

# The Role of Buddhist Monastery toward Thai society in an inscription of The great king Ramkhamhaeng.

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## Abstract

The current academic article presents the role of the Buddhist monastery (Wat) with a major special reference to the inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng, the Great. The objective of the article is to analyze the role of Wat in the Thai society context only according to the background and history of the Thai nation study based on a comprehensive study on Thai history as the original of Wat in early Buddhism. The Ramkhamhaeng Inscription is a stone tablet recording historical events in the Sukhothai period. The remarkable role of Wat is represented as the accommodation of Buddhist monks such as senior monks Nissayamuttaka, Theras, and Mahatheras. In the spiritual, the role of Wat was the center of the king, princes, princess, also layman and laywoman to pay homage to the Buddha statues. Furthermore, they practice and learn Dhamma and observe the precepts such as the five or eight rules of morality. The study was found that Wat in the inscription of the King Ramkhamhaeng, the Great can be defined into 8 dimensions consist of (1) accommodation, (2) spiritual, (3) geography, (4) education, (5) social, (6) culture, (7) Architecture, (8) Museum.

**Keywords:** Role of Buddhist Monastery, Thai Society, Inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great.

## Introduction

The Buddhist monk monasticism along with the life transition from the Buddha time presented in Indian society even constructions and simplify of Buddhist encouraging. The original Buddhist Monasteries showed as Buddha time fine data and lead to study of function and construction of Wat, also the relationship of Wat toward Indian society and history of early Buddhism especially in India studied as well (Dutt; 2008). Wat in the context of the society in Thailand. Although there is the key to open knowledge led success to the study goes on the research objective is to study the historical background of Wat in ancient Buddhism.

The Wats had been taking a scenario towards Thai society as a core and major of the country as far as it cultivated and influenced cultures, norms, morality, and also lifestyles. The state of question evident several roles of Wat was the past is “what are Wat towards Thai society in the past? So, today the face Buddhist role and Thai society have seen especially in

the period of transformation 2020 A.D. in Thailand. Thai populations and tribes of minorities historically composed of several roles in social development. The border of contexts presented ethnic, cultural change, across the nationality such as Thai-Portuguese; the Mon; the Lao; the Cham, Persian, Indian, Malay, and Indonesian Muslims; and the Taechiu, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainanese, and Chinese groups overall such as the Khmer, Vietnamese, Thai Yuan, Sikhs, and Westerners view on the past and future especially impact and value existing significant in society in ethnic minorities (Van Roy; 2017).

Society of Buddhist monastery was commented by Buddhaghosa sangha indicates “assembly”, “association”, “company” or “community” and generally advert directly to Buddhism as the monastic community of bhikkhus (monks) and bhikkhunis (nuns) (Buswell, Robert Jr; Lopez, and Donald S. Jr., eds.: 2013). Particular communities have customarily pertained to the bhikkhu sangha or bhikkhuni sangha. Spectacular on the Arya Sangha who attained any positions of the four stages of enlightenment that is not matter but there is a monastic member, it quite referred to as the *Āryasaṅgha* “noble Sangha” (Bodhi: 2013).

The article is an analytical in-depth context (Kohlbacher, 2006: 10) of Buddhist characteristics in Thailand to present the role of Wat in the context of Thai society regarding histories leading to Buddhist and society, particularly, in the field of the early Buddhist in India, Southeast Asia, and Thailand. Concerning the inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great and several studies based on the role of Buddhist, Wat is attracted for depth study and obvious on the field of the role of Wat such as Buddhist State Monasteries in Early Medieval China and their Impact on East Asia” by Liqun He (2013), The Roles of Temples Towards the Public Welfare: A Case study of Bankongnoi, Ratchaburi Province” (2011) by Phrakhruchinawalanuwat Kamyong, “Buddhist Architecture: Meaning and Conservation in the Context of Thailand” (1996) by Pinraj Khanjanusthiti and Wat Prayurawongsawas Warawihan’s Role to Promote Multicultural of Tourism Community Based on Buddhist Peaceful Means” (2016) by Siripattra Raksaphol.

