, an illuminated manuscript consists of a number of small-surfaced leaves, which allows them to present a comprehensive range of content that can be contemplated from leaf to leaf, thus allowing for a better appreciation of the underlying lessons. Therefore, illuminated manuscripts are basically confined to the monastically-educated elite.



On the other hand, a mural painting is usually exhibited to all devotees, both the clergy and the laity alike, at all times. Moreover, it is placed on a single but much wider expanse of a two-dimensional plane surface. Thus, it usually has simpler but more visually impressive contents that ensure the immediate recognition of episodes and facilitate an understanding of the underlying lessons. It also serves as one of the most public marker of righteousness of the individual who commissions it, comparable to a temple building. Thus, based on their targeted audience, size, and content, mural paintings work as more effective means of conveying their underlying lessons and of demonstrating the righteousness of those who commission them to the devotees, particularly to lay devotees who usually have only limited knowledge and opportunity to read illustrated manuscripts.

### 6.1.2 Location

The Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I were mostly placed in the *ubosot* or one of the principal *viharns* in a Buddhist temple. The *ubosot* and the *viharn* are halls specifically constructed for gatherings of both the clergy and the laity so that they may observe Buddhist rituals; thus, they are usually built to accommodate a much larger number of devotees than any of the other buildings in a temple.

For the laity, the Buddhist temple is the most public place in a community. As a community school, it provides them with opportunities they would not otherwise have to acquire knowledge in various fields. More importantly, as a field of merit, it provides them with opportunities to earn merit, which is the greatest concern of most lay devotees. In order to earn merit in return for the act of devotion, lay people come together at the *ubosot* or the *viharn* in everyday life and on various important occasions in life to participate in various rituals, including ordination ceremonies, for the chanting of the *Dhamma*, to listen to sermons, and to pay homage to the Buddha and the teachings. Mural paintings as visual sermons are presented to them every time they attend these rituals, often accompanied by oral sermons given by the monks.

The capacity and roles of the *ubosot* or the *viharn* made the mural paintings located in the *ubosot* or the *viharn* among the most powerful medium for the transmission of messages in Thailand, at least before the age of mass communication.

### 6.1.3 Arrangement

The Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I are mostly arranged on the wall behind the presiding Buddha image within the *ubosot* or the *viharn* which the devotees immediately encounter and look at when they first enter the *ubosot* or the *viharn*. It is also the wall which they face during rituals and, hence, automatically gaze at longest. Thus, this wall is among the most powerful in that it provides a combination of both immediate impact and gradual influence to the audience.

By presenting the Traiphum in the form of mural paintings and placing them on this strategic wall in the *ubosot* or one of the principal *viharns*, King Rama I was able to convey the underlying lessons of the Traiphum as well as his righteousness in the most effective and powerful way to the greatest number, particularly to the laity, who would not otherwise have the opportunity to be exposed to the knowledge contained in the Traiphum.

## 6.2 Form and Content

### 6.2.1 Whole Scene

#### 1) Component World and Component Realms

Usually, illuminated manuscripts of the Traiphum portray the comprehensive structure of the universe, within an orthodox framework, through an almost impartial depiction of all thirty-one realms and *Nirvana* from leaf to leaf. The Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I, on the other hand, depict the three realms in the World of Desire, namely Heaven, or more precisely Tavatimsa Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell, to the fullest extent but do not depict in an obvious way all the transcendental states: realms in the World of Form, and the World of Formless and its beyond, *Nirvana*. Thus, King Rama I's Traiphum murals do not represent "the three worlds" as prescribed in the text but actually represent "the three realms" within the World of Desire, which is the "this-worldly" realm. By depicting such a reduced view of the universe, these mural paintings provided a more secular representation of the universe and, thus, just like the story of Phra Malai, were intended particularly for the laity who still pursues a "this-worldly" life.

*King Rama I's Traiphum mural paintings are limited to three component realms that constitute the universe, as noted above – only one realm of Heaven, represented by Tavatimsa Heaven, the Realm of Men, and only one realm of Hell, represented by one level of Hell, unlike the Ayutthaya mural paintings at Wat Ko Kaeo, which depict six realms of Heaven in the World of Desire in more or less equal layers. Thus, while the paintings at Wat Ko Kaeo provide a more precise and comprehensive depiction of the World of Desire, these Traiphum mural paintings depict a greatly simplified structure.*

In this very basic and concise depiction of the universe that has the Realm of Men in the middle, a far broader perspective of Heaven and Hell is on view in these mural paintings. The single realm of Hell portrayed in them represents all four realms lower than the Realm of Men, while the scene of Tavatimsa Heaven represents all twenty-six heavens higher than the Realm of Men. Thus, although they actually represent only “the three realms,” it is as though they represent “the three worlds”.

