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STUPA-MUSEUM AND THE DISSEMINATION OF BUDDHIST DHAMMA  
IN THE REIGN OF KING BHUMIBOL

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**ABSTRACT**

The construction of stupas for the propagation of Dhamma became significant since the Great Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha. After 1974, King Rama IX became involved in the construction of stupa-museums for a number of noble monks and wanted their bone remains and utensils to be kept at the same place. This study was aimed at interpreting the construction of these stupa-museums regarding Dhamma dissemination. The conceptual framework lies in the notion that the following components: the noble monks' personal utensils exhibited, the construction venues, myths, legends, and biographies formed as Dhamma dissemination. The study revealed that besides the cremation ceremony participated by King Rama IX, the placement of the utensils and bone remains, and the opening ceremony of the stupas; The components mentioned are that illustrate their Dhamma practices in their *Dhutanga* paths, showing that Dhamma practice leads to attaining an *Arahanta*.

**INTRODUCTION**

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, or King Rama IX of the Chakri Dynasty continuously supported Buddhism during his reign. The key concept His Majesty always held was to observe the virtues of the Ten Royal Virtues (*Rajadhamma*), the practices of Bodhisattva Dhamma and Dhamma of the King according to the principle of Buddhist kingship. In addition to His Majesty's patronage of the religion and dissemination of Dhamma, King Rama IX had close relationship with forest monks under the lineage of Luang Pu Mun in particular.

It cannot be denied that King Asoka the Great was the major model of King according to the principle of *Cakkavati*<sup>1</sup>, the fact that King Asoka was a Dhamma King did not only denote the mission in disseminating Dhamma, but also many other missions. He built hospitals, animal hospitals, roads that connected places and provided more accesses in the kingdom, accommodations for travelers, wells and reservoirs, and provided education to the people. Asoka built stone inscription as an announcement of Dhamma as well as making an oration to declare Dhamma policy for the different levels of leaders in the country to use in their teaching and in their religious fostering (Phra Brahmaganabhorn, 2011, p. 46). In addition to the connection with monks for revival of the religion, construction of stupas or monasteries is one of the royal duties of the monarch under the Theravada Buddhism, following King Asoka as the model. Stupas are a symbol of an emperor, and that is why King Asoka built as many as 84,000 stupas to disseminate Dhamma all over the Jambudvipa (Strong, 1983, p. 109). The Asoka Paradigm became another way of legitimating political authority and integrating socio-political realm (Swearer, 1981, p. 46).

Nevertheless, King Rama IX saw the relationship, based on His Majesty's own sense, between the monks and the people, in the dimension of the great changes from the past eras. Since His Majesty King Rama IX did not possess full power as the former kings but was under the democratic system of constitutional monarchy, implementation of many royal projects was based on the interpretation of *Cakkavatti* principle according to the contemporary Thai society context. Under this condition, His Majesty King Bhumibol had a reservoir constructed in the area of Klong Pane Cave Monastery of Luang Pu Khaw Analayo, now in the area of Nong Bualamphu Province (Archives and Documentary Codification Committee, 1999, p. 299) and Ban Na Thong reservoir constructed in 1977 at Chetiya Khiri Vihara Monastery or Phu Thok in Sriwilai District, Buengkan Province at present. The latter was the monastery where Luang Pu Juan Kulachettho stayed. The construction was also aimed at managing water resources for the villagers. That was the first occasion King Rama IX went to discuss Dhamma with Luang Pu Juan (Phra Raksaphon, 2009, p. 55).

King Rama IX invited some noble monks to the Palace several times to personally converse on Dhamma issues or to preach to the public. Besides, His Majesty the late King went to pay respect to some noble monks who stayed in a remote rural area. For, instance, he went to see Luang Pu Khaw Analayo 8 times, from 1976 to 1983 (Archives and Documentary Codification Committee, 1999, p. 299) and to see Luang Pu Juan Kulachettho at Phu Thok in 1977 (Phra Raksaphon, 2009, p. 55). In 1979, His Majesty made a personal visit to Ban Tad Forest Monastery in

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<sup>1</sup> *Triphumikatha* written by King Lithai mentioned King Asoka the Great as a model of *Cakkavati*. See Lithai (2526:73-82). In addition, there are religious scriptures that mentioned King Asoka such as *Mahavamsa*, See Geiger, Wilhelm. (trans.) (1964) *The MAHĀVAMSA or The Great Chronical of Ceylon and ASOKAVADAN*, See Strong, S. John. 1983. *The Legend of King Asoka: A Study and Translation of the Asokavadan*, and *THUPAVAMSA* Scripture, etc. See Thupavamsa (Berkwitz, Stephen C. (trans) 2007.