## Role of Buddhist Monastery (Wat)

Wat (Wat is a synonym of a Buddhist monastery or Buddhist temple that is called in Thai, and is called in Pali as *Āvāsa* and *Ārāma*). William J. Goode (2011) studied the social research concerning the processes or patterns of the society. The research results found the influence of dynamic relationship between social processes and social institutions.

The role of Wat in early Buddhism took the important scenario related to society. So that emerged after placement of the first Wat in Pali “*Āvāsa* or *Ārāma*” (Dutt, 2008: 58). In Buddhism, the first temple was offered to the Buddha by the king Bimbisara. The role of Wat was the place that monks and laymen practice, worship Buddha status, lean Dhamma, chant, meditate and calm the mind.

The early propagation of Buddhism in South East Asia passed the cultural milieu of Southeast Asia when Buddhism arrived such as multiplicity of beliefs and practices. Buddhism and Hinduism formed part of this stream to diverse beliefs and occupied equally. Sometimes it had been held on stronger more than the courts, and simultaneously with the schism of Mahayana and Theravada “sects”. Buddhism was undergoing increased popularization gradually from time to time. Dutt and Eliot said tolerance and non-assertiveness as a core of teaching in Buddhism. Meanwhile, it was many factors dilute and made it indistinguishable from Hinduism like happened in India. Perhaps, there was venture an opinion, that did not happen in the Theravada countries. Thus, Buddhist doctrines were strictly maintained at least by the sangha (Nash, Obeyesekere, Michael M., and Arnes, et al, 2007: 72-74). So far so good, Buddhism in Southeast Asia is concerned with history in the period of the king Asoka of the Pataliputra, had been the emperor of the Mauryan Dynasty (268-232 BCE) in India (Keown, and Damien, 2013: 80).

The earliest record of Buddhist influenced this region from Ceylon. The Pali Tipitaka was recorded in the last century B.C. throughout history. The influence of Buddhism had remained the focus of the political formation of modern nationalism (P.V. Bapat, 2012:59). The same analogies were encountered in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia. The earliest Buddhist historical pieces of evidence have been survived in a specific time of Hindu-Buddhist. These two religions has influence on traditions of people in South-east Asia (Kenneth P., 2020:90-95).

### **King Ramkhamhaeng the Great and His Inscription**

King Ramkhamhaeng the Great was born in 1239 A.D. and passed away in 1298 A.D., (Charounwong: 2019). He was the third king of Sukhothai in currently a North Central Asian country, United Nation created him as the new and trouble kingdom into the primary major of the Tai state in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the geographic area.

On the death of his brother, King Ban Muang in 1279, King Ramkhamhaeng transmitted his small kingdom solely with the amount of a hundred square miles. Over consecutive two decades by careful diplomacy, he had shrewd alliances, and military campaigns, and extended his power and influenced as far as Vientiane and Luang Prabang in what's currently Laos, west to the Indian Ocean coast of Myanmar or Burma, and south on the Malay Peninsula to Nakhon Si Thammarat. It was probably that he failed to directly rule all these spaces. However, rather he gained the popularity of native rulers of his suzerainty. He had combined a vicinity that shared a brand-new religion in Theravāda Buddhism and a hostility towards the Cambodian kingdom of Angkor, which earlier had dominated the region.

However, that was legendary of Ramkhamhaeng from the inscription in 1292, the earliest extant presented the inscription within the ancient Thai language. Meanwhile, some comments from Western scholars looked at an exceeding script devised by the king himself. Even though, it had been shown that he was a paternal parent whose justice and compassion with one or all subordinates of them. But he was a dedicated and generous patron of Buddhism and a promoter of trade. King Ramkhamhaeng governed Sukhothai which happened as the cradle of Siamese civilization and more expanding to neighbors. In the view of humanities, he developed distinctively Thai expressions, and associate that found in Sukhothai bronze sculpture reached a particularly high level. On the trading, the side found ceramics, supported techniques influence from China, it made at Sukhothai and Sawankhalok. And it had become a significant item of international trade (Veerapak, 2019).