By means of such a simplified and more secular structure, the far more complex and comprehensive structure of the Traiphum, based on orthodox teachings, is conveyed in a manner that is easier to understand and more appealing to devotees who are usually not familiar with nor interested in the philosophical significance of the Traiphum.

## **2) Composition and Proportion**

The Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I place the three realms – namely Heaven, represented by Tavatimsa Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell – one after the other in layers in a strict vertical order. These realms as well as all the other cosmic elements, including the sun, the moon, and rows of heavenly mansions and beings are also placed in a precise symmetrical composition centring on Mount Meru. By means of this distinctive hierarchical order of the universe that centres on Mount Meru and the underlying concept of *kamma*, the concept of rebirths into progressively higher spheres of the universe is depicted in a simple, diagrammatic form. This representation conveys the sense of hierarchy more clearly and strongly than do the Ayutthaya painting at Wat Phutthaisawan and the illuminated manuscript of the Traiphum. In the Ayutthaya mural, the three realms are neither in a strict vertical order nor symmetrical. Instead, a vast area at the centre of the panel of the Ayutthaya mural is occupied by the scene of the Realm of Men, while the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell are depicted on a smaller scale and in a less central part of the panel. The illuminated manuscripts of the Traiphum

depict each of the thirty-one realms in order from leaf to leaf. In such a form, the sense of hierarchy is not obvious at a glance but can only be felt through the experience of turning the pages, one by one, from the beginning to the end of the manuscript.

By emphasising the hierarchical order centring the Realm of Men, the Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I place their main concern on the fate of man, not on the Realm of Men itself, contrary to the paintings at Wat Phutthaisawan that focus on the Realm of Men itself and visually define the places of men in relation to other realms, or to Heaven and Hell. Placed above and below the Realm of Men in this hierarchical order, Tavatimsa Heaven and Hell are presented as possible rebirth places for the beings in the Realm of Men. Placed at opposite ends from the Realm of Men, Tavatimsa Heaven and Hell are portrayed as places to be aspired to and to be avoided, respectively.

At the same time, this hierarchical order suggests that man, in the middle of the order, is in the vulnerable position of standing to gain or to lose the most and that it is far easier for man to rise or fall than it is for the higher beings in Heaven and for the lower beings in Hell. By placing man in such a vulnerable position, King Rama I's Traiphum mural paintings serve as an effective means of leading man naturally to higher realms in the hierarchical order of "the three realms" or, more precisely, to Tavatimsa Heaven.

The focus on the fate of man is evident in the overall trend in these Traiphum mural paintings where the scene of the Realm of Men becomes increasingly diminished in size, while the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell, particularly the latter, become increasingly larger. This trend is obvious in the paintings at Wat Ratchasittharam and Wat Suwandararam, which include scenes of Heaven and Hell but exclude the scene of the Realm of Men, and in murals at Wat Chaiyathid, in which a much smaller scene of the Realm of Men is depicted in the far corner of the painting, while the scenes of Heaven and Hell, depicted next to each other in layers, occupy most of the panel.

Thus, the Traiphum murals of King Rama I, with its hierarchical order of "the three realms", more clearly convey to its beholders the vulnerability of men, as well as the notion that Tavatimsa Heaven is the place to be aspired and Hell is the place to be avoided, thereby leading them to Tavatimsa Heaven more effectively.

## 6.2.2 Individual Scenes

### 1) Hell Scene

#### A. Component Realm and Proportion

In terms of proportion, the scene of Hell was not the main component of the Traiphum mural paintings of the Ayutthaya period, as can be seen in the murals at Wat Phutthaisawan – in which the scene of Hell is placed in the left corner below and next to the extensive illustration of the scene of the Realm of Men. This trend is also found in other forms of painting, such as the gilt lacquer scripture cabinet which often adopts the same theme and composition as the mural paintings. For example, in the Traiphum painting depicted on the scripture cabinet made in the eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> there is no illustration of the scene of Hell but only of the scene of the Realm of Men and the scene of Heaven, which are composed as an organic whole. (Fig. 83) In contrast, the mural paintings of King Rama I invariably portray the scene of Hell as the major component.

#### B. Component Images

##### a. Variety

In the scene of Hell at Wat Phutthaisawan, square-shaped compartments that symbolise major and subsidiary Hells occupy the vast area at the centre, while more detailed vignettes of individual tortures occupy the bits of spaces around these squares. On the other hand, in the scene of Hell in most of the mural paintings of King Rama I, the squares representing abstract images of Hell are reduced in size and number. Instead, in addition to these squares, a greater variety of images, including the figure of King Yama and his sphere, hell wardens, various vignettes of tortures, and the figure of Phra Malai are spread over the whole area, constituting a single unified scene of Hell. By the adoption of such a variety of images, the scene of Hell as a whole represents a more concrete and extensive picture of Hell, portraying the specific process that all sinners go through, from the entrance to the sphere of death, an investigation of their past deeds, judgement, torture, agony, and finally to salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> The cabinet is presently housed at the National Museum at Ayutthaya.