Udonthani to meet with Luang Ta Maha Boowa Yannasampanno. This trip was made with no planned itinerary during the time of his stay at Phu Phan Palace<sup>2</sup>. At that time, the area in the Upper Northeast was affected by the Communism (Phra Raksaphon, 2009, pp. 47-48).

His Majesty King Rama IX revived the religion by many methods. In addition to His Majesty's ordination in 1956, he practiced meditation, prayed and studied philosophical Dhamma and ways of practicing it<sup>3</sup>. In 1985, His Majesty had the Tripitaka revised. The work was completed in 1987 and was published both in *Pali* and in Thai version. In Thailand, a study of the Tripitaka was conducted and the various parts translated into Thai. This work was accomplished in the reign of King Rama IX. In 1988, Mahidol University filed all of the Tripitaka content and the exegesis on the computer, which was the first time in the world (Dinar Buntham, 2555, p. 214).

King Rama IX played an important part in constructing the stupas for the noble monks of Luang Pu Mun Phurithatto lineage, although some Stupas containing relics of those noble monks had been constructed before, for example, the Stupa of Luang Pu Phrom Jirapunno (1970) at Prasitthitham Monastery, Udonthani, or the Commemorated Stupa of Luang Pu Bua Siripunno (1975) at Nong Saeng Forest Monasatery, Udonthani. Some noble monks had prior to then constructed large stupas for containing the Buddha's Relics, for example, Phra Thutangkachedi at Asokaram Monastery, Samutprakan Province, constructed by Luang Po Lee Thammatharo in 1960 and Phra Viriyang Mangala Maha Chedi Ratanakosin at Thamamongkhon Monastery, Bangkok, constructed by Luang Po Viriyang in 1976<sup>4</sup>.

However, when the bone remains of Luang Pu Mun Phunivatto, following the cremation in 1950, turned into relics 4 years after, in 1954 (Phra Maha Bua, 1992, p. 229), the phenomenon brought about great respect towards the many follower monks of Luang Pu Mun Phunivatto, who carried on Luang Pu Mun's path among Thai people, including King Rama IX and the members of the Royal Family. From 1978 to 1983, His Majesty King Rama IX contributed to the construction of stupa-museums for containing the bone remains of the noble monks under Luang Pu Mun Phunivatto's lineage, i.e., the stupa-museum of Luang Pu Fan Ajaro (1980), the

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<sup>2</sup> One of the duties of the universal king or *Cakkavatti* is to consult and ask Dhamma questions to Brahmin and monks who are in good conducts and are not negligent in order to clarify what is right or wrong. See Phra Brahmaganabhorn (2551:251).

<sup>3</sup> See the Royal duty in fostering Buddhism of King Rama IX in Dinar Buntham (2555: 216-275).

<sup>4</sup> Although the construction of this stupa began in 1976, the completion and interment of the Relics was in 1984. See Viriyang Sirintharo, 2009: Autobiography of Phra Thepchetiyajarn (Viriyang Sirintharo), Samutprakan: Kyodo Nation Printing Service (PP 235-256). See more in Pattara&Songyot. 2016. The Establishment of Phra Maha Chedi in the Early 26th Buddhist Era in the Monastery of Luang Pu Mun Bhuridatta Thera's Lineage. Journal of the Faculty of Architecture, Khon Kaen University, Year 15, Issue No.2 (July-December) 2016, Page 53-70. Pattara and Songyot, 2020. pp. 54-70. Journal of Faculty of Architecture, Khon Kaen University. Vol.15 No.2

stupa-museum of Luang Pu Khaw Analayo (1982), and the stupa-museum of Luang Pu Juan Kulchettho (1984).

Dissemination of Dhamma ever since the Buddhism Era was by means of journey to teach Dhamma of Lord Buddha and the disciples. Later, Dhamma was to be memorized by chanting until there was inscribed. The text of the Tripitaka was written during the First Century (Veidlinger, 2006, p. 10). Monks in the Theravada realm, moreover, took an important part in recording the history, which was one means of Dhamma dissemination in South and Southeast Asia, such as the texts of *Thupavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* describe the history of Buddhism and Sri Lanka. These writings were in the frame of religious history, history of Buddha images, or history of monasteries, important places, or relic stupas (Veidlinger, 2006, p. 11).

