

Bangkok as a “Buddhist City”: Representation of “Civilized Bangkok” from Buddhist Culture¹

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Abstract

One of the outstanding images of Bangkok represented in official tourist guides is as a “*Buddhist City*”. Such images indicate the status of Bangkok as the centre of Thai civilization in the modern period. This study attempts to explore the concept of “Civilized Bangkok” from official tourist guides published by the state and state enterprises of Thailand from 1998 until 2013 under the promotion of the “*Amazing Thailand*” campaign in order to identify images of Bangkok as a “Buddhist City” and analyse the construction and representation of “Civilized Bangkok” based on the data sources.

The study reveals that the oldest image represented in official tourist guides and foreign travel writings is that Bangkok is a “Buddhist City” as there are Buddhist practices, Buddhist art and creation of a Buddhist cityscape. Bangkok is the continuation of the Buddhist civilization and the centre of Buddhism in Thailand and Southeast Asia. In this image, the relevant concepts of an

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“exotic city”, “the land of smiles”, “a sacred city” and “the city of pilgrims” have been constructed through the process of representation. The outstanding characteristics of Bangkok’s Buddhist attractions are that of being the epitome of “Thainess” in aspects of beauty, faith and knowledge. Such characteristics have been constructed from the preservation of the old Buddhist cityscape, the creation of Buddhist state temples and Buddha images, the status of the city as the centre of Buddhism in Thailand and Southeast Asia, and the integration of art and science in Buddhist monasteries.

Introduction

In the age of globalization, tourism is one of the important factors influencing cultural interaction among cities in the world. To affirm the positive image of Thailand, Thai tourism sectors have selected the uniqueness of Buddhist culture of each province to represent the civilization of the country. Bangkok, the center of Buddhism of Thailand, is promoted as a “Buddhist City” where Buddhist practices, Buddhist art and creation of a Buddhist cityscape evidence such Buddhist civilization. Through the promotion of Bangkok tourism since the outset of touristization in Thailand in the 1960s, to the period of the “*Amazing Thailand*” campaign, large numbers of Buddhist attractions in Bangkok have been selected to attract foreign visitors by the state. The outstanding characteristic of Bangkok Buddhist attractions is being exotic or “civilized”. Under such a picture, the outstanding characteristics of “Exotic Thai” are represented through images of the Venice of the East, Heaven on Earth, the City of Angels and relevant images of the Land of Smiles, or through the newly rebranding images of the biggest Buddhist museums and the center of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

“Buddhist City” Images Portrayed in Foreign Travel Writings

Tracing back to the past, the image of a Buddhist city has been portrayed in many Western writings. From the Ayutthaya period to the time of colonialism, the construction of Buddhist temples has been evidence of the glorious state of civilization, while the surroundings were unclean and undeveloped. The related pictures were the ways of life of people that show their good mind influenced by Buddhism. The iconic Buddhism temples that have widely appeared in foreign travel writings have been Wat Phra Kaeo, Wat Arun, Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho) and Wat Saket. Since the reign of King Rama III, these were significance state temples located in beautiful scenery, particularly near canals, the Chaophraya River, the Grand Palace and in Bangkok’s central area. Apart from this, Wat Trimit was also narrated in Western novels for its precious big golden Buddha image. Until the modern period, in the early era of Thai tourism, the traditional image of a Buddhist city was challenged by the influx of development that damaged the Thai ways and Buddhist ethnic. The attraction for international visitors was Bangkok’s red light districts attracting much more visitors. In this stream of negative change, Bangkok’s image has been as a dangerous metropolis where murder, human trafficking and an insecure life have also been portrayed in fiction and non-fiction. However, some data sources reveal that the image of a traditional Buddhist city still appears in foreign travel writings, but have more comparative pictures to other iconic tourist destinations in the world in aspects of a highly developed material culture with some preserved traditional areas. In this competition, Bangkok is a leading tourist city where traditional Buddhist temples and practices cause the city to differ uniquely from other Buddhist cities in the region. Relative to image making by the Thai tourism sectors, the positive viewpoints appearing in such data have been imitated in official tourist guides as the key to attract international visitors, especially the concept of the “exotic” Buddhist temple scene. Apart from such positive pictures, there are also some negative images, such as “the city of brothels”, as in the famous song “*One Night in Bangkok*” released in 1985, or

recently in the set of Bangkok songs released via *Le cool Bangkok* online magazine that portrays the contrasting picture of a Buddhist City and a dangerous city. The disrespect towards Buddhism, in other words, the negative image of Bangkok and Thailand from that view, has had a parallel reimagining by official tourist sectors through time.³