## b. Number

The Traiphum mural paintings of King Rama I have a great profusion of vignettes of tortures, which occupy a vast area at the centre of the scene of Hell. They not only include various forms of tortures, disproportionately large in number, but vignettes that simply exhibit intense suffering also constitute part of a continuum of punishment in Hell. They include the traditional forms of tortures, such as men and women on a kapok tree full of thorns or men being boiled in a huge iron cauldron, and various form of physical deformity, such as *preta*. Also included are seemingly extraneous images, such as vultures devouring children, adults, and a monk, or images related to death, such as fire balls flying in the air, or a monk pouring water into a dying man's mouth. By the inclusion of such a great profusion of vignettes of tortures, the scene of Hell contains what seems like a "catalogue" of sins and punishments.

Such a scene of Hell presents its beholders with a more concrete and extensive picture of Hell that portrays a "specific process" with a "catalogue" of sins and punishments that all sinners undergo, thereby evoking not only terror but also making a more immediate, powerful, and compelling statement about the frightful consequences of committing sins. Through such a scene of Hell, the sense of "morality" is brought to the forefront, transforming "an abstract hierarchical order of the universe" to "a hierarchical order based on morality", or "a moral order". As a consequence, Heaven and Hell are transformed from being merely possible places of rebirth to places of specific rewards and punishments, to be attained as a result of meritorious deeds and sinful deeds, respectively.

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## 2) Comparison of Hell Scene and Heaven Scene

### A. Component Images

The scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell in the Traiphum murals of King Rama I consist of different types of component images.

#### a. Major Components: Popular versus Orthodox

In the murals, the scene of Heaven is composed only of elements prescribed in the text, such as the figure of Indra and his gem palace, attendant subjects, heavenly palaces and beings, Chulamani Chedi and the coral tree Parijataka.

The scene of Hell, on the other hand, includes a number of elements from popular beliefs, in addition to the ordinary hell beings and hell wardens described in the text. The most profusely illustrated are the *preta*, or suffering ghosts of the departed dead, who originally belonged to a separate realm, the Realm of *Preta*. The *preta* parallel the famous spirit *phi pret* in popular Thai beliefs who perpetually suffers from exceeding hunger and thirst because of greed and strong attachment to material possessions while alive. Another element related to popular beliefs in these murals is the figure of Phra Malai who gives comfort and betterment to the beings in Hell.

The inclusion of elements associated with popular beliefs not only brings the concept of Hell more within our reach, a place that we can easily fall into, but also serves to domesticate the Traiphum mural as a whole, making the complicated system of the Traiphum, which most devotees find unfamiliar and difficult to understand, something they can more easily relate to. In contrast, the scene of Heaven consists of only orthodox elements, thereby emphasising the otherworldliness of Heaven and maintaining a certain distance from us.

#### b. Figures (Appearance): Plain and Grotesque versus Elaborate and Elegant

In the scene of Heaven, all the beings, including Indra, are given elaborate appearances. All these beings, except Indra who is portrayed with his customary green complexion, are shown to have a fair complexion. Their bodies are entirely covered with royal outfits, elegant attire, magnificent head-dress, and accessories.

In the scene of Hell, on the other hand, all the beings – those that inflict and those that suffer tortures – have quite a plain appearance, similar to those of contemporary native Thai people. They have dark skin, dark hair, and big eyes. Those inflicting tortures are partly naked, with a piece of cloth tied at the waist, while those being tortured are totally naked. In the meantime, all the *pretas* who in the scene of Hell have various kinds of deformed or exaggerated frightful appearances, as can be seen in a man with an excessively enlarged testicle drooping down nearly to the floor, or a man with no head but a face at the abdominal area, or a man with the head of an animal, such as a frog, a horse, and a serpent. Portrayals of them as bleeding and with flames emanating from various parts of their body, including the head, chest, arms, legs, and genitals, augments the grotesque and fearful appearance of these beings.

### **c. Figures (Gesture and Posture): Unrestrained versus Restrained**

All the heavenly beings, including Indra, exhibit elegant but restrained gestures and postures of only limited patterns. Most of the beings within the compound of Indra are sitting in an upright position, with some in profile, turning their face and hands towards the master Indra at the centre. Also, most of the celestial beings flying in the air are in the same dancing postures depicted in profile.

In contrast, the beings in the scene of Hell are shown with a greater variety of gestures and postures based on the spontaneity of human beings. Most of the beings are shown with agonising gestures, as can be seen in the vignette of men being boiled in a huge iron cauldron, while some are shown with pleading gestures, with their hands raised high up above the heads. Also, some are shown with embarrassing and dishonourable postures, as can be seen in the vignette of men and women climbing up and down a kapok tree full of thorns.

