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RATTANAKOSIN EMERALD BUDDHA TEMPLE

SUWAPHAT SREGONGSANG : A STUDY OF THAILAND AND LAOS RELATIONS
THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE VIENTIANE SISAKET TEMPLE AND THE
RATTANAKOSIN EMERALD BUDDHA TEMPLE. THESIS ADVISOR : PROF. ROSS KING, Ph.D..
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The study of Thailand and Laos relations through the perspectives of Vientiane Sisaket temple and Rattanakosin Emerald Buddha temple is to investigate (1) the relations between the Siam and Lao kingdoms in the Sukhothai period, the Ayutthaya period, and early Rattanakosin period (Kings Rama I-III) (2) the relations between architectural characteristics of an emblematic temple in the early Rattanakosin era (Emerald Buddha temple) and an emblematic temple in Vientiane (Sisaket temple) and (3) Laotian perspectives towards Siam through an interpretation of the Sisaket temple and King Anuvong, (the Lao ethnocentric view). The method of investigation for this study is qualitative, involving in part a descriptive analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews with a group of people who are involved in the area and primary data from Thai and Lao chronicles in the National Archives of Thailand and the Lao National Library. For secondary data there are the books about history, religion, and architecture from libraries in Thailand and Lao Vientiane.

The study found that (1) the relations between the Siam and Lao kingdoms in that period was not smooth due to the political situation, where Lao kings had to strengthen efforts to liberate their kingdom from being annexed to Siam while Siamese kings tried to maintain their authority over the Lao states, especially Vientiane. The war between Vientiane and Bangkok which aimed for liberation could not be avoided. In 1827-1828, the war began and finished with the Bangkok triumph. As a result, Vientiane was destroyed. Lao properties, people, and valuable commodities were removed to Bangkok. However, one important building still survived from the destruction, namely Sisaket temple. This temple was built in the reign of King Anuvong, designed with a Bangkok temple architectural model. (2) The construction of Sisaket Temple yielded the only temple in Vientiane that was built almost similar to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok in that time. King Anuvong was one of the Lao Vientiane nobles arrested in Bangkok and he spent much time in Bangkok and had close relations with King Rama II. When comparing the two temples, there are many elements that are similar in form, such as the form of building pediments, roof, struts to support projected eaves joists, cloister, column, terrace surrounding the main chapel, mondop style of the window and door frames, ceiling decoration, capitals, and the paintings of the interior murals. (3) The relations between King Anuvong and Sisaket temple construction policy could be linked to the Emerald Buddha, the most sacred object of Thai and Lao kings to legitimate their authority both in terms of politics and society. The history of the Emerald Buddha is a story of both fantasy and reality as a guardian of the Thai and Lao nation. This gives the Emerald Buddha mystical powers that awe the faithful and are all part of a mythology surrounded by mystery and ceremony. With the Indian conception of sacred kingship, wherever Buddhism has prevailed as was the case in Thailand and Laos, these beliefs were modified so that the ruler was viewed as a Bodhisatta or "Future Buddha" rather than a god. These traditions formed the basis for the Siamese and Lao kings' quest to obtain divine status and the claim of having acquired the physical marks of a Buddha. King Anuvong spent time in Bangkok as a political hostage. Although the problem of this study is that the details of the history are unclear and there is no obvious evidence to show that why Sisaket temple could survive during the war, at least this temple could be posed as the representation of King Anuvong and his yearning for liberty and his faith of the Emerald Buddha through the standing of this holy place.

Program of Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism

Graduate School, Silpakom University

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Student's signature *Suwaphat Sregongsang*

Thesis Advisor's signature *Ross King*