Overview of Buddhist Attractions from Traditional to New Trends

Traditionally, Buddhist attractions in Thailand and Bangkok share similar characteristics in that they are the representatives of the glorious past of the old Buddhist kingdoms. Among the large numbers of Buddhist attractions in Thailand, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Bangkok are the most prominent Buddhist cities in Thailand. There are historic Buddhist sites in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya have been designated as UNESCO World Heritage. These sites differ slightly from Buddhist attraction sites in Bangkok since Bangkok was established after the end of such former Buddhist kingdoms, aged not over 300 years. Therefore, Buddhist attractions in Bangkok have different outstanding features because of Bangkok’s status as the center of the most recent Thai Buddhist kingdom, especially the living practices in Buddhist monasteries and well-preserved Buddhist art in the old city area. For international reward, there are only a few iconic attractions that have been recognized as world heritage for their great body of archived knowledge, rare and beautiful Buddhist architecture and significance to old community living culture, such as Wat Phra Chetuphon, Loha Prasat and Wat Prayunwongsawat. However, in general view, the well-known Buddhist temples in Bangkok, mostly in Rattanakosin Island, are famous for their exquisiteness of Buddhist arts, historical background and cultural management. All may not be the oldest ones, but are worth to visit as they are evidence of the great faith of the Thai nation with regard to Buddhism, as well as the wisdom of to create such national heritage.

The prosperity of Buddhist heritage promoted in a Bangkok tourist context was based on the image of Bangkok as the center of the

³ See more details from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Night_in_Bangkok and <http://bangkok.lecool.com/>.

Thai Buddhist kingdom where cultural independence was cultivated from political independence. This idea has appeared since the 1960s, as can be seen in the publications of the Tourist Organization of Thailand (TOT). The characteristics of Bangkok Buddhist attractions are represented as evidence of the continuity of Buddhist social development that preserved conventional concepts of the creation of a Buddhist city. Through time, such concepts have appeared in the period of this study, the 15-year “*Amazing Thailand*” campaign, where the image of the kings as Buddhist protectors and Bangkokian as good Buddhists were narrated in official tourist guides. In this regard, the relevant images of Buddhist kings as great artists, great warriors and great supporters for all religious sects have been promoted. For Bangkokians, their Buddhist practices, comprised of praying, enjoying Buddhist festivals and ceremonies, offering food to monks and taking part in daily Buddhist sermons, have constructed the image of good Buddhists implying the happiness of the people in Bangkok. The characteristics of Thai Buddhists, in this context, are of mindful and gentle people, which also supports the representation of “the land of smiles” that is different from other Buddhist cities in the world.

Buddhist Attractions Promoted in the “Amazing Thailand” Campaign

In the period after the promotion of the “*Amazing Thailand*” campaign, the characteristics of Bangkok as a Buddhist city show the high contrast of modern Bangkok and the old religious culture that has long been practiced, preserved and reinvented in the Bangkok period. The representatives of Bangkok as a Buddhist city can be categorized into two parts based on the aspects mentioned above: temples and Buddhist practices. The state temples are representative of the glorious roots of the nation as they are the sacred places archiving national heritage showing the prosperous arts of the kingdom and also significance places for national ceremonies. Apart from state temples, local temples have been selected to be representative of the unity and long history of old communities in Bangkok and suburban areas as they are the center of local festivals and places archiving

Buddha images and Buddhist art of the communities. Knowingly, the represented icons or motifs of the Buddhist city are the prang of Wat Arun, the Emerald Buddha of Wat Phra Kaeo, the beautiful marble temple of Wat Benchamabophit, and the world heritage at Wat Phra Chetuphon.

Apart from the well-known temples as mentioned, the ordinary life of Bangkokians, such as people offering food to monks and paying homage in temples or shrines, is also counted as representative of Buddhist practices. The construction of the image of a Buddhist city focuses on the significance of the temples as places for ceremonies and festivals, along with the beauty of religious art created and collected in the temples, such as the Royal Barge procession, Loy Krathong and Songkran. Buddhist attractions also reveal the order of religious practices in Bangkok; Theravada Buddhism is predominant, partially integrated with Hinduism. Other religious sects, Mahayana Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikh of Thai-ethnic people are not iconic attractions, but show the blending of Buddhist art and ethnic religious art.