### **d. Figures (Facial Expression): Feverish versus Serene**

All the beings in the scene of Heaven have subdued, serene, and calm facial expressions. On the other hand, most of the beings in the scene of Hell have facial expressions of dread and terror, with their eyes wide open, while some are shown to have desperate faces, pleading for mercy.



### **e. Objects Constituting the Environment: Down-to-Earth versus Otherworldly**

The scene of Heaven is full of objects, including Indra's palace, a walled court, the throne, relic containers, Chulamani Chedi, Parijataka tree, and rows of celestial palaces. These objects, including Indra's palace in multi-tiered structure decorated with gems, emphasise the otherworldliness of Heaven but do not show particularly socially-related aspects.

The scene of Hell, on the other hand, except for the sphere of King Yama, depicts only objects used for tortures, such as an iron cauldron, a kapok tree, vultures and iron clamps. These objects can be seen in reality, which implies the this-worldliness of the crimes and the immediacy of Hell.

### **B. Composition: Asymmetrical/Disorderly versus Symmetrical/Orderly**

The principles underlying the composition of the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell are completely different. The scene of Hell consists of a variety of elements, such as the figure of King Yama and his palace, the figure of hell wardens, square-shaped compartments representing major and subsidiary Hells, various vignettes of tortures, and the figure of Phra Malai. These elements, big and small, tall and short, are placed randomly over the whole area in an unstructured, asymmetrical composition, augmenting the chaotic state within the scene of Hell.

In contrast, all the elements in the scene of Heaven are placed in an orderly symmetrical composition, centring on the central figure of Indra. Tavatimsa Heaven, prominent in size, is placed at the centre above Mount Meru. A number of heavenly palaces and beings, almost all of the same size and shape, are placed on either side of Tavatimsa Heaven. Within Tavatimsa Heaven, Indra's palace at the centre is flanked by Chulamani Chedi to the right and the Parijataka tree to the left. Within the palace, all the celestial attendants sitting below Indra are turning their faces and hands towards the master Indra in a gesture of paying their respects to him. All the other celestial beings, both flying in the air and sitting in the floating celestial palaces, are also shown turning their face, hands and legs towards Indra. Thus, through such an orderly, symmetrical composition, in which the central focus is placed on the figure of Indra, the scene of Heaven maintains a strict sense of order and balance.

### C. Style: Naturalistic versus Stylised

There is no stylistic unity between the scenes of Heaven and Hell. Figures and objects in the scene of Hell are depicted to look natural and realistic. All the beings have different forms of appearance, gesture and posture, and facial expression based on those of actual human beings. All of them are outlined in rough brushwork, which contributes to augmenting their exaggerated frightful appearances and the overall impression of hideousness in Hell.

In contrast, the figures and objects in the scene of Heaven are highly stylised and are outlined with fine and steady brushwork. Most of the heavenly beings are depicted in profile and have the same restrained gestures. All the heavenly palaces are multi-tiered, stressing the sharp and rigid zigzag outline. All these highly stylised forms contribute to augmenting the serenity, elegance, and magnificence of Heaven, enhancing a sense of its difference, distance, and detachment from us.

### D. Colour: Dark/Black versus Bright/Red

In terms of colour, there is no unity between the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell. The predominant colour in the scene of Heaven is red. Most of the illustrated components are painted in a reddish earth-colour outlined in black. These components are painted against a bright red background, which accentuates each component and heightens the brightness and splendour of the entire scene of Heaven.

The components in the scene of Hell, except for the sphere of King Yama, are painted in monotonous tones, using only flesh colour for the beings and some red for the flames and blood emanating from these beings. The entire scene of Hell is painted against a black or dark background, making the flesh colour and red stand out. This augments not only the frightfulness of each hell being but also the hideousness of the entire scene of Hell.

Thus, it can be seen that the component images, composition, style, and colour of the scene of Hell and the scene of Heaven are made to vividly contrast with each other. While dignified and serene, a magnificent and elegant atmosphere is created within the scene of Heaven; the state of “*Avici*”, or the Great Hell of Suffering without Respite, is recreated with an atmosphere full of emotion and drama within the scene of Hell. Such contrastive states give clear substance both to reward in Heaven and to

punishment in Hell, making for a more immediate, powerful, and compelling impact on the beholders about the moral consequences of their deeds. By this contrast, therefore, a rather “abstract moral order” of the universe is transformed into a more “concrete moral order”, making Heaven a more tangible and concrete goal and Hell a more tangible obstacle to that goal.

