

Thailand Throne Hall Architecture in the Grand Palace in the Early Days of Ratthanakosin Era

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Abstract—Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall is one of the most significant throne halls in the grand palace in the Ratthanakosin city situated in Bangkok, Thailand. This is the first group of throne halls built in order to serve as a place for meetings, performing state affairs and royal duties until the present time. The structure and pattern of architectural design including the decoration and interior design of the throne hall obviously exhibits and convey the status of the king under the context of Thai society in the early period of Ratthanakosin era. According to the tradition of ruling the kingdom in absolute monarchy which had been in place since Ayutthaya era (A.D.1350-1767), the king was deemed as Deva Raja, the highest power and authority over the kingdom and as the greatest emperor of the universe (Chakkravatin). The architectural design adopted the concept of “Prasada” or Viman which served as the dwelling place of the gods and was presented in the form of “Thai traditional architecture” For the interior design of the throne hall, it had been adopted to be the heaven and the centre of the Universe in line with the cosmological beliefs of ancient people described in scripture Tribhumikatha (Tri Bhumi) written by Phra Maha Thamma Raja (Phraya Lithai) of the Sukhothai era (A.D.1347-1368). According to this belief, the throne hall had been designed to represent mount Meru, the central of the universe. On the top end of Mount Meru is situated the Viman and dwelling place of Indra who is the king of gods according to the idea of Deva Raja (the king god Avatar). At the same time, Indra also existed as the king of the universe simultaneously.

Keywords—Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall, throne hall architecture, grand palace, Thai traditional architecture, Ratthanakosin era

I. INTRODUCTION

RATTANAKOSIN is currently known as “Ratthanakosin Island” of Bangkok, Thailand. The reason why it is called “Ratthanakosin Island” is because most of the areas of Ratthanakosin city are surrounded by Chao Phraya River in the west and are also encircled by Khlong Khu Mueang which was built in the east, thus looking like an island. Phra Bat Somdet Phra Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke, king Rama I, the primary king of Chakri dynasty had established this city in the year 1782 A.D. or B.E. 2325. His majesty the king ordered Phra Ya Thammathikorn and Phra Ya Vijitnavee to be the leaders of the construction and lead all craftsmen and citizens to the temple to measure the space to build the new capital city in the areas along the Chao Phra Ya River in the east. These areas used to be the lands of Phra Ya Raja Sedhi and a group of chinese people who had settled there [1] (Fig. 1). In the first phase of establishing the capital city, Phra Raja Mondhien was built out of wood and the city wall was besieged by log palisade or stakewall on a temporary basis on May 6, 1783.

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This construction is was to be used in the enthronement ceremony of his majesty the king Rama I on Thursday June 13 in the same year. Later in the year, 1783, his majesty the king Rama I ordered to urgently build up the capital city to completion in the year 1785. Then, he ordered to set up the royal coronation ceremony in the complete royal traditional ways and hold Phra Raja Mondhien celebration (like a house warming celebration) in the same year [2].

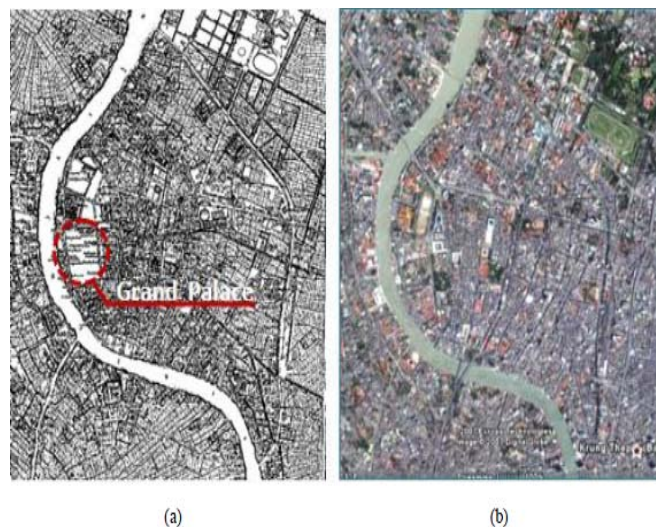


Fig. 1 Ratthanakosin Island and the location of the grand palace
Source: Adapted from Old Map, Royal Thai Survey Department (a)
and www.earth.google.com (b)