Nevertheless, construction of Buddhist monasteries is an important part in dissemination Dhamma, which had been related, preached or transferred through traditional processes or other social processes that may not be in the form of books. One cannot deny the importance of the transfer of Dhamma through practices. There are evidences of the religion in the form of architecture that compiles various components which can be the principles of Dhamma. The study on the dimension of Dhamma dissemination has not received much interest, however. As mentioned above, it is undeniable that Rama IX tried to encourage Buddhism according to his sovereignty provided in the context of contemporary Thai society. However, his architectural work that was most mentioned was the monastery of his reign (Wat Phra Rama the XI Kanchanabhisek) while the construction of the stupa that he was a part of the project has not been investigated as part of the patronizing Buddhism. Documents which are compiled specifically according to the King Rama XI's works also disregarded these stupa museums.<sup>5</sup>

There are few architectural studies by means of the analyses of meaning and interpretation of stupas in the contemporary Thai Buddhism society. One is the work of Gabaud (2003) who gave interesting comment that calling a stupa-museum denotes the preservation of the eight necessities (*attha parikkara*) of a noble monk and can be thought of as the *paribhogchetiya*. Pattara and Songyot (2020) were interested in studying the stupas in this group, with an emphasis on architectural semiotic interpretation, location and new utilization as well as the principle of creation of the center. The works of Sakchai (2017) on "Stupas in Thailand: Style, Development and the Power of Faith" and that of Santi (2001) on his study of "Buddhism in Thai Architecture: Stupa" involved the style evolution of stupas. Phakorn et al. (2015) study specifically on some contemporary stupa in Northeast Thailand of the period 1982-2012 is also focusing on the design of the form of the stupas.

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<sup>5</sup> For instance the works of Dinar (2012) and Grossman and Dominic (eds.) (2011).

The architecture of these stupa-museums is key evidence showing King Rama IX's connection to them as an important supporter of noble monks. It was His Majesty who gave ideas in the management and construction of these stupa-museums. Religion-based interpretation of these stupa-museums, especially in Dhamma dissemination, would contribute to the understanding of the complexity of the traditional concept and its transformation and the development of the contemporary architectural style of stupas.

### *Objectives of the Study*

This study was aimed at understanding the meaning of the architectural expression of the stupa-museums, relation with the Theravada Buddhist Kingship, and the hope to disseminate Dhamma. The interpretation thus performed was in the contemporary society of King Rama IX's reign as His Majesty was involved in setting the managerial plans of the construction of these stupa-museums.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The conceptual framework of the study was based on traditional establishment of the meaning of Buddhism architecture including the making of decorating paintings and the symbolic system of stupa architecture. The development of the key components of the stupa was interpreted as symbols connected to the Buddhism principles in the contemporary social context of Thailand. The key components are, for instance, narrative paintings or exhibited objects. Snodgrass (1985, p. 4) pointed out that in traditional India, architecture is viewed as symbolic in both content and import. It is intended to function both physically and metaphysically. As a symbol, it is a formal expression in and through which a supra-formal reality is perceived. Coomaraswamy (1977, p. 168) demonstrated that the architectural decorating pictures telling the story of the Buddha are not only symbols of historical records but also show legendary and iconographical meanings. Additionally, Snodgrass (1985, p. 6) demonstrated that the symbolic compositions were not only the visual and spatial symbols but also the myths, which are a symbol expressed in verbal, narrative and ritual, as well as related doctrine, all of which are part of the construction of a symbolic system.

The earliest Buddhist traditions, Dhamma refers, first, to the sacred reality which the Buddha had discovered according to his Enlightenment. It is recognized both as the Law which regulates and governs the totality of existence, and as the Truth which enable men to break free from the limitations which existence imposes. Therefore, Dhamma was taken to be source both of order in the world and salvation from it. (Renold, 1972, p. 15).

Phra Buddha Kosajarn (Prayut Payutto) concluded Buddhism Dhamma in 2 types as follows:

1. Expressing the middle-path truth called *Majjhenedham*, for benefits in terms of practices in real life and which does not enhance attempts to attain truth by dispute or by creating a theory.

2. Expressing the middle-path practices called *Majjhima patipada*, which is the principle of living by the self-training individual.

Buddhism is the religion of action or assiduity, not the religion of pleading. Dhamma preached by Lord Buddha is aimed towards practices (Phra Dhammapitaka, 2000:6). Consideration related to the principles of Dhamma thus requires consideration of both the truth and the practices.