The Ramkhamhaeng Inscription is a stone tablet recording background of Thai politics, society, culture, and also Buddhist, etc., based on the historical existence of the Sukhothai Inscription in 1282 A.D. It was discovered by the Crown Prince Mongkut who was ordained as a Buddhist monk after becoming a monk 8 years later at 29 years old, he found it on the way of Buddhist pilgrim journey far to the north of Thailand. Thai history claims the count date of the immersing the Thai Kingdom in 1292 A.D., and several evidence pieces of information defined that during the Sukhothai Era (Terwiel, 2010: 7).

Concerning The King Ramkhamhaeng inscription invented the stela script in 1283 (Tim's Thailand). The origin stela was a stone block with a cutting shape as quadrilateral tall 114.5 cm. and wide 35.5 cm. It had contained 35 lines for couple sides and the other sides 27 lines each. The letters engraved depth and distinct appropriately to keep the messages. The inscription was a masterpiece of Thai language and sociology emphasizing the previous context of Thai society. The ancient Thai letters presented on the stela was the semblance of Thai, was adapted into the modern consonant and vowel. Although, the characters were similar but quite for modern Thai people scattered to read it's not easy, the messages meaningful completed.

The specific characters found to regard the substance of the inscription narrative perspective of Sukhothai emphasize the biodata of King Ramkhamhaeng. That reflected the scene of previous Thai society and politics in 1283 A.D. It definite the present modern Thai alphabet created by King Ramkhamhaeng the Great. King Rama IV discovered and initially translated it into modern Thai language but keep it until 1897 A.D. The message was initially published in the journal names "Vajrayana" in Thailand, but the inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng varies notably to understand the message of it. So, that could not be concealed from western scholars namely A. Bastian, who was translated to English successfully in 1864 A.D. So, the English version was published before the Thai version and another masterpiece of the transliterate version into two languages i.e., Latin and French. Both western languages were

produced by Père Schmitt in 1884. Later a few decades Dr. C. B. Bradley was criticized and analyzed base on the inscription by English and published in 1909 A.D. A Thai scholar named Prince Damrong Rajanubhaph and his companion namely Gorge Coedès conjoint decoded to French issue into Thai and revised of Thai edition passed in 1924.

After the prosperous time of literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, later the inscription was published several times e.g., the Thai and English versions edited by Dr. A.B. Griswold, and Dr. P. Na Nagara disseminated to foreign countries in 1971 A.D. Seven years later The Thai National Library was proprietor and pressed the complete revision in the original modern Thai alphabet distributed in 1977 A.D. Furthermore, the inscription of the King Ramkhamhaeng distributed into a couple significant of publications e.g., “The Inscription of King Ramkhamhen of Sukhodaya in 1292 A.D., Epigraphic and Historical Studies No. 9” by A.B. Griswold and Prasert Na Nagara in the Journal of the Siam Society in 1971, and the version of Thai transliteration by Dr. W. Pongsripian in 2009 A.D. And the online version was available at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University’s webpage showing the inscription in both the original script and modern Thai. The article will scope only the main relevant to Wat and Buddhist fields particular those that play roles in Thai society. Especially, the keywords are analyzed relative to the role of Wat in contexts of Thai society contents overview. (Figure 1).

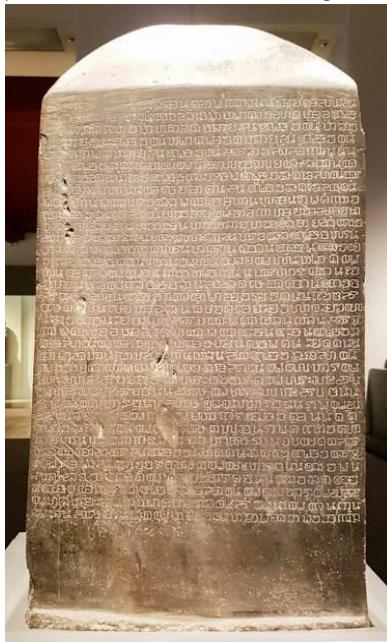


Figure 1: 1<sup>st</sup> Inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng The Great

(The Ram Khamhaeng inscription in the Bangkok National Museum.