The Characteristics of a “Buddhist City” Reflected by Buddhist Attractions in Bangkok

Focusing on Bangkok in a tourist context, the image of a “Buddhist City” is represented by the uniqueness of Buddhist practices, Buddhist art and creation of a Buddhist cityscape. Knowingly, the oldest image of Thailand and Bangkok in a travel context is as a “Buddhist city”. As there are large numbers of Buddhist temples, Buddha images, traditional religious practices and ways of life showing the chain of Buddhism since the Thai Buddhist kingdom established in the Sukhothai period. For example, there is narration of the Loy Krathong festival firstly conducted by Nang Noppamas, a concubine of the King Ruang in the Sukhothai court, the Royal Barge procession for the Kathin ceremony appearing since the time of King Narai of the Ayutthaya court, the Songkran festival that generally spread in the Southeast Asian region since ancient times, as well as many Buddha images from the old Buddhist kingdoms now placed in

Buddhist temples, the Grand Palace and the National Museum. From official tourist guides, there are four groups of highlighted Buddhist attractions represented as the representatives of Thai civilization of the Rattanakosin period.

Preservation of the Old Buddhist Cityscape Supporting the Expression of Thai Traditional Values in Iconic Buddhist Historic Sites

Characteristics of civilization are constructed from main images of places and practices. Both the Visakha Bucha ceremony and Songkran festival highlight the significance of place as a center of Buddhism where the faith of Thai people is constructed through various activities all related to revering Buddhism. The most outstanding picture represented from Buddhist practices in this iconic site is faith in Buddhism. In this regard, the characteristics of the Thai Buddhist community has been constructed by focusing on Buddhist activities and people gathering to pay homage to important Buddha images of the nation. In relation to Bangkok Buddhist attractions, the image of being a center of Buddhism has been constructed from places and practices that are the center of activities in the historic area functioning as the heart of Bangkok and the Thai nation. The complex of the Meru Ground (Sanam Luang)-the Grand Palace-Wat Phra Kaeo is an unseparated site with each site linked together.

Iconic images of Bangkok as an old Buddhist city has long been representing through the picture of Wat Arun and the Chao Phraya River. In relation to this iconic place, there are two Buddhist ceremonies and festivals represented as Thai civilization: Loy Krathong and the royal barge procession. From such representation, Buddhist practices, temples and the Chao Phraya River are integrated. They are portrayed as one picture in order to convey the sense of place where “serenity”, “Thai beauty”, and Bangkok as the “Venice of the East” are combined.⁴ In the context of “riverine cultural tourism”,

⁴ Although there are many water-cities in Asia that once claimed to be “Venice of the East”, including Osaka, Calcutta, Suzhou, and Edo or Old Tokyo, Bangkok is the most prominent tourist city that has kept promoting such old image through the set of practices as mentioned. See more details in Kerr, “Bangkok Found”, 52.

there are many tours conducted to highlight this, including iconic destinations such as night fairs, “The Night of Wat Arun Fair” or Ratri of Wat Arun in the early of 2000s, and Chao Phraya cruising on Loy Krathong night that has been continuously promoted for 15 years.

The Chao Phraya River and the Loy Krathong festival has become an iconic tourist setting that has been colorized by modern decoration, including Chao Phraya cruising trips. The construction of the historical background of Loy Krathong portrays the image of Buddhist civilization that emphasizes fine handicrafts made by court women. From such narration of “a romantic legend about Sukhothai”, the characteristics of this festival have been romanticized.⁵ The sense of romance as the selling point also appears in foreign writing of *Sawasdee* magazine, such as “a poetic festival”,⁶ or “such scenes take place every November on waterways throughout Thailand in the country’s loveliest festivals, called Loy Krathong,” and “as it floats away it takes with it all the bad luck that has dogged you through the year.”⁷ In connection with Buddhism, some tourist guides have cited that “Loy Krathong honours the Lord Buddha and gives thanks to the river goddess,”⁸ or “Buddhist redefined it a Brahmin ritual of Loy Krathong Pratheep, was an act of worship to God Brahmin, Narayana and Isva as a pious homage to the Lord Buddha’s footprint.”⁹

Wat Arun, the Chao Phraya River and the royal barge procession are the representation focused on the historical significance of Wat Arun as the center of the old Thai kingdom in the Thonburi period “designated a royal temple during King Taksin in 1767,”¹⁰ and also a symbol of continuing Thai civilization. Such a picture has been portrayed through a light and sound show that depicts the history of this site and the whole history of Thailand in the Rattanakosin period: “The show is a light and sound spectacle that uses a computerized

⁵ Kerr, “Bangkok Found”, 52-53.