### *Study Sites*

The study was targeted only at three contemporary stupas, which received guidance by King Rama IX from 1977 to 1986, namely, 1) the stupa-museum of Phra Ajarn Fan Ajaro (Figure 1), 2) the museum of Phra Ajarn Khaw Analayo's utensils (Figure 2), and 3) the stupa-museum of Phra Ajarn Juan Kulachettho (Figure 2). The details presented consist principally of the procedures in designing and constructing the stupa-museum of Phra Ajarn Fan Ajaro, since it was the first stupa under King Rama IX's intention. According to Table 1, the emphasis of this study was on the stupa-museum of Phra Ajarn Fan Ajaro, while the comprehensive view of the three projects is included. The stupa-museum of Phra Ajarn Fan Ajaro is situated at Udomsomporn Forest Monastery, Pannanikhom District, Sakonnakhon. Luang Pu Fan built this monastery in 1950 and was the first abbot here.

**Table 1** Information of the 3 stupa-museums

	Date of Death	Cremation	Construction of the Stupa
Luang Pu Fan Ajaro	January 4, 1978	January 21, 1978	Laying foundation stone – November 22, 1980 Placing bone remains – January 9, 1982
Luang Pu Luang Pu Juan	April 27, 1980	April 18, 1981	1984
Luang Pu Khaw	May 16, 1983	February 11, 1984	Laying foundation stone – November 25, 1982 (Luang Pu still alive) Placing bone remains – November 25, 1989



**Figure 1** The Stupa-Museum of Phra Ajarn Fan Ajaro, Udomsomporn Forest Monastery, Sakonnakhon



**Figure 2** The Museum of Phra Ajarn Khaw Analayo's bone remains and utensils, Klong Pane Cave Monastery, Nong Bualamphu (Left) and the Stupa-Museum of Phra Ajarn Juan Kulachettho, Jetiyakirivihara Monastery, Buengkan (Right)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The stupa-museums*

His Majesty King Rama IX and Her Majesty the Queen went on a personal trip to the royal-patronage cremation of Phra Ajarn Fan on January 20, 1978. His Majesty said,

*“As a student of Phra Ajarn, I ask everyone to be in unity. Please strictly hold on to his preaching. Please keep Phra Ajarn’s bone remains with his utensils. If these can be kept at the same place, that will be good.”* (The Documentary Compiling Committee, 1999, p. 73).

On November 22, 1980, The King came to lay the foundation stone of the stupa-museum building. When the construction was completed, His Majesty came back to preside over the opening ceremony and the placing of bone remains in January, 1982. The stupa has an official name of “Phra Ajarn Fan Ajaro’s stupa-museum”

(Phra Raksaphon, 2011, pp. 33-36). There are 56 arches decorating the base of the stupa, with the outside being clay bas reliefs, relating the life of Luang Pu Fan (Figure 4). The four metal doors also contain stories related to 4 types of lotus or four types of people. The center is the pedestal that supports the portrait statuesque of Luang Pu Fan in the sitting position with his left hand holding a long stick (Figure 3).

The stupa-museum of Phra Ajarn Juan at Jetiyakirivihara Monastery, Buengkan, is an octagon form with doors on three sides and on the remaining five sides are decorating terracotta high relief scenes relating the story of Phra Ajarn Juan (Figure 4). The biography of Phra Ajarn Juan, is also related in the order of his ordained years over the three door arches. The Monastery had asked for affixing the abbreviation of King Rama IX's signature “๙๗๙” on top of a door arch. Inside and at the center stands a small stupa that contains the relic. One wall behind the icon is relief scenes showing Phra Ajarn Juan's biography, his past life and his line of conduct. Besides, in the cabinet that exhibits Phra Ajarn Juan's eight necessities, there is the photograph of King Rama IX when he made a visit to discuss Dhamma with Phra Ajarn Juan at the Monastery and His Majesty's photographs at the cremation (Sureepan, 2013, pp. 98-100).