<https://www.binntour.com/culture/ram-khamhaeng-inscription-stone/>

## The role of Buddhist Monastery and Thai Society in the Part

The article focuses on the analysis of the King Ramkhamhaeng Inscription “what is the role of Buddhist Monastery and Buddhist role on Thai society”. According to the study, the first inscription showed several words related to the word “Wat”, and tradition of Thai Buddhist people (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Side 2 of 1<sup>st</sup> Inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng The Great  
(Chulalongkorn University ed., 1984: 41-42.)

“The Sukhothai people who lived in the town demonstrated a self-imposed religious observance precept and provided charity held by King Ramkhamhaeng who governed Sukhothai. Wat was the place for princes and princesses, noble gentlemen to practice precepts and perform various ceremony such as Katina. Katina is ceremony at the end of the retreat rainy season along with a period of a month.

Everybody went to the Araññika temple (Araññika means a monastery in the forest.) to participate in the Katin ceremonies. When they went back to the town, they followed traditional walking and kept on the line like a procession from the Araññika. They were very enjoyed together with splendid folk song performing of several musical instruments, someone praying and singing. Whatever immeasurable of acting depended on the one who wanted to do such merry and laugh. The town of Sukhothai has four huge gates, and the inhabitants always swarm together for watching the lighting of candles and showing of fireworks, the town become noisy if it presenting illumination.

The condition of the town of Sukhothai was abundant of viharas, golden images of the Buddha and Phra Attharos images numerous huge images of the Buddha and several medium-

sized and meanwhile, there are huge viharas and medium-sized, also appeared of senior monks Nissaya Muttaka, Thera and Maha Theras. The Western town of Sukhothai is the Araññika, where King Ramkhamhaeng donated to the Maha Thera Sangharaja who was the savant who has studied Tripitaka in each level. The Araññika have rectangular Vihara situating border figure high and extremely nice and main landmark as Phra Attharos image standing position. The Eastern town of Sukhothai is a situation of viharas and senior monk houses, extensive open fields, plantation of betel areca and betel leaf, farms taken at all inland and plane, habitats, big and small villages, the garden of mango and tamarind. That is great to take a look as delightful for the intention." (Chulalongkorn University, 1984:41-42).

### **The Role of Buddhist Monastery (Wat) Analytical**

The inscription of king Ramkhamhaeng, the Great presents the context of the Sukhothai era in the major essence relevant to the roles of Wat. The roles of Wat were found in several dimensions e.g.:

1. Accommodation role; usually, Wat represents to be the residents of Buddhist monks in the inscription found the Araññika accept the role of accommodation for the Thera Bhikkhu e.g., Nissayamuttaka, Theras, and Mahatheras.
2. spiritual role; Wat was the center of King, princes, princess, also layman and laywoman to pay homage to the Buddha statues, to learn Dhamma as well as practicing, and observing the precepts such as five or eight rules of morality. These are the five precepts to be observed by all Buddhists: 1) to refrain from killing; 2) to refrain from stealing; 3) to refrain from sexual misconduct; 4) to refrain from telling lies; 5) to refrain from drinking intoxicants. On a holy day lay devotees generally observe the eight precepts, that is the five rules plus three more as; 6) to refrain from eating after midday; 7) to refrain from taking part in any kind of entertainment and from wearing perfume and ornaments; 8) to refrain from using high and luxurious couches.
3. Geography role; Wat was a botanical garden because of various types of tree planting and growing inside and to become the forest of the city.
4. Education role; Wat was the school teaching Buddha Dhamma as a school of religion to service morality and knowledge belong to the Buddha teaching by the Mahatheras, who have wise and competent belong to Tipitaka Pali Canon and commentary. The three divisions of the Buddhist Canon are namely: 1) Vinaya, a series of instructions for the monks and female monks; 2) Suttanta sermons addressed to all; 3) Abhidhamma, thematic arrangement and logical development of Buddha's teaching, it is entirely abstract, precise and impersonal.
5. Social role; Wat was the meeting place that serviced anyone in the society to meet as well as the purports of functions.