The importance or role of the grand palace at the age of the early establishment of the city was to serve as a place for the coronation of the king and a living place for the king as well. The early Ratthasakosin era followed the ruling system of the absolute monarchy which operated in the Ayutthaya era (A.D. 1350-1767). The king placed his status according to the beliefs and concepts of the great emperor or the king of the universe which meant the greatest of the great or universal monarch [3]. This was the same as other kingdoms in south East Asia [4] in that the king had positioned himself as the emperor in the concept of the world according to buddhists and hindus. The king had existed as “Dharmaraja” (the virtue king) ruled the kingdoms by absolute virtues or duties of the king [5]. At the same time, the king had existed as “Dhevaraja” (the king as god Avatar) who held the absolute power and placed as the sacred in Mandala or areas which had the capital city encircled by the dependent cities [6]. Therefore, the king had the absolute power in ruling the kingdom according to the so-called beliefs and concepts. The grand palace, therefore, is of great importance as the centre of the ruling administration which has the “Throne Hall ” as the place where the king perform his duties of ruling the country and the place for important ceremonies which are approved by the king as appropriate (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 The grand palace in Rattanakosin period

A useful architectural work which serves as the first throne hall when establishing the city in the year 1782 which was used for the enthronement ceremony until now is Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall. This article is the presentation of the study on throne hall architecture in the early period of Rattanakosin era through the case study of Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall in order to understand the forms, patterns, building structures and decorative arts on both Sculpture and Painting including the traditions, beliefs, communication through architecture and fine arts under the context of Thai society and culture in the early period of Rattanakosin era which was the period when that architecture was created. Apart from this, this is a way to understand beliefs and concepts of the status of the king, Thai society and cultural characteristics which have been portrayed through architectural works as well.

Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall: in the present time is one out of 7 throne halls of the group of Phra Maha Mondhien which are deemed to be of utmost importance for performing the royal coronation of the kings in Chakri dynasty. This is the first group of throne halls which were built inside the grand palace and served as places for performing royal duties for the kingdom until now. The first phase of the construction of Phra Maha Mondhien in the year 1782 was done temporarily out of wood to serve Phra Bat Somdet Phra Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke, king Rama I, in the enthronement ceremony. Permanent basis were constructed out of lime and cement in the following year. In the beginning of the construction in the reign of king Rama I, Phra Maha Mondhien named "Chakkapat Piman throne hall", was carried out in the form of three consecutive and connected halls. The building was designed to align on a north-south axis. Later in the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Nangklao Chao Yu Hua, king Rama III (A.D. 1824-1851) named the throne halls separately [7] with the hall in the north called "Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall"; the middle called "Paisan Taksin throne hall" and the South called "Chakkapat Piman". Apart from these throne halls, there are supporting or decorative halls which were Thepardpilai throne hall, Suralai Piman tower, Phra Thart Mondhien Tower (Fig. 3). Among these halls in the group of Phra Maha Mondhien, only Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall was used for royal duties.

The king also used to see his royal family, noble men, and citizens in this throne hall. The rest of the group of Phra Maha Mondhien was his majesty's personal residences.

Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall, when first constructed had no walls. Later, in the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Nangklao Chao Yu Hua, king Rama III ordered to "...demolish the structure of Amorn Vinijchai throne hall, with the previously round (wooden) pillars in every room, replaced with square pillars except for one room which has a bridge as a ridgepiece connected..." [8]. This means to change the new pillory or ridgepiece to separate the throne hall's ceiling walls with bricks and lime and also bricks were laid to cover the old wooden pillars. But the doors and the windows did not have glass-made arch [9] (lime-formed frame decorating the outside walls of the door and windows) covered by gold and mosaic mirrors. In the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua, Rama IV ordered to lift up the glass-made arches of the surrounding doors and windows around the throne hall as appeared in the present time [10]. For the repair and restoration in the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Chunla Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua, king Rama V, the roofing tiles were change from pottery tiles to the colore coated tiles as appeared today. In the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Mongkut Klao Chao Yu Hua, king Rama VI, he ordered the addition of the elaborate apse or portico in the east and the west (Left-sided and Right-sided area of the royal throne) of the throne hall so as to enlarge the space inside the hall. The area in the east was set to be a screen or partition for the king while the portico in the west was arranged to be the residence or meeting area of the royal family during important royal ceremonies.

Since the reign of king Rama VII until now, there has been no change in any single part of the throne hall except the repair and restoration of the broken parts, thus preserving the throne in the same condition [11].

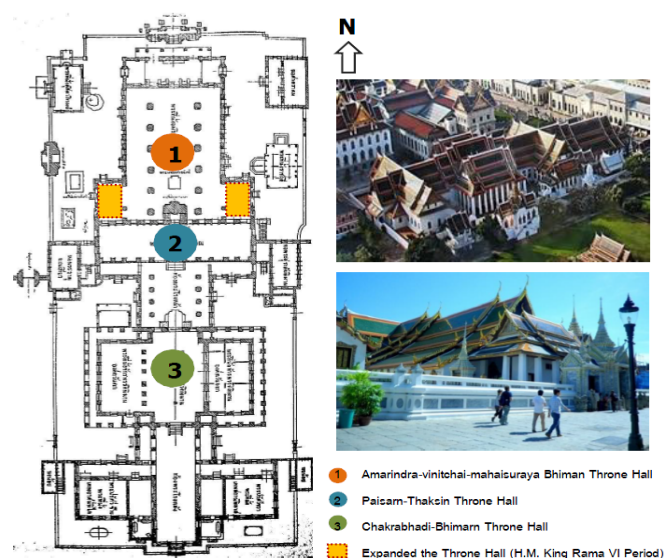


Fig. 3 The important throne halls in the group of Phra Maha Mondhien and the extension for enlargement the space of Amarindra-vinijchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall in the reign of king Rama IV

Sources: www.media.photo bucket.com

II. STRUCTURES IN ARCHITECTURE AND COMMUNICATION UNDER THE CONTEXT OF THAI SOCIETY

Strict design and construction of traditional Thai architecture under the context of Thai society in the early period of Ratthanakosin era, has a criteria for the importance of the building which is based on the status of the owner or user of that building such as the king, the royal families, noble men, wealthy people, or ordinary citizens. Therefore, the architectural buildings exhibit the "Hierarchy". For example, the building which is built as Thevalai or a living place for the king is prone to be built greatly with the use of strong and robust material or is decorated elaborately and exquisitely and displays different beliefs from those of commoners.

Throne hall architecture of Pra Tee Nung Amarin Vinijchai is the building whose significance is directly related to the king. The architecture characteristics and lay-out are designed to be aligned on a north-south axis. The throne hall orients to the north with 0.50 meter above the ground, width of 21 meters, and length of 31.50 meters [12]. The main entrance at the north has three doors, the middle one, which is the largest door, is for the pavement for the king. The two smaller doors are beside the big one. The side walls at the east and the west have seven windows and the two doors alike. Inside the throne hall, there is a rectangular pillar built of bricks and lime in double rows with six pillars each. At the rear end of the throne hall is situated "Busaboke-Mala Maha Chakkrabhadibhiman", the movable throne with pointed roof. At the front area of Busaboke-Mala Maha Chakkrabhadibhiman is situated "the royal throne" which is the royal seating for the important ceremonies and "Noppapadon Mahasawettachat" or the royal nine-tiered umbrella of the king as the important symbols of Kingship as in the crown ceremony in the western culture. It is like the multi-tiered umbrella upon the top of nine levels (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Architecture of Amarindra-vinijchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall

Sources: Royal house hold, Bureau, The grand palace (Bangkok: Thaiwattanapanit, 2005)

If the architecture is categorized into elements to analyze and explain the patterns and structures, there are three parts: namely the basement of throne hall, the body of the throne hall and the upper part (structure and roof elements) of the throne hall.