**Figure 3** The statue of Luang Pu Fan (Left) and Phra Ajarn Juan (Right)





**Figure 4** Terracotta reliefs showing Luang Pu Fan’s biography (Left) and relating the story of Phra Ajarn Juan (Right)

The stupa-museum of Luang Pu Khaw Analayo that was built later underwent interesting developments. Although there are no high reliefs containing the biography of Luang Pu Khaw, the design of the building structure to resemble elephants facing the stupa in all of the four directions shows interesting intention since Luang Pu Khaw used to have some connection with wild elephants until it became a legend and shows an important part of his struggling in life. Inside the stupa at the major point stands statuesque of Luang Pu Khaw in meditation. It can therefore be said that the design of the stupa’s form in a structure that looks like elephants facing the stupa (Figure 5) is a new interpretation that denotes the stupa being deviated from the traditional form. The structure that resembles elephants is the use of metaphor instead of a realistic elephant sculpture as a component. The power of these virtual elephants and the legend of Luang Pu Khaw made it unnecessary to build bas reliefs containing biography as decoration. This is certainly a new interpretation that makes the form of the stupa different from the traditional pattern.



**Figure 5** The Structure of Luang Pu Khaw’s museum of relic and utensils – the structure resembling wild elephants.

### *Dhamma Biographies, Portraits, and the Eight Necessities*

In the Indian Buddhist culture, there are decorating depicting showing stories of the Buddha's Life. The practice has been widespread and continued through time (Longhurst, 1992, p. 14). These paintings convey the meaning of the Buddha, Dhamma, and religion, which raise perception and observation as customary practices from the past until now. However, in Thai culture, there are changes in interpretation to be more specific to what appears in the contemporary stupas. For the virtue of the noble monks, most of the narrative scenes illustrate the personal story and the path of each noble monk. (Pattara, 2018, p. 431).

The biography of a noble monk is an important substance to be interpreted for the creation of decorating pictures, icons, or other symbols, all of which are derived from the content recorded in the biography or from events and stories that have become referenced texts. (Hayachi, 2011, p. 334). Keys (1981, p. 168) mentioned that since the historical uniqueness of the death, the actuality of this death is one of utter loss. The historical person is gone and will never be seen again. So too, the social order has been breached in that a social position has been vacated and the functions of the position are no longer be performed so that the meaning must be that the loss of death is not final, that in a personal, social, and/or universal way there is an order which negates the loss of death.

It is certain that the practices and duties of the monks in Luang Pu Mun Bhuridatta Mahathera's lineage are emphasized in Dhutanga (ascetic practices) and meditation. A book written by Acariya Maha Boowa Yanasampanno called "The Path of Dhutanga and Meditating Monks in the Lineage of Luang Pu Mun Bhuridatta Mahathera" begins with the word "*kammatthana*" (mental exercise) as a special Dhamma practiced by forest monks. True meditation can exist in everyone, male and female, and monks or laymen alike. The word "*kammatthana*" is defined here as the essence of practice in removing existence (*Bhava*), defilements (*kilesa*) and ignorance (*avijja*) from the mind in order to distance one away from suffering (*Dukkha*), which is birth, oldness, illness, and death (Acariya Maha Boowa Yanasampanno, 1993, p. 3). *Dhutanga* or thirteen austerities are ascetic practice is the essence of the life of forest monks. It is Dhutanga practice, the principle of which was formerly presented in relief sculptures at the museum of Luang Pu Mun's utensils at Sutthavasa Forest Monastery.

The propagation of the Dhamma of Buddhism in the reign of King Rama IX through his contemporary stupa construction was not only represented in the architecture and concept of worshipping the relics, but also the patronage of the noble monks who were the inspiration of the stupa construction. Noble monks are wise monks who practice according to Dhamma. While living, these noble monks taught the laity until the end of their lives. After passing away, the story of their lives and honor go on to serve as teaching that does not dissolve with the deaths. The stupa-museum still collects and propagates the teachings, as well as the place

for pilgrimage of the faith. This leads to the Dhamma being latent in architecture (Strong, 1983, p. 161).

Conze (1968, p. 250) suggested that since the human body is an important part behind the cultivation of attempts and attainment of Dhamma until bliss of freedom, there is a harmonious relationship between microcosm and macrocosm. Preserving what is preached is thus very important. The visible manifestations of this concern for cosmic harmony are the magnificent stupas that adorn all parts of the Buddhist world and are tangible focus of the religion. The stupas are as fundamental to Buddhism as the four holy truths, and it has been shown beyond doubt that they have cosmic significance and that they are representative of the universe. Mus<sup>6</sup> (1959, pp. 187-200 cited in Conze 1968, pp 250) further concluded that this cosmic architecture represents the world as a theatre for the working-out of the Dhamma and for the awakening of all beings by its piercing rays.