These contrastive states, at the same time, reveal two contrastive figures or personages receiving reward in Heaven and punishment in Hell. As for the scene of Heaven, the recipient of the reward is represented by Indra. The splendour of the scene of Tavatimsa Heaven, where Indra is surrounded by attendant subjects and heavenly beings, represents an ideal state, similar that found in the scenes of higher realms in other related contexts, such as the Jatakas and the life of the Buddha. Just as the scenes that depict Bodhisattva or the Buddha being rewarded, the scene of Heaven depicting Indra being rewarded portrays the superiority of Indra’s earned merit and the excellence and superiority of Indra. The scene of Tavatimsa Heaven, represented as an ideal society, not only emphasises the notion that Heaven is the place for reward but also enhances the significance of Indra and the Thai king, who is traditionally compared to Indra.

In the scene of Hell, on the other hand, the recipients of punishment are primarily represented by beings in a great profusion of vignettes of tortures. All the beings in these vignettes are associated with ordinary people, particularly ordinary Thai people, and the objects depicted are down-to-earth, associated with ordinary Thai life. The sins that lead to rebirth in Hell, shown in the vignettes of mundane images, are all socially-related, since the types of torture correspond to the types of crimes or sins committed. For example, the vignette of men and women climbing up and down a kapok tree covered with thorns implies adultery, and the torture of a man having his tongue being pulled by iron clamps is associated with having deceived or cheated others. Thus, those who witnessed such a scene of Hell would more readily realise the importance of improving their standards of morality because it determines their fates. The scene of Hell also speaks to the importance of governance in the Thai society of that time.

Thus, by the vivid contrast between the scenes of Heaven and Hell in terms of component images, composition, style, and colour, the Traiphum murals serve as an effective means for moral enforcement and for the justification of the king’s rule.

### **E. Location: Lowermost versus Uppermost**

As described earlier, the Traiphum Mural paintings of King Rama I are mostly located on the wall behind the presiding Buddha image, or the west wall, a location associated with “death”. However, the locations of the scene of Heaven and the scene of Hell are different, and a few points of practical and symbolic import derive from this difference.

The scene of Heaven is located at the upper part of the wall behind the presiding Buddha image. Depicted at this location, the pyramidal shape, or the large equilateral triangle, created by Mount Meru and the mountain ranges in descending heights, topped by Tavatimsa Heaven, overlaps the shape of the Buddha image in front of it when it is viewed from the audience floor. Such a pyramidal shape, by being painted against a red background, serves like a halo or aureole, which allows the Buddha image to stand out in the dark where only limited light from outside comes through the small windows set in the lateral walls. This not only makes the Buddha image look more prominent and auspicious but also augments the overall impression of the brightness and magnificence of Tavatimsa Heaven.

The scene of Hell, on the other hand, is located at the lowermost part of the wall behind the Buddha image, where it cannot be seen from the audience floor. However, when walking around the Buddha image, the scene unexpectedly appears in the dark. The experience of seeing the scene of Hell in this manner makes the fearful scene of Hell look even more fearful, and has an unforgettable impact on anyone who experiences it.

The lowermost part of the panel is at the level of the eyes’ of an adult. Unlike the scene of Heaven, which is only seen from a distance because of its location at the uppermost part of the panel, this particular location allows the beholders to make a close observation of the scene of Hell. Viewed from such a close distance, at eye level, the scene of Hell vividly reveals the detail of each torture as well as the whole picture of a Hell, imprinting the consequences of each sin as well as the whole process that await the sinners in Hell.

This location, at the same time, is also in the deepest and darkest place within the hall. The darkness that derives from that location accords with the concept of Hell which is originally associated with darkness. According to the Traiphum Phra Ruang, all Hells are located at the bottom of the universe and, thus, are originally dark, since light from the moon and the sun is generated in the space at the top of the mountain ranges that surround Mount Meru; therefore, the lower the realm gets, the darker the realm is

(Reynolds and Reynolds 81). For example, the *Avici*, the lowest of all eight major Hells, is located at the very bottom of the universe and thus is the darkest of all thirty-one realms of the universe. There is also another Hell that is even more strongly tied to darkness. This Hell is called the *Lokanta*, or the Hell between the Universes, which is located in the space outside the walls of the universe. Because of this location, light from the sun and the moon never reach the *Lokanta* and utter darkness reigns in the interior of this Hell. The darkness of the *Lokanta* for the beings that are re-born there is “as if they had shut their eyes on a dark moon night” (Reynolds and Reynolds 81). In this Hell, darkness itself is treated as an additional form of punishment. The suffering and agony of living in total darkness, feeling all alone, as well as the relief from that suffering by finding companions when light brightens the interior of the Hell for a split second is expressed in the words of a hell being<sup>2</sup> as follows:

“I thought that I was the only one who had come to live here. I did not know that many other beings have come to stay in this terrible hell just as I have come myself.” When they see each other in that way, it does not last long; it lasts only the split second taken by a snap of the fingers or a flash of lightning. When this split second occurs the beings say “What? What?” but after they have said that, it becomes as dark as it was before (Reynolds and Reynolds 81).