⁶ Thai Airways International, *Sawasdee* (November 2004): 14.

⁷ Thai Airways International, *Sawasdee* (October 2000): 18, 20.

⁸ Thai Airways International, *Sawasdee* (September 2009): 35.

⁹ Thai Airways International, *Sawasdee* (September 2005): 15.

¹⁰ From “*The Night of Wat Arun Fair*”, see also in Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, *Bangkok’s Guide to The River and canals*, 20.

control system...the history of the Thai nation from past to present is told in the show.”¹¹ Apart from this representation of historical significance, the beauty of architecture, particularly the prang of Wat Arun located nearby the Chao Phraya River, has become the selling point in many tourist activities. Cruising along the Chao Phraya River as a part of a dining experience, and apart from Thai dancing and Thai cuisine, the beauty of the iconic Buddhist complexes elegantly standing is well-known scenery that has long been promoted. This picture of contemporary riverine tourism is differently represented from that highlighted in the very iconic image of Bangkok as a Buddhist city, the royal barge procession, which is the epitome of Thai beauty, Buddhist faith and the sense of amazement from the mythical narration to Thai craft production selected to attract visitors. The identities of places and practices from this picture has highlighted the beauty of the riverine scenery where the architecture of Wat Arun has been boasted for its similarity to Khmer architecture, and also the characteristics of the royal barge procession have been portrayed as the legend of the old Buddhist kingdom that makes the outstanding image of such components into a semi-real, mythical scene. In connection to Buddhist practices, the royal barge ceremony has integrated the concepts of Buddhism and Hinduism. In this regard, the procession, figurehead and story from Hindu mythology has been employed to celebrate the great Buddhist Kathin ceremony, a time for the laity to express gratitude to the monks.

Expression of Buddhist Faith from the Creation of Buddhist Temples and Buddha Images

In connection with the iconic Buddhist attractions, this study has categorized the creation of Buddhist attraction into three parts. The first part is the components of Buddhist buildings continually promoted and highlighted in official tourist guides. The second part is the creation of exquisite state temples: Wat Phra Kaeo, Wat Phra Chetuphon, Wat Ratchanada and Wat Benchamabophit. The third part

¹¹ TAT website, 6 March 2002.

is the unique conventional Buddhist cityscape marked by highlighted Buddhist architecture of the iconic state temples that makes the Bangkok tourist cityscape special.

Components of Buddhist Buildings Promoted and Highlighted in Official Tourist Guides

Wat Phra Kaeo is the most famous Buddhist temple in Bangkok and Thailand. It is represented as a complex of the epitome of faith as there are many significant examples of Buddhist art collected there representing devotee dedication to revere Buddhism and the kings as the incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. The outstanding attraction is the iconic Ramakien mural paintings at Wat Phra Kaeo, said to be the longest continuous mural in the world, narrating the story of Ramakien, the Thai rendition of the Rama story originating in India. These paintings are one of iconic motifs for visitors to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Such exemplar shows the influence and relationship between literature and mural art, transcending from oral to written to visual art. This shows religious art in the court now linked to public art consumption in the central state Buddhist temple. Unlike other Buddhist cities in Southeast Asia, the Ramakien mural paintings of Wat Phra Kaeo are the most accomplished and still well-preserved. The iconic Ramakien mural paintings are representative of a Southeast Asian Buddhist culture that successfully blended the concept of Hindu-Buddhism through the production of religious art which is still well-preserved for conventional symbolic function.

Complexes of “Thai Myths” in Buddhist Temples: “Guardian Giants” and Mythical Creatures at Wat Phra Kaeo-Grand Palace, Wat Phra Chetuphon and Wat Arun

Apart from the iconic Ramakien murals, use of characters from Ramakien, Traiphum and the *jataka* tales in the form of giant and mythical sculptures are prominent attractions in Wat Phra Kaeo-Grand Palace, Wat Phra Chetuphon and Wat Arun: “All things weird and wonderful in Thai culture are worth exploring in detail for a better

understanding of the country and its history.”¹² The ads promoted in *Sawasdee* as mentioned describes the mythical imagery in Wat Phra Kaeo-Grand Palace. John Hoskin, the writer of this tourist article talked about numerous mythical statues in state temples in order to welcome readers visiting Bangkok. The outstanding picture of Bangkok represented from such iconic imagery is that of “the city of mythic”, one with exotic characteristics promoted under the “*Amazing Bangkok*” theme. Although every culture has its lasting legends, the data sources reveal that Thailand and Bangkok is different because of the use of art decoration and the idea to revitalize characters from Buddhist narratives in symbolic Buddhist buildings. Such use of mythic Thai in Buddhist temples is composed from the following.