The paintings or pictures placed on the walls around each stupa that relate the stories of noble monks are the succeeding of Buddha's Jataka, which has been conventionally engraved around a Stupa. Brown (1997, p. 71) suggested that Jataka pictures in Indian architecture were made not for looking, for there are many of these could not be clearly visible. Thus, the paintings were there for worshippers. He also exemplified the making of Buddha's Jataka in India at Ajanta Cave, in Burma at Ananda Temple and at Borobudho in Indonesia. He believed these paintings were not made for communication or for teaching but were made in terms of the presence of the Buddha, his manifestation being produced through a visual (re)presentation of his history (Brown, 1997:100). In addition, Skilling (2008, p. 67) explained that Jataka paintings are not only literature but also ideology, for they relate the story in the attempts and accumulation of virtue as Bodhisattva until finally reaching the enlightenment and becoming Lord Buddha both in physical glory and spiritual accomplishment. Therefore, The biography of a noble monk in his stupa museum is the order of major events in his perfection (*Parami*) practice toward enlightenment.

King Rama IX must have known that these noble monks attained *Arahantship*, thus ordered their utensils and bone remains to be kept at the same place and had the stupa-museum constructed. Not long after the cremation, the bone remains crystallized and became relics. In this respect, Taylor (1996, p. 156) stated that many forest teachers have been regarded as national "spiritual treasures". Faithful Buddhists pilgrim to these places of stupa museums, making the stupas the center for Dhamma dissemination and remembrances similar to other relic *chetiyas* such as Phra That Panom. Pilgriming transfers pilgrims from the localized model of the village and region to the national model of the pilgrimage center<sup>7</sup>. In addition to the stupas, the records of life struggling and practices of the noble monks are present in Dhamma Biography Books that relates the true life-story as Dhamma principles.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Muz, "Introduction, Présence du Bouddhisme" (France-Asie [Saigon], Vol. XVI, 1959, pp.187-200 cited in Conze 1968:250.

<sup>7</sup> See the study of the pilgrimage tradition of Thai people, especially in the Northeast in Pruess (1976)

Biographies are usually published and distributed at the relic interment ceremony when the construction of the stupa was completed. They became important legends and the principle part of Thai Buddhism. Taylor (1997, p. 304) indicated that the transformative and integrative process of hagiography turned local legendary recluses into institutionalized national figures.

From at least the time of Asoka onward two kinds of Buddhism must be distinguished: that of the kings, at grips with the realities of the social world; and that of the monks, tranquilly renouncing the world and its agitations, provided the kings furnished them with the means to do so (Conze, 1968, p. 242). Although King Rama IX was a king with no power as the kings in old tradition or Buddhism states in the past, the fact that His Majesty supported the construction of stupas denotes connection between Buddhism of the noble monks and the society as one part.

The Dhamma that lies in the stupa may be understood by the fact that all the sects of Buddhism have the same principles that it is the same one between the body of the Buddha and his teachings. The relics are the manifestation of the body or the Dhamma, and both are the truth to remind the being of the Buddha. The stupa then functions as the teachings of the Lord Buddha (Snodgrass, 1985, p. 354). The noble monk's relics, which have transformed into sacred crystal relics, represent them as Buddhist disciples, not just a Buddhist monk. These Buddhist disciples are the witnesses of the enlightenment of Lord Buddha, which completed the Buddha's life as Lord Buddha. (Phra Maha Thiranat, 2008, p. 78)

King Rama IX's patronage over Luang Pu Fan, Luang Pu Khaw, and Phra Juan, demonstrates that His Majesty saw the importance of those with intellect and knowledge, who are an example for practices towards the level of being Arahant. The commemorating venue or the point where the stupa-museum stands manifests Dhamma conveyed by His Majesty, i.e., a normal individual is able to practice until being released from the round of existence. The crystal relic or *Phra Dhatu* is the evidence of Dhamma Attainment.

### ***The spaces of the stupa-museum, monastery and the place of cremation***

The items presented inside including exhibition of utensils and biography are meant to raise awareness and recognition that the noble monk once lived and was once able to practice under the same world. Therefore, the Dhamma conveyed by His Majesty is not confined only to listening to summons, but to perception by all means. This emphasizes the fact that Dhamma is everywhere. It is only a person with intellect who is able to perceive and apply for one's own and others' benefits. The significant difference between this type of stupa-museum and the conventional stupa that inters a noble monk's relic is in the presentation of the monk's biography or Dhamma biography<sup>8</sup>. In fact, the biographies of nearly all

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the biography of Luang Pu Jam Maha Punyo called, "Dhamma Biography of Luang Pu Jam Maha Punyo, who had a lot of merits". See Phra Dhammadaro, 2012. Nearly all biographies of noble monks are Dhamma histories.

noble monks in the forest monastery lineage were written in the style of Dhamma biography, i.e., narrating the life struggling towards attaining Dhamma and releases from suffering.