By this darkness deriving from the location, the states of “*Avici*” as well as “*Lokanta*” are created within the interior, states which, together, contribute to augmenting the originally fearful scene of Hell.

During a sermon or chanting, such a fearful scene of Hell, augmented by the dark location, would dramatically be recalled through the glittering scene of Heaven in front of us. Such a hidden but recalled scene of Hell has an even more fearful impact on the audience, imprinting indelibly on their mind the contrast between Heaven and Hell and its implications for them in the Law of *Kamma*.

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<sup>2</sup> It is lit up only on the five rare occasions of the Buddha’s life, that is the Conception, the Birth, the Enlightenment, the First Sermon, and *Nirvana* (Reynolds and Reynolds 81).



Fig. 78 The Scene of Heaven and the Realm of Men, Ayutthaya Scripture Cabinet  
(Stored in the National Museum, Ayutthaya)

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

King Rama I's reign began in the midst of social unrest and political instability. In order to restore morality to the society and establish a firm governing base, the king undertook various activities for the reconstruction of the society in five major spheres: external government, administration, legislation, religion, and culture. As a result of his efforts, the king succeeded in bringing stability to the kingdom, with peace and prosperity, thereby establishing a firm foundation that ensured further expansion and development.

Among the many activities he embarked on, the one that King Rama I had a particular interest in was the re-edition of the Traiphum text. This was quite natural and logical since the content of the Traiphum covered all aspects of the king's reconstruction activities, providing the king with a legitimate base for his rule and simultaneously conveying moral lessons to the people through its underlying concept of *kamma*. In addition, King Rama I also commissioned extensive mural paintings of the Traiphum to decorate the interior of a number of temples that he constructed and restored, which have often been praised as "the Best of Rattanakosin Art" because of their exquisiteness.

Representing the cosmology in art and architectural form had long been an inherited tradition for conveying moral lessons and justifying the kingship. In architectural forms, the divine order of the universe, or Mount Meru and heavenly extensions, were represented spatially through the plan, structure, and exterior surface decoration of the temple. In mural paintings, aspects of cosmology, particularly *Nirvana*, were traditionally represented within the context of merits and rewards. Within this mural tradition, however, there were certain shifts in the way of representing aspects of cosmology, with an overall trend of greater specification in the mural paintings gaining dominance. The scenes that decorate the major part of the interior walls were gradually transformed from hieratic configurations, including the Buddhas of the Past and the Celestial Assembly that convey the relationship between merit and reward in an abstract way, to narrative themes, including the Jatakas and the Life of the Buddha that convey the relationship between merit and reward within a more specific, and perhaps, realistic context.

In this growing trend for specification, the Traiphum that conveys the relationship between merit and reward and between sin and punishment within a specific cosmological framework, which had already been cultivated for some time in the tradition of illuminated manuscripts, began to be seen in the murals that adorned the interior walls. The two surviving Ayutthaya Traiphum murals prove that this trend had started at least before the end of the seventeenth century. The series of King Rama I Traiphum murals were thought to be a continuation of this existing trend.

However, King Rama I's murals and two surviving Ayutthaya murals are completely different in style, form, and content, indicating that the three sets of murals had their source in completely different inspirations. It remains unclear, however, whether the style evident in King Rama I's Traiphum murals was the creation of his reign or whether it had already existed as one of many styles of representing the Traiphum in the Ayutthaya period. The one thing that is certain, nevertheless, is that King Rama I's Traiphum murals had certain characteristics which were quite different from the two Ayutthaya murals and which served as a model or a standard, albeit with varying degrees of modifications, in the works commissioned by King Rama II and King Rama III and by non-royals in the provinces. Thus, they constitute an important part of Thai tradition, particularly in the period pre-dating the reign of King Rama IV who introduced Western perspectives and techniques to Thailand.

The form, content, and medium of King Rama I's Traiphum murals specifically correspond to his reconstruction activities. In terms of the components, composition, and proportion of the whole scene, these murals place the focus on three realms in the World of Desire, namely Tavatimsa Heaven, the Realm of Men, and Hell, which are placed in layers of a strict vertical order. They do not represent the Three Worlds exactly and impartially but portray a distinctive hierarchical order of the universe focusing on these three realms within the secular framework in a simplified diagrammatic form. By means of this simplified structure and secular framework, the murals convey the vulnerability of men as well as the notion that Tavatimsa Heaven and Hell are possible rebirth places for men, thereby leading the people, particularly the laity who still pursues a this-worldly life to the summit of this hierarchy, that is, Tavatimsa Heaven.