Structure at the basement of throne hall: the Thai lime basement which is called "Lion Setting Basement" is one of the basements of Thai art works (Fig. 5) of highest hierarchy among the basements of the buildings. This is used to decorate the building or the art works which are solely related to the Thai monarchy and religion. For citizens or commoners, it should not be an element of their houses since this will conflict with the tradition of the architectural design under the context of Thai culture, even though there is no such law or prohibition indicated in legal statements.



Fig. 5 The basement "Lion Basement" of Amarindra-vinijchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall

Structure at the body of throne hall: white-washed as flat wall. There are only doors and windows which environ the throne hall that have the lift up of arches decorated by lime and gold with mosaic windows exquisitely. The door facing to the north, there are three doors, the middle one is the biggest for the pavement for his majesty the king only and it is enclosed by the two smaller doors. Next to the three doors, there is one window on each side. For the side wall in the east and the west, there are seven windows and the two doors which are exactly alike. The pattern of arch of the doors and windows is in Thai-style which is called "Bun Ta Leang" [13] or small gable placed in front of the main one. It is specific arch (Fig. 6-7).



Fig. 6 The doors (left) and the windows (right) of Amarindra-vinijchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall



Fig. 7 The arch of the doors and windows “Bun Ta Laeng” in Thai architecture

Source: Somkid Jirathassakul, Beliefs, Symbolism and Meaning of Thai Arch and Windows (Bangkok: Amarin Printing Publishing, 2003)

Bun Ta Laeng is used in specific architecture design that is related to the king and royal ubosot or sanctuary and Vihara. In the early Rattanakosin era, it is absolutely and strictly prohibited for the commoners or citizen's houses to have this arch design. Noticeably, there is a stacking or piling up in layers design of the arch of the doors and windows into the entrance in a Prasada-like style or paradise as a living place for god or sacred things in the religion. This is referred to, in Thai culture, as “Pagoda-like building” for example “Pagoda at Wat Phra Phai Luang”, Sukhothai province (Fig. 8). Another concept of construction is to mimic or condense the size of the roofing of the buildings as in old beliefs like “Reun Prasat-style” which is then modified and renamed as “Reun Kaew” [14] (frame of the arch to seat the Buddha image with an aureole around the body) (Fig. 9). Besides, the characteristics of the opening orientation of the doors and windows of Amarin Vinijchai Mahaisurayapiman throne hall still remain unique in traditional Thai architecture. This serves as the opening orientation into the inside of the building that appears in some architectural works likes Ubosot, Vihara and central tradition Thai house.



Fig. 8 The stacking or piling up of the arch of the main entrance in the shape of Prasada-style, Wat Phra Phai Luang, Sukhothai province



Fig. 9 “Reun Kaew” Frame of the arch for the seating of the buddha image

Structure at the upper part of the throne hall: the word “Krieung Bon” means the structure, pattern and elements of the roofing of traditional Thai building especially the religious buildings and buildings which are related to the king. The distinguishing feature of Krieung Bon or the roofing part of Amarin Vinijchai Mahaisurayapiman throne hall is the stacking-style roofing and decrease in tiers which means each set of roofs have a top part which ends in a triangular gable. Next to the gable, on each side, are three piles of tiers thus leading to a total of four sets (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10 Structure, pattern and element of roofing part of Amarindra vinijchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall

In previous days, the roofs of the throne hall were covered by pottery tiles. Later in the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Chunla Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua, king Rama V (A.D. 1868-1910), this design was replaced by the color coated tiles as appeared in today's time. The main focus was on green-colored tiles. The green color is thought to have been inspired by the body color of the Indra. In Thai culture, there is a belief that Indra has a green colored body. This can be seen from the paintings of the Indra in several arts at least since the Ayutthaya era (A.D. 1350-1767) onwards [15] (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11 The Indra (green-colored body) from paintings of Tribhumi folded page book Ayutthaya edition

Source: Fine Arts, Department, Tribhumi Folded Page Book Krungsri Ayutthaya-Thonburi Edition Book I (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 1999)

Indra is regarded as the head of all gods that are also kings with status of demi-gods like, Dheva or Avatar of god who descends into the human world for the purpose of eliminating all hardships and sorrow in mankind. The front end of each set of roofs is decorated with rakes like “Krieung Lam Yong, Chofah and Hang Hong”. “Chofah” is the top decorative ornament of the rake; “Hang Hong” is the rear end decorative ornament of the rake; “Lam Yong” which means the beautifying decorative ornaments [16] (Fig. 12) is placed in the middle between Chofah and Hang Hong. All of these are made from carved wooden specific figure. Lacquer (means coating of the gum retrieved from the crown trees, this is the jointing materials to secure colored mirrors tiles with Krieung Lam Yong Chofah Hang Hong) decorated with mosaic colored mirrors exquisitely. Noticeably, the decorative colored mirrors are displayed only in the buildings which are directly related to Thai monarchy. The characteristics of Krieung Lam Yong, Chofah and Hang Hong had firstly been traced to be seen since the Ayutthaya era (A.D. 1350-1767). It is presumed that the design had been inspired by the pattern of Prasada-style roofing which has Khmer culture as its source of origin. They are reserved for religious buildings and related to Thai monarchy buildings as well as the lion-shape basement and the Bun Ta Laeng Arch.

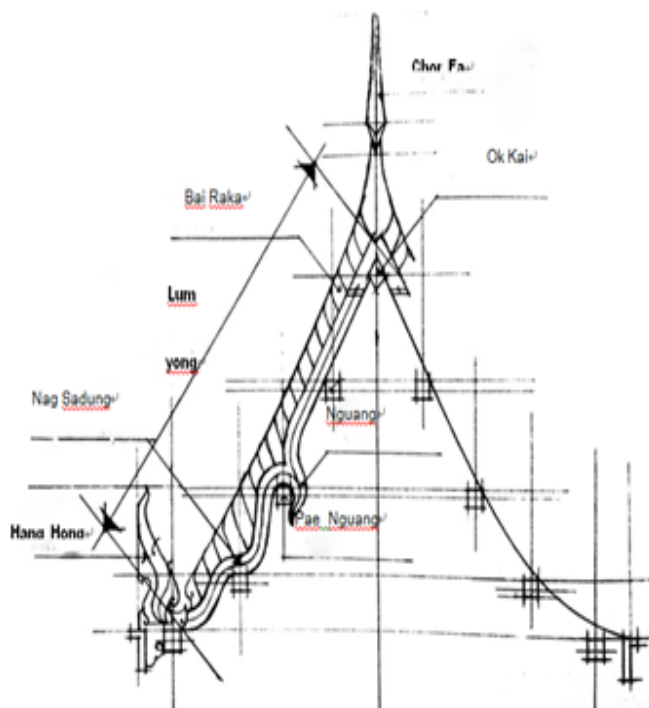


Fig. 12 Structure, pattern and elements of the rake “Krieung Lam Yong, Chofah, Hang Hong”

Source: Adapted from Somjai Nimlek, Krieung Bon and decorative artworks of Thai architecture (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 1996)

III. TECHNOLOGY OF BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND STRUCTURAL SYSTEM OF THRONE HALL ARCHITECTURE