Firstly, the use of 12 characters from Ramakien adorned by traditional Thai craftsman resulting in a refinement with prominent attractiveness. Secondly, “animistic” beliefs as evidenced by the placement of these characters in order to “protect” the Buddhist temple. Thirdly, to construct a story of a battle between the giants of Wat Cheang, or Wat Arun, and Wat Phra Chetuphon; a local tale in the area that explains the establishment of Tatian, an old community located between these two Buddhist historic sites, a story that appears in some tourist guides.

Numerous Stupas and Pagodas in the Center of Rattanakosin Island: Symbols of the Highest Faith of the Bangkok Buddhist Kingdom

Another iconic view reflecting the image of Bangkok as a Buddhist city is numerous tall stupas and pagodas in Rattanakosin Island. The group of such buildings makes the sacred space in old town Bangkok have a centric mark at Wat Phra Kaeo-Wat Phra Chetuphon-Wat Arun, as well as dotting two other sites at Wat Saket and Wat Ratchanada. Condense sacred space marked by numerous stupas and pagodas is prominent Buddhist architecture that can easily be seen and has continuously been used as a mark for old town Bangkok. Traditionally, the concept to construct such buildings is described by

¹² Thai Airways International, *Sawasdee* (February 2005): 32.

Thai scholar Srisak Walliphodom. He explained that the significance of the great Buddha relics in Siam civilization could be summarized as the expansion of Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka to Burma, Mon, Thai, and Cambodia, causing these Buddhist cities to build many stupas and pagodas in order to centralize their communities.¹³ As a result, in Thailand there are large numbers of sacred buildings enshrining relics. Such tradition has been continuously practiced through time. When Bangkok was established as the center of the Thai Buddhist kingdom, some concepts have changed. In particular, there was no Mahathat temple established in old town Bangkok to enshrine great Buddha relics similar to other old Buddhist cities in Thailand. Instead, there are large numbers of stupas in old town Bangkok enshrining Buddha relics and the relics of former kings. In addition, being representative of the center of Buddhist faith, such creations also have uniqueness showing complexes of religious art. From this representation, the characteristics of such buildings comprise many art styles: Hindu mythology motifs, Chinese art motifs and material decoration, and Sri Lanka architectural art forms. The pattern and position of stupas and pagodas in Buddhist temples are influenced from Hindu-Buddhist cosmology. The decoration, which is an outstanding feature, was from Chinese mosaic and mythical figures attached to the buildings.

The Creation of Great Buddha Images: Representative of the Wealth and Wisdom of the Bangkok Buddhist Kingdom

Wealth is measured in many ways around the modern Kingdom, with one constant being the use of pure and precious metal in particular...no country has a greater reputation of being rich in mines than the country of Siam, and the great quantity of idols and other craft works which are there seen, evinces that they have been better cultivated there in former times, than now they are.¹⁴

¹³ See also in Srisak, *The significance of the great Buddha relics in Siam Civilization*, 63-69.

¹⁴ Thai Airways International, *Sawasdee* (November 2014): 18.

The above writing in *Sawasdee* magazine is an excerpt of Monsieur de la Loubere's writing that Anthony Windsor used to promote the iconic golden Buddha images of Bangkok and Thailand. Generally, the image of Bangkok as a Buddhist city has been partially constructed from the wealth of the nation by seeing numerous golden Buddhist edifices in temples. Apart from iconic golden Buddhist temples comprised the golden spires of Wat Phra Kaeo, the huge gilded chedi of the Golden Mount and numerous chedi in Rattanakosin Island, golden Buddhist attractions have been selected to be representative of the great creation and wisdom of Thai Buddhism: Wat Trimit "temple of the golden Buddha" and the reclining Buddha of Wat Phra Chetuphon are prominent Buddhist creations. The size and material of Buddha images evidence the faith of devotees. The large numbers of Buddha images promoted in the data sources attract foreign visitors because of the numbers, enormous size and valuable materials. Focusing on these two iconic Buddha images, the outstanding characteristics selected to promote are that of the size and posture of the reclining Buddha and the amount of real gold in the golden Buddha of Wat Trimit.