This hierarchical order of the universe, which is rather an abstract notion, is transformed into a moral order, or an order based on morality, by the expanded and elaborated scene of Hell that demonstrates the moral consequences of one's acts clearly and vividly. As a result, Heaven and Hell, rather than being merely possible rebirth places for men, were transformed into more specific places for reward and punishment to be arrived at as a result of meritorious deeds and sinful deeds, respectively. This



moral order becomes a more concrete order by the vivid contrast made between the scenes of Heaven and Hell in terms of component images, composition, style, colour, and location that gives substance both to reward in Heaven and punishment in Hell. Heaven becomes more tangible as a goal to be aspired to and Hell more clearly seen as the obstacle to that goal.

These contrastive states are also exemplified in the two contrastive personages associated with Heaven and Hell. In the scene of Heaven, the recipient of the reward is represented by Indra, who stands at the apex of the moral hierarchy. The splendour of the Tavatimsa Heaven scene, which shows Indra surrounded by the attendant subjects and heavenly beings, represents an ideal state conferred on Indra as a reward for the superiority of his merit and the excellence of his rule. Such a representation not only emphasises the notion that Heaven is the place for reward but also clearly justifies the Buddhist kingship. Furthermore, through such a representation, the Thai king, who is compared to Indra, appears allusively as an ideal ruler, the *Dhammaraja* (the Righteous King) and the *Cakkavatti* (the Universal King).

In the scene of Hell, the recipient of the punishment is primarily represented by sinners via a great profusion of vignettes of tortures that primarily constitute the state of “*Avici*” within the scene of Hell. All the beings and objects in these vignettes can be associated with ordinary Thai people and their lives. Thus, such a scene of Hell makes those who are committing similar crimes in their actual life realise the importance of improving their morality that determines their fates and of the importance of the governance of Thai society. The awareness of this fact makes the rule of the Thai king, who is compared to Indra, all the more important. Within this context, the Thai king is also justified as an ideal ruler.

These messages displayed through the form and content of the paintings are conveyed in the most effective way to the greatest number, particularly to the laity who do not otherwise have either the opportunity or the ability to read the Traiphum, by being presented in the form of mural paintings, placed on the wall behind the presiding Buddha image in the most public religious space, the *ubosot* or one of the principal *viharns* that ensures their widest dissemination.

Moreover, the righteousness of the king, implied through the form and content of the Traiphum murals, is demonstrated in the existence of the murals themselves as moral offerings, especially such exquisite works like those commissioned by King Rama I. In other words, the act of making these murals is the act that substantiates the righteousness of the king. This substantiated righteousness of King Rama I is also conveyed to the audience through the form and content of the murals, thereby further

enhancing the justification of King Rama I's rule as *Dhammaraja* and *Cakkavatti*.

In short, the message of the justification of the kingship was covertly, but most effectively, conveyed through Hell's overt moral and religious context, as seen in the elaborate scene of Hell portrayed as a constituent of the distinctive hierarchical order within the World of Desire. Presented entirely in such rational and universal context that stresses morality to the fullest extent possible through their form, content, and medium, the messages of the justification of Kingship as well as of moral enforcement were conveyed in a way that nobody would deny. Thus, the murals became the most effective means of bringing order to the society and of consolidating the king's power, thereby bringing stability in the midst of social unrest and political instability.

The messages conveyed through the Traiphum text and the Traiphum mural paintings are fundamentally the same. However, King Rama I's mural paintings were not a mere visualisation of the text. The text conveys its messages primarily through an extensive description of the Realm of Men, treated as a microcosm within the comprehensive portrayal of the universe based on orthodox teachings, or the macrocosm. This double structure in the text, which is an effective means to demonstrate the significance of the *Cakkavatti* in relation to the orthodox framework and the salvation goal *Nirvana*, does not appeal to the laity, who still pursue a "this-worldly" life and are usually not familiar with nor interested in the philosophical significance of the Traiphum.

In contrast, King Rama I's mural paintings present the secular salvation goal of Tavatimsa Heaven directly, through its vivid contrast with Hell, the obstacle to attaining such salvation. Thus, the murals not only appealed to the masses but also effectively satisfied their religious requirements, just like the story of Phra Malai does. Thus, in commissioning the Traiphum mural paintings at the same time that he commissioned a re-edition of the Traiphum text, King Rama I reaffirmed the authenticity of the concept of the Traiphum and its underlying messages and conveyed them to the people in the most effective and convincing way. By doing so, King Rama I not only fulfilled his political purposes but at the same time fulfilled the needs of Thai society, both the clergy and the laity. This is probably why the Traiphum mural paintings were accepted and approved by the Thais as an important part of their culture.