Besides, the regulations prohibit lighting of candles and incense sticks in the stupa-museums, and a placard is usually placed on which are written words of worshipping or words of requesting forgiveness (*ahosi-kamma*) to be read by visitors to the respective noble monk. The space inside the stupa therefore bears no atmosphere of homage paying, vowing, or pleading that is usually done by Buddhists towards a Buddha image or sacred being, which is possible at other relic stupas where people travel for merit making. Hence, the time spent at the stupa-museum is for contemplating on the eight necessities of the noble monk exhibited or other decorating items. Dhamma shown in these stupa-museum is clearly based on practices. King Rama IX once gave an oration on the occasion of the royal visit to Buddhist Association of Thailand on November 26, 1970 that the right way in teaching Buddhism is to teach a person to be able to discover the principles of Dhamma from life and practice the principles for one's own benefits (Dinar Buntham, 2012, pp. 216-275); this being the same direction as the Dhamma biography of noble monks.

The importance of the venue of cremation and the stupa-museum construction is composed of many aspects. *Firstly*, the venue or monastery where the noble monk stayed for the longest time, or was an abbot – all of the three cases under this study were forest monasteries and are situated in rural areas. *Secondly*, the venue is for cremation. According to the tradition, the area is sacred, and must not be used for other purposes. *Thirdly*, King Rama IX came to the cremation at these places, denoting His Majesty's biography connected to the noble monks and the venues, although when the noble monks were alive, His Majesty used to visit and discuss Dhamma with them. Thus, the venues are the *paribhogchetiya* of the monks. The history of this part was recorded in the biography of each noble monk.

After the cremation of Luang Pu Mun in 1950, an Ubosatha was built over the area with placement of some bone remains at the pedestal of the principal Buddha image in the *Ubosatha*. At the time when the building was constructed, the utensils and bone remains of Luang Pu Mun were distributed to the disciples. When the bone remains crystallized, another museum was built at the adjacent area. Then, the distributed bone remains and eight necessities were traced and regained (Phra La Khemmapatto, 1995, pp. 199-200).

King Rama IX must have known the problem, and thus ordered that the cremation place, the museum of utensils and the stupa be built as one. The cluster of the venue, utensils, bone remains, and legend of a noble monk at a center was like creating a center for remembrance and at the same time disseminating Dhamma.

With the exhibition of utensils in the stupa-museum, the interaction or perception of people towards the meaning of the venue became different. The utensils might be perceived as the Paribhogakacetiya, Dhamma text may be perceived as

Dhammacetiya, the Buddha image once under the possession of the noble monk may be perceived as Udesikachetiya, while the bone remains may be perceived as the Dhatucetiya, as stated by Gabuade (2003, p. 115). However, in a museum, all objects possess the implication of exhibited object. In a stupa museum, the eight necessities (attha parikhara) of the noble monk convey another meaning, a cetiya or object of homage since traditionally these utensils were installed in a closed chamber of a stupa. The biography and legend would be the important part leading to perception of their meanings.

In the new interpretation of the eight necessities (attha parikhara) exhibited in each stupa under the study, according to the characteristic of existence (sabhāva dhamma), these utensils are very important. The semiotic meaning of the utensils denotes the life of Dhutanga practice, and hence consisting of only necessary and simple utensils. Some utensils of the noble monks were used until they were old and ragged, such as the robe or sandals. The use and deterioration of the utensils demonstrate the existence to the eyes of intellect beholders are able to see. It is no doubt of the truth from the fact that stupa-museums disseminate Dhamma. It is only the perception of Dhamma present in each stupa that differs from one individual to another depending on the intellect in Dhamma understanding. The semiotic meaning of the monks' utensils, additionally, denotes their being the world materials that must be left in the world and cannot be taken by the noble monks after death.