Building Foundation: Nowadays, there is no historical and archeological dig; therefore, the foundation system of throne halls is still unknown. However, since Amarindra-vinijchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall is the ancient type of throne hall, the foundation piles haven't been hammered and there is no ferro-concrete with steel foundation as seen in today's technology. The type of the foundation that can be presumed from the archeological dig of contemporary buildings or in prior era is one in which the foundation of the throne halls was from compressed soil mixed with pebbles, debris bricks or sand to support the weight effectively. Or there was “Klong Rak” which is a hole dug in a table shape surrounding the building, under the building or between the space separating pillars. After the above, the next process was to build up with bricks and lime as the basement or foundation with proper width and thickness to support the weight of the structure instead of ground beam.

Upper Ground Structure of Throne Hall: overall the structure has a skeleton frame of column and beam. The main materials for the structure were bricks and lime. For construction work in traditional Thai architecture the main material is lime which is retrieved from limestone burnt on fire and smashed into powders. The powder is fermented in water, pounded and mixed with sand until it sticks in a lump form. It is not strong as the Portland cement (used in construction in today's time) and hardens wooden sheet or bar.

The wall of the throne hall has a wall structure standing on brick foundation which was high in thickness to bear the weight of the roofing structure. The pillars inside the throne hall were gigantic since in that time there was no technology of the ferro-concrete with steel foundation. Hence, this construction was merely made of a foundation of bricks mixed with lime. Therefore, it was necessary to construct the huge and wide pillars around a meter wide in order to bear the weight of the roofing structure which was made of huge log as the crossbeam between pillars and between pillars and the bearing wall.

Krieung Bon or Roofing Structure: a specific structure of traditional Thai architecture called “Pradu with rafter roof framing” signified that this structure was wooden indented with straining sill, straining piece, and hammer post as primary elements that are piled up into tiers with the rafters connected by the straining sill and straining piece. On the top of straining piece is king-post to bear the ridge beam under the gable roof framing with the bird-winged roof (the roof under the gable roof) piled up in tiers (Fig. 13).

From the study of the construction of Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall, it is discovered that the construction technology and material used are key factors in determining the size of the building. The space between the pillars cannot exceed the length of the log crossbeam which has limited length and size. With the lack of ferro-concrete technology with steel foundation at that time, multi-storey buildings seem to be difficult to construct. In addition, multi-storey building were not popular in the early period of Ratthanakosin era due to the traditional Thai beliefs that the well-being of the dwelling people must never be compromised by allowing some people to stand others even if it was on different stories of the building.

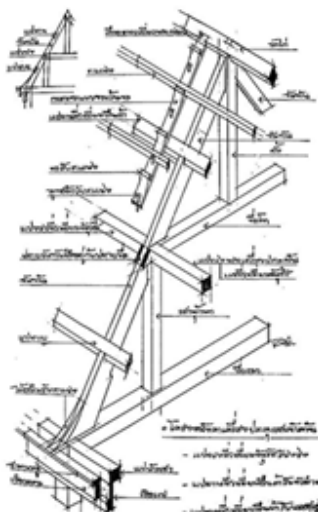


Fig. 13 Pradu with rafter roof framing used as roofing structure of the throne hall

Source: Somjai Nimlek, Pradu with Rafter Roof and Kabul Ceramic tiles (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2003).

IV. DECORATIVE ARTS AND INTERIOR DESIGN OF THE THRONE HALL

The most substantial decorative elements of Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall is the boat-shape, Busaboke-mala Maha Chakrabhadi-bhiman throne and the royal throne (Fig. 14) these two decorative elements are significant in that the decorated hall serves as a seating place for his majesty the king when performing his royal duties. The characteristics and design also obviously illustrate the status of the king under the context of Thai society as Devaraja or god-king (the avatar of god) and the greatest emperor of the universe, as will be clarified in the following chapter.