The Creation of Exquisite State Temples: Wat Phra Kaeo and Wat Benchamabophit, Representatives of the Center of a Traditional and "Modern" Buddhist State

These iconic state temples, Wat Phra Kaeo and Wat Benchamabophit, have functioned as representative of the power of the monarchy and the new modern state of the Thai nation. Importantly, such a flourish of royal temples appearing in terms of valuable artifacts, knowledge and art masterpiece is integrated in temples. This also can indicate the state of a civilized nation. The picture of a traditional Buddhist state prominently appeared through Wat Phra Kaeo and the Grand Palace. The characteristics of such sacred spaces are different from other Buddhist cities in the region. In particular, the aspect of the well-preserved conventional royal sacred place and Thai heritage also marks these complexes as the epitome of Thainess comprising the most refine Buddhist decoration and the blending of

Thai religious architecture with various art techniques developed throughout the Rattanakosin period.

Unique Conventional Buddhist Cityscape Marked by Highlighted Buddhist Architecture of Iconic State Temples that Makes a “Special” Bangkok Tourist Cityscape

This part will summarize Bangkok cultural routes that Buddhist temples have distinctly marked as characteristic of old town Bangkok. In *Bangkok Angelic Allusion*, Barry Bell explained how Bangkok has uniqueness in term of architectural landscape. He said one of the important factors is the numerous Buddhist temples with dissimilar roof markings differentiating traditional Thai buildings from ordinary modern buildings.¹⁵ Bangkok is the “city of images”, as cited in this book, easily and effectively recognized in tourist posters and brochures. Such an opinion is also evidenced in many ads that have raised Thai Buddhist architectural forms as the selling point for sightseeing, both from riverine and land views. Not only is the big picture of Bangkok as a Buddhist city, as a city of images marked by differing Buddhist architecture, the Bangkok tourist cityscape also has uniqueness of spaces that could be categorized as follows. Firstly, the characteristics of an “island” scape, where the selling point is a riverine scene with state temple complexes comprising of [1] traditional landmarks: Wat Arun, Wat Phra Kaew and Wat Phra Chetuphon; [2] new extended landmarks: Wat Prayoon designated by UNESCO; and [3] new iconic Hindu and Buddhist sacred sites closely located: Wat Suthat-Giant Swing, which was also selected as the new logo by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA). Ads in *Sawasdee*, for example, have promoted the old island cityscape where Buddhist temples are marked as the center. Among these Buddhist temples, tradition is the prominent picture. The idea to see such images also appear in many new activities, such as the cycling route in Rattanakosin Island and cruising along the Chao Phraya River. The landmarks of these activities are Wat Phra Kaeo, the Grand Palace and Sanam Luang. In this context, Buddhist temples are colorized by light decoration,

¹⁵ Bell, *Bangkok Angelic Allusion*, 25.

as well as significant sites that reflect the old world charm along the Chao Phraya River. Focusing on this image, many tourist guides have given the picture of Wat Phra Kaeo as the symbol of a glorious Thai Buddhist kingdom, inseparable from the Grand Palace, the heart of the country. The light decoration at night and glittering roof of *wat* (temple) and *wang* (palace) are the significant features that make this image more attractive. Apart from this, the relationship between old markets and Buddhist temples create a variety of scenes, “lively markets” and “serenity and beauty of temples”. The “Tourist Map of Rattanakosin”¹⁶ includes several routes: “Route 4: A Gem of the Thai Kingdom” highlighting Wat Phra Kaeo-the Grand Palace which “represent the pinnacle of Thai architecture and fine craftsmanship”. Along this route, major markets – Tha Chang Wang Luang-Tha Phra Chan – the old palace, where now the National Museum is located, and Wat Mahathat are promoted for preservation of old Buddhist cityscape where the center is the state temple and the Grand Palace. “Route 2: A bird’s eye view of the city” highlights the beauty of the panoramic view that focuses on the Golden Mount, the Loha Prasat and Wat Suthat, where still is preserved an old market around Dinso Road. In addition to approaching the sacred shrines of the holy relics, from the Mahachesadabodin Pavilion visitors can explore major multi-racial communities of Thai, Chinese and Indian around Wat Suthat. “Route 5: A tour of a royal garden” has selected two state temples, Wat Benchamabophit and Wat Phra Chetuphon. Along this route there are two old markets – Pak Khlong Talad and Talad Tha Tian – marked as old Buddhist communities.