6. Cultural role; Wat was servicing the merit culture based on Buddhism culture such as the Katin ceremony.

7. Architecture role; Wat was the landmark of the city by the building such as a large rectangular Vihara by the way of building art of nation appearing and presenting on the tall exceedingly beautiful, Kuti where monks reside and Chide or Pagoda.

8. Museum role; Wat was a museum especially collecting Buddha art e.g., Buddha statues, and Managsila on a sitting stone slab.

According to the special source of king Ramkhamhang the Great, Wat can be summarized into 8 complexation dimensions consist of (1) accommodation, (2) spiritual, (3) botanical garden, (4) education, (5) social, (6) culture, (7) Architecture, (8) Museum. It displays in figure 3 below.

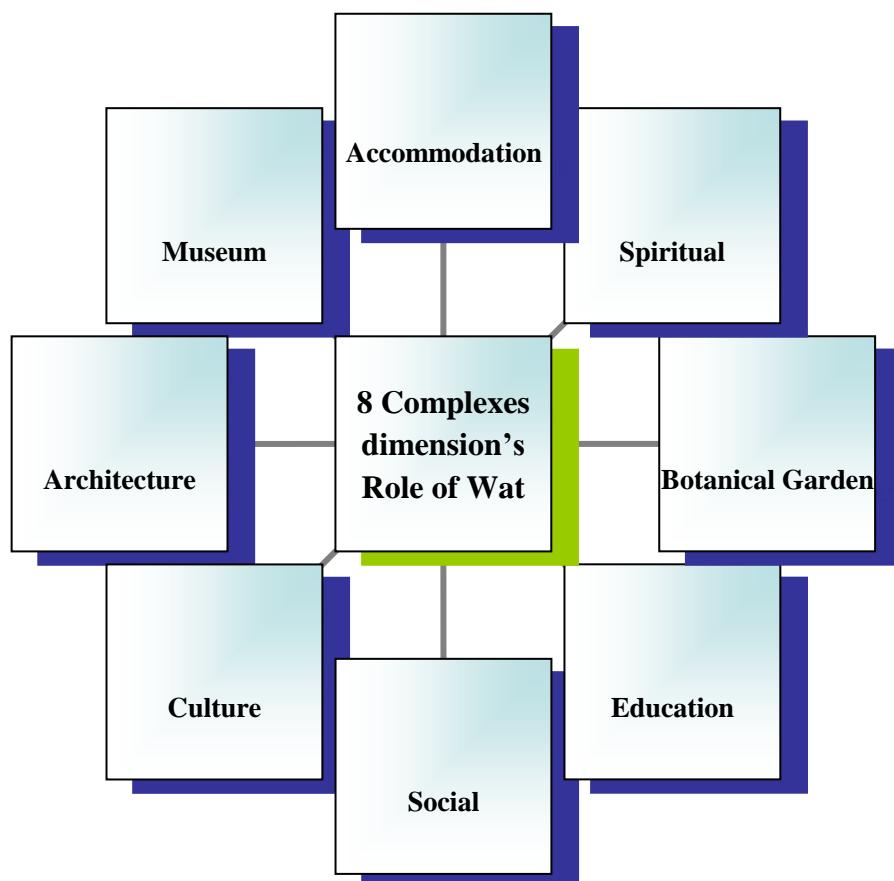


Figure 3: 8 Dimensions of the Role of Wat Display in the Inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great

Role of Wat and context of Thai society in the Inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great.