Fig. 14 Busaboke-mala Maha Chakrabhadi-bhiman throne (a) and the royal throne hall (b) inside the grand hall,

Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall

Source: Royal House Hold, Bureau, the Grand Palace (Bangkok: Thaiwattanapanit, 2004)

Busaboke-mala Maha Chakrabhadi-bhiman Throne: Phra Bat Somdet Phra Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke, king Rama I, ordered the construction of this throne for the purpose of important royal seatings and ceremonies. The throne is made of wooden structure with carved patterns and golden lacquer decorated with colored mirrors. The bottom is a lion-shaped basement just like the basement of the Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya bhiman throne hall with elaborate golden lacquer and highly exquisite taste. The upper part of the basement is encircled by a small carved sculpture, depicting a scene of Garuda arresting Naga. Just above it is a short backrest enclosing the rectangular Prasada-shaped Busaboke. The upper part is encompassed by carved wooden sculpture with golden lacquer portrayal of Dheva putting palms of the hands together in salute. The next part is the seating area of which the 4-corner of the poles had been set in order to support the Prasada which conveys the same meaning in hindu culture and buddhism as in Devalaya or Vimana (means two ways which are the prasada or the top part which serves as the seating of the gods in each layer) [17], which is a type of the religious buildings that has been designed to serve as the seating place of the gods [18]. The “Kudarkarn” which is the top part of the building with the piled roof or descended tiered roof is made up of highly exquisite decorations.

Besides, the left and the right of Boodsabok are decorated with an element called “Krn” which is the carved wooden sculpture with golden lacquer with the upright bended rear end. When composed with the two sides of Boodsabok, this will allow the appearance of the boat-shape. The two sided top part of the Krn are decorated by the 7-tiered umbrella in golden perforated design (Fig. 15).

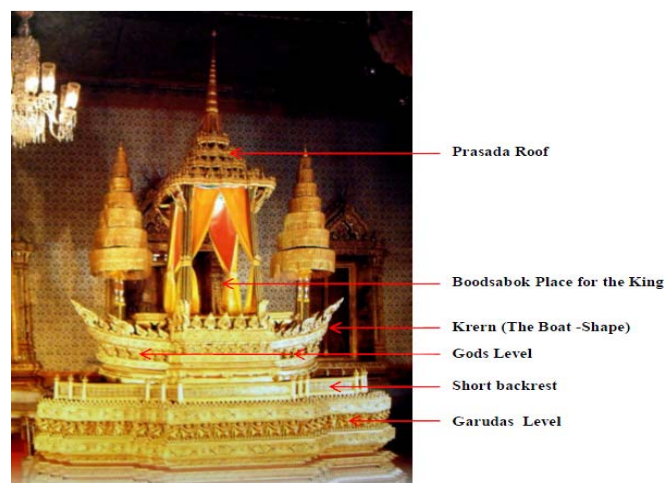


Fig. 15 Elements and names for the compositions of Busaboke-mala Maha Chakrabhadi-bhiman throne

The artistic characteristics are similar to the basement of Busaboke-mala Maha Chakrabhadi-bhiman throne in Fig.16 (a) which is a wooden structure with carved patterns and golden lacquer decorated with colored mirrors. The bottom is the lion-shaped basement with golden lacquer decorated exquisitely. The level just above the basement is an encirclement of small carved sculpture depicting a scene of Garuda arresting Naga. The next level displays a circle of carved wooden sculpture, with golden lacquer, that portray “Dheva” (gods) with palms of the hands together on the chest in salute to the king. The top of the throne is surrounded by a short backrest that leaves the front entrance path. Inside the backrest is a space that contains the seating place of the king. It is sometimes occupied by another set of throne which is called “Pudtarn Karnjanasinghas throne hall”. This throne hall looks like a miniature royal throne hall, but its top end has three backrests, left, right and back rest together with a cushion decorated seat “Lard Phra Yi Pu”. In Fig. 16 (b) the canopy of the throne is made up of the “Noppapadon Mahasawettachat” (the white royal nine-tiered umbrella ascended to the top) which is a symbolic future of the king similar to the crown in western culture. It is generally used when there is a royal ceremony such as the coronation of the king.