The Largest Archive of Buddha Representatives in Thailand and Southeast Asia

There are large numbers of Buddha images and relics archived in Buddhist historic sites. The tourist guides reveal that similar to religious architecture and the Buddhist cityscape, Buddha images of the Rattanakosin period are from the gathering, collecting, imitating

¹⁶ Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, *Bangkok's Guide to Rattanakosin*.

former Buddhist kingdoms, and inventing new models with high art decoration. In this process, the image of Bangkok as the center of Buddhism has continuously been constructed through time in order to imply a strong Thai Buddhist state. Similar to conventional Buddhist centralization, Bangkok Buddhist attractions in this group are portrayed as representative of a kingdom of prosperity and power. The concept to create, collect and propagate sacred Buddha representatives in the Buddhist region has traditionally been practicing through times, both for spiritual and social purposes.

The Largest Collection of Buddha Images from Before Thai Buddhist Kingdoms Were Established to the Bangkok Period

There are collections of Buddha images of ancient Buddhist kingdoms comprising of Srivijaya and peninsular areas, Khmer and Lopburi, and former old Buddhist kingdoms located in present day Thailand – Lanna Thai, Sukhothai and Uthong. There are many Buddha images with different artistic styles: Lanna, Sukhothai and Ayutthaya from old Buddhist cities in Thailand. Bangkok boasts collections of Buddha images and relics archived in the National Museum, Wat Benchamabophit, Wat Phra Kaeo, the Golden Mount and the Grand Palace. Collections of Buddha images have cultural significance in Thailand and in the old Buddhist kingdoms located in Thailand. They are symbols of the Thai nation and the great Buddhist kingdoms. The supreme characteristics and values are from the historical background and characteristics of religious art that combine “sacredness” and “beauty” into Buddha images. Revered Buddha images of the country, the Emerald Buddha and Phra Phuttha Sihing, are praised as national Buddha images, along with the beautiful and most revered Buddha image named Phra Buddha Chinnarat that King Rama V imitated from Wat Phra Sri Rattana Mahathat, Phitsanulok. The data sources also refer to such details such that one could draw a long Buddhist chain between Bangkok and Sri Lanka through Buddhist history in this region. Not only the trace of Buddhist attractions is mentioned, the representation shows that in religious practices, these iconic Buddha

images function as the center of faith and ritual in national Buddhist ceremonies and festivals. They are also the destination for Buddhist pilgrimage, along with the great relic at the Golden Mount that is an important sign of a great Buddhist kingdom and the chain from Thailand to Sri Lanka.

The Integration of Art and Science in Buddhist Monasteries

Wat Phra Chetuphon represents evidence of a highly developed Buddhist temple of Thailand for its great integration of Buddhist art and science. In such representation, it has been promoted for the progressive concept of gathering Buddhist and secular knowledge that goes further than general Buddhist temples in the country and region conventionally have done, while other Buddhist countries at that time were dominated under colonization. The success of campaigns to remodel general forms and types of knowledge in monastic space was continuously constructed by the command of Kings Rama I to Rama III. In the reign of King Rama III, there was a great renovation and construction that made over Wat Phra Chetuphon into the center of Buddhist knowledge of the country; in particular, the inscriptions with knowledge of a variety of fields, the construction of the Reclining Buddha decorated with novel style on the footprint, the making of hermit statues teaching Thai yoga, and *Khao Mor* [เขามอ] or imitation small hills decorated by Chinese pagodas, lantern poles, figurines, four-legged animal figures and rare plants and herb. Such attractions are now iconic tourist sites. The characteristics of civilization from the representation of Wat Phra Chetuphon is that of the exhibition of data revealing the essential knowledge for the state in the lens of the kings that partially shows the development and integration of Asian wisdom heritage of the Thai Buddhist state. This also shows the professional skill and wisdom of the kings, scholars and craftsmen of the Rattanakosin period. Prominently, the branches of knowledge show the civilization of Thailand where Bangkok is the generating center. The process of collecting and propagating various branches of knowledge in Wat Phra Chetuphon was also the first time the country embedded a significant body knowledge that was essential for development and