The article presents the important role of Wat that was the accommodation of Buddhist monks such as senior monks Nissayamuttaka, Theras, and Mahatheras. The same characteristics

are consistent with Manish Meshram (2013) who conducted the study entitled “Role of Buddhist Education in Ancient India”. The results of the study showed that the monasteries or Buddha Vihars were the center for learning and only the Buddhist monks could be admitted to them for education (Meshram, 2003). In terms of spiritual role, Wat was the center of King, princes, princess, also laymen and laywomen to pay homage the Buddha statues, to learn Dhamma as well as practicing, and observing the Precepts such as five or eight rules of morality. These are relevant to the study of Pinraj Khanjanusthiti (1996) which found that the formal education for the Sangha in Thailand has been long established and developed from time to time. Traditionally, education emphasized the study of Dhamma and ecclesiastical matters.” (Khanjanusthiti, 1996: 42). The study mentioned the specific role of Wat toward a society with acts as an educational center. The characteristic role of Wat represented architecture, involved belief in the role of the Buddhist monk accorded to words “Buddhism has been practiced in Thailand since the thirteenth century. Over the centuries, monastic architecture, as an outcome of the belief, has developed and changed its character along with the transformation of the religion and the role of the Buddhist Sangha.” (Khanjanusthiti, 1996: 54). That is the five precepts to be observed by all Buddhists are; (1) to refrain from killing; (2) to refrain from stealing; (3) to refrain from sexual misconduct; (4) to refrain from telling lies; (5) to refrain from drinking intoxicants. On a holy day lay devotees generally observe the eight precepts, that is the five rules plus three more as; (6) to refrain from eating after midday; (7) to refrain from taking part in any kind of entertainment and from wearing perfume and ornaments; (8) to refrain from using high and luxurious couches.

The geography role of Wat was a botanical garden because of various types of tree planting and growing inside and to become the forest of the city. The educational role of Wat was the school teaching Buddha Dhamma as a school of religion to service morality and knowledge belong to the Buddha taught by the Mahatheras who finished Tipitaka Pali Canon and commentary, the three divisions of the Buddhist Canon, namely (1) Vinaya, a series of instructions for the monks and female monks; (2) Suttanta sermons and addresses to all; (3) Abhidhamma, thematic arrangement and logical development of Buddha’s teaching: it is entirely abstract, precise and impersonal. In the social role of Wat was the meeting place serviced anyone in the society to meet as well as the purports of functions. The cultural role of Wat was servicing the merit culture base on Buddhism culture such as the Katin ceremony. In the Architecture role of Wat was the landmark of the city by the building such as a large rectangular Vihara by the way of building art of nation appearing and presenting on the tall exceedingly beautiful, Kuti where monks reside and Chide or Pagoda. Furthermore, Wat was a museum collecting of Buddha Art such as Buddha statues and Managsilabai is a sitting stone slab. According to the study finds the role of Wat in the Inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the

Great, the Ramkhamhaeng Inscription is a stone tablet recording the history of the Sukhothai Inscription can sum into 8 dimensions are (1) accommodation, (2) spiritual, (3) geography, (4) education, (5) social, (6) culture, (7) Architecture, (8) Museum.

What is the homeland of the root of Thai culture and tradition? The study found the roles of Wat according to the dissertation titled “The Thai Temple, Case Study of Watprayurawongsawas Bangkok, Thailand” by Nitiphum Saengsutho (2016), the research found the same point as such as “...its image of the temple had shown conservation of cultural architecture, and ancient heritage image within the temple which attracted local and foreign tourists” (Saengsutho, and Supinit: 2016). The results of that study showed the role of Wat toward the society in Thailand that was like a center of cultural architecture, an ancient heritage image collecting place, and also a destination for tourists.

According to the study of Khantipalo Bhikkhu in the Sukhothai era, the Wat had combined several buildings such as Temple Halls or Ubosots, Prang and Chedi and Chapels or Vihara, and other Buildings (Khantipalo, 1982). The buildings need a big size to support the activity sessions of monks and the public. So, Thai people usually build the roofs of big constructions with wood more than stones. The body of the building was contemporarily baked clay and wood, and such constructions of Ubosot have been impacted by Mon and Khmer culture.

## Conclusion

The article presents the role of the Buddhist monastery (Wat) in the Inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great. Ramkhamhaeng Inscription is a stone tablet recording the history of the Sukhothai inscribed by the phenomenon related to a Buddhist monastery and Thai society in Sukhothai. Buddhist monastery had eight specifics roles: (1) accommodation, (2) spiritual, (3) geography, (4) education, (5) social, (6) culture, (7) Architecture, and (8) Museum.

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