Besides the contents related to the noble monk, the meaning of the space in the stupa-museum of Luang Pu Juan with the photographs of King Rama IX' visit is not confined to the noble monk only. All stupas visited by His Majesty have become a special space. His Majesty King Rama IX's power of merits and grandeur partially add to the history of the place, making it a place of commemoration. Thus, a stupa-museum possesses many overlaying semiotic meanings, while the portrait statuesque, biography, utensils and the place denote the implication of the Dhamma biography of each noble monk. The place is also a place of remembrance related to the grandeur of King Rama IX and the royal family. This demonstrated His Majesty's key duty according to the significance of an ideal king in Buddhism. Gokhale (1966, p. 20) pointed that a king functions were not restricted to the establishment of orderly social, economic and political relationship among his subjects but extended to bring about a moral transformation in the nature of his subjects.

In reality, the decorating paintings of Luang Pu Fan's history and the clay high reliefs may not clearly convey any meaning to those who have not known his path. Some high reliefs are too high to see clearly. However, it is the story of Luang Pu Fan that has been related which becomes a legend perceived by the public. Thus, it can be said that the meaning of the space of the stupa-museum of Luang Pu Fan is perceived through the historical place, towards Buddhism. That is to say, Lord Buddha is the founder of Buddhism who originated the doctrine. It cannot be denied that both the place and the symbols related to Luang Pu Fan remind us of the Buddha. This is because the preaches of the disciples are inevitably conveyed to

the Buddha at the origin. Cetiya or stupas built under the Buddhism culture has significantly become the symbol of the Buddha and Dhamma (Shorto, 1972, pp. 75-81).

### CONCLUSION

The significant of these stupa museums that King Rama XI was involved in the establishment process, has created a new dimension for the presentation of the story of the noble monks by integrating all factors related to their lives, i.e. the most important monastery, the cremation space, the biography scenes and the biography book. In addition, the shape of the stupa museum has been modified to be contemporary architectural form. The incorporation of these elements would not have been possible without the guidance of the king. As the king of the Theravada Buddhist state, the establishment of these stupa museums was intentionally to fulfill Buddhist kingship practice. With the participation of Sangha and Thai people, the design concept of these stupas became a seminal model for later establishment. Certainly, all the elements are the part that undoubtedly a mechanism of dissemination of Dhamma which the Dhutanga practice of the noble monks is probably an important part of the sufficient economic philosophy which the king proposed some years later.

The good deeds at least at an individual level with the specialty of a noble monk who has practiced until attaining *nibbana* and become respected by a lot of Buddhists as well as the King with righteousness, who became involved in the biography of the monks and the place, made the founding of the stupa-museums more special than other projects. The monastery and the stupa-museum venue are therefore full of Dhamma taught by the religion, enabling people with faith to see the success from attempts and practices that can be witnessed from the evidence in the practices and the bone remains of the noble monks. The symbols referred to by Snodgrass (1985, p. 6) are composed of: visual and spatial symbols, myth, verbal, narrative, and ritual. These were established through the ritual of cremation, and, together with the related doctrine, became part of the building of the symbolic system in the stupa-museum.

Biography of a noble monk or Dhamma account explains the life based on Dhamma practiced by an individual. Such biographies, when read by laymen, bring out their intellect and ability to contemplate. A person with sufficient faith or charisma may be able to practice in real life. These biographies are the important part in disseminating Dhamma in parallel to construction of a stupa-museum. In Thailand, the culture of Theravada Buddhism has succeeded over generations for a long time. It demonstrates that there were many interpretations in architectural construction and in Dhamma dissemination. In reality, stupas that contain bone remains of laymen were constructed everywhere in Thai history. Paintings showing the biography of a noble monk is the succeeding of the Sacred Biography in Buddhism consists of the Life of the Buddha's and *jataka*. The monument has been developed to be specific to a person and to exhibit the bone relic openly in order to show the reality of *nirvana*. More importantly, this confirms the saying that whenever there

is a person leading his life with Noble Eight-Fold Path, there will be Phra Arahant in the world.<sup>9</sup> This significance makes Thailand remain the country of Buddhism, which is still practiced under the Noble Eight-Fold Path towards nirvana in the modern world. Dhamma in the context of these stupa-museums, therefore, is the middle-path truth (*Majjhenadham*) and the middle-path practices (*Majjhima patipada*) (Phra Dhammapitaka, 2000, p. 6). It is the most influential power to Thai Buddhist society since so many Thai Buddhists follow the teaching and practice of these noble monks as they are accepted as *Arahantas*. These stupa-museums have also been developed in the new interpretation of contemporary Thai Buddhist architecture.

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<sup>9</sup> Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra Maha.T. 10/175/138



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