Fig. 16 Elements and names of the components of Busaboke-mala Maha Chakrabhadi-bhiman throne

The design of Busaboke-mala Maha Chakrabhadi-bhiman throne and the royal throne hall is adopted from the belief and concept of cosmology which has been mentioned in Thai scripture “Tribhumikatha” or “Tri Bhumi” which was written by Phra Maha Thamma Raja (Phraya Lithai) of the Sukhothai era in A.D. 14. The content conveys the origin of life in the universe and it also portrays a descriptive explanation about the shape of the world and the universe [19]. The lay-out plan illustrates that the Mount Meru is the core or centre of the universe. This is encircled by the stack of mountains called “Sattaboriphan” with the ring shape mountain encircling Mount Meru in a total of 7 layers. Between these stack of 7 mountains laid the “Maha Natee Si Than Dorn” river. Next to Sattaboriphan, are four continents which seem like islands situated on each of the direction: the north is called “Uttarakurudvipa”; the south is called “Jambudvipa”; the east is called “Buparavithedvipa”; and the west is called “Amornkoyandvipa”. Among these four continents, Jambudvipa ranks the most important due to the fact that it is the land of the humans on which the current Buddha was born. Next to the four continents lay the wall of the universe (Fig. 17).

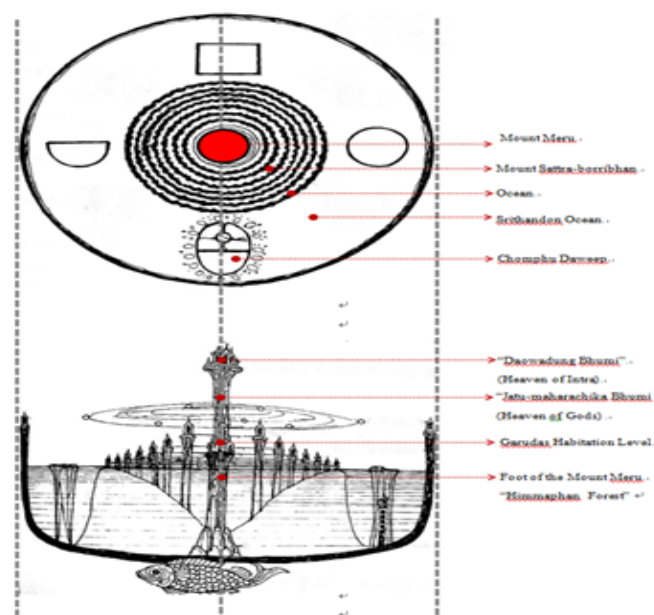


Fig. 17 Ceiling (upper) and the section view (lower) of the universe in Triphum believe

Source: Adapted from Pitsanu Supanimitra, The puzzle of Himmaparn (Bangkok: Ammarin, 2008).

For Mount Meru as the centre of the universe, at the foothills there is the forest of Himmavanta which is a wonderful land filled with superb animals or humans that are different from those in the world (Jambudvipa). The animals that live nearby the foothills are called "Himmavanta creatures" (mythical creatures) such as Naga, and Garuda. Humans who live in the Himmavanta are Nak Sithivithayathorn which means the magical practitioner who are different from other humans and possess higher powers. The upper part is the capital city of the gods protecting Mount Meru called "JatLokkabal" and the gods protecting 4 directions called "Jatumaharachikabhumi". The top of the Mount Meru is called "Trayastrīśa heaven", the city of Indra [20], the king of gods.

The characteristic of Khao Phra Sumen as the core of the universe has reflected the line of thought and express into the art work of Phra Tee