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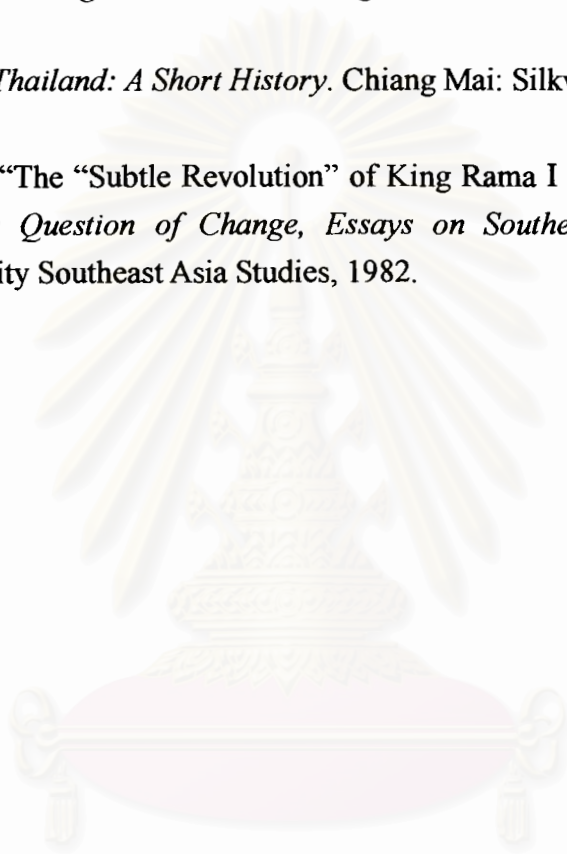
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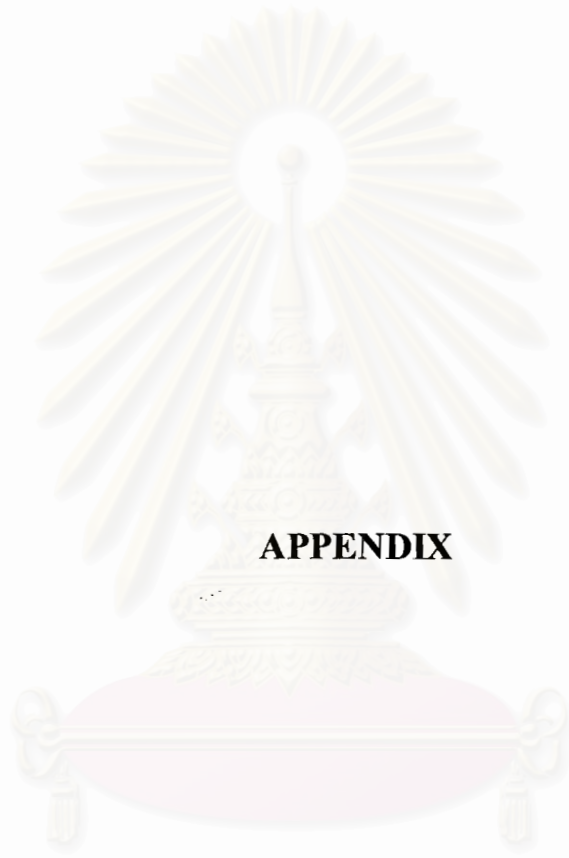
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**APPENDIX**

สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## Three Worlds and Thirty-one Realms

### World of Formless (4 realms)

- Realm of neither perception nor non-perception (Nevasannanasannayatana)
- Realm of nothingness (Akincannayatana)
- Realm of infinite mental process (Vinnanancayatana)
- Realm of the infinite of space (Akasanancayatana)

### World of Form (16 realms)

- Realm of *brahma* who are supreme (Akanittha)
- Realm of *brahma* who are clear-sighted (Sudassi)
- Realm of *brahma* who are beautiful (Sudassa)
- Realm of who are serene (Atappa)
- Realm of who do not fall from prosperity (Aviha)
- Realm of *brahma* who are without perception (Asannisatta)
- Realm of *brahma* who receive great reward (Vehapphala)
- Realm of *brahma* whose aura is steady (Subhakinha)
- Realm of *brahma* with infinite aura (Appamanasubha)
- Realm of *brahma* limited aura (Parittasubha)
- Realm of radiant *brahma* (Abhassara)
- Realm of *brahma* with infinite lustre (Appamanabha)
- Realm of *brahma* with limited lustre (Parittabha)
- Realm of great *brahma* (Mahabrahma)
- Realm of *brahma* ministers (Purohita)
- Realm of *brahma* attendants (Parisajja)

### World of Desire (11 realms)

- Realm of those who delight in the creations of others (Paranimmitavasavatti)
- Realm of those who delight in their own creations (Nimmanarati)
- Realm full of joy (Tusita)
- Realm of out of pain (Yama)
- Realm of the thirty-three divine beings or *devata* (Tavatimsa)
- Realm of the four guardian kings (Catumaharajika)
- Realm of men
- Realm of demon or *asura* (Asurakaya)
- Realm of suffering ghosts or *preta* (Pittivisaya)
- Realm of animals
- Various hells (Niraya)



## BIOGRAPHY

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