was the representation of a “civilized nation” to other countries. The outstanding identities of iconic attractions in Wat Phra Chetuphon are their contents and representation. The contents or characteristics of the body of knowledge have distinct details different from other Buddhist cities, both in the country and in the region. The representation of such knowledge is by the creation of art. The method to propagate such knowledge is based on the transformation of knowledge from text and oral to visual (painting and sculpture) and inscription in order to serve the self-learning of the Thai people. With respect to iconic Buddhist attractions, Wat Phra Chetuphon has managed the tourist space to highlight the outstanding identities of place and practice. The must visit site is the Epigraphic Archives that is a collection of Thai knowledge of Asian and local roots. The invention of religious art is also outstanding. There are many attractions in Wat Phra Chetuphon represented as an exhibition of faith and Buddhist knowledge. The most prominent is the footprint of the Reclining Buddha that shows creativity and Thai beauty. The creation was intentionally done to demonstrate the 108 auspicious symbols made by embedding mother-of-pearl, along with Chinese art, onto the Buddha’s footprint. This was the first creation of such type of Buddhist art in the world. Lastly is the image of a “temple of the healing art”¹⁷ that is a success at branding Thai massage as a product of Bangkok to world tourists. The creation has ranged from the development of traditional knowledge to contemporary healing services, from traditional knowledge described in the history of the Lord Buddha and literature to a concrete exhibition in the form of park decoration being the replica mountains influenced from Chinese art decoration. As a tourist attraction and temple service, the school of Wat Phra Chetuphon Thai massage is the only place that has managed to serve visitors in all aspects, from historical tour and traditional healing with unique method to art demonstration. In the data sources, the selling point of the iconic massage school is on its original and long practice among Thai people passed on over generations.

¹⁷ Thai Airways International, *Sawasdee* (September 2010): 25. Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, *Bangkok Style 2010*, 41.

Conclusion

To summarize, iconic Bangkok tourist sites represent the result of a long continuous preserved and developed Buddhist culture with no interruption of great wars and colonization as in other Buddhist cities. As a result of political and cultural independence since the establishment of the Rattanakosin kingdom, there are many outstanding Buddhist attractions that evidence a strong Buddhist social establishment with continuous development, different from other Buddhist cities in this region. Rattanakosin Island is representative of an old Buddhist kingdom that is still preserved and practiced; in the sacred area, many iconic Buddhism motifs are conjoined.

In a tourism context, these characteristics are the selling point selected by the state to attract foreign visitors and to be representatives of the civilization of the country and city. For visitors, “what to see” is the easiest and fastest ways to consume cultural attractions; the most outstanding picture of Bangkok as a Buddhist city is “the beauty”. The city is represented as the outcome of the faith and wisdom of Buddhism. The state temples and the Grand Palace are representatives of the highest beauty of Buddhist cultural heritage of the country and the city of Bangkok. “The mythic beauty” is the most outstanding concept that has been formulated from beautification, especially by adornment, creating exquisite religious art, or the tourist space – “*Amazing*”. The second characteristics of beauty is from novel creation. The invention based on conventional concepts is the most significant idea of Thai craftsmanship. In the larger picture, the outstanding characteristics of Bangkok as a Buddhist city is from the beauty of old world charm that comes from the creation of a Buddhist city since the establishment of the Rattanakosin kingdom. Next are the characteristics of “sacredness”. The image of Bangkok that has been portrayed is of a “sacred city” because of the status as the center of Thai and Southeast Asia Buddhist cities. The outstanding identities of Bangkok, in this context, is that of the first and only Buddhist city with its religious culture directly and traditionally influenced from Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism. The image of Bangkok also focuses on “the centeredness” as appears in the centralization of national Buddhist festivals and ceremonies onto state Buddha images enshrined in sacred

space in Rattanakosin Island. The most important factor that makes the uniqueness of Bangkok as a Buddhist city is from “Buddhistization” that has been portrayed through Bangkok’s Buddhist cityscape and national Buddhist practices. The last is “knowledge” cultivated from Buddhist temples. There are two aspects of Buddhist knowledge represented in this context. The first type is that of the exhibition of Bangkok as the biggest museum that has archived Buddhist cultural heritage of Thailand and Southeast Asia. From such a picture, the aspects of knowledge have ranged from Buddhist historical background to Buddhist art collections and prototypes. The second is that of Buddhist temple service originated from Buddhist knowledge, as in the branding of traditional Thai massage of Wat Phra Chetuphon. With respect to the factors influencing the selection of Bangkok’s Buddhist attractions by the state, the data sources reveal that Thai tourism organization have selected the core image of Bangkok as a Buddhist City, which is the oldest image appearing in foreign travel writings since the time before touristization. In this image, the relevant concepts of an “exotic city”, “the land of smiles”, “the sacred city” and “the city of pilgrims” has been constructed through the process of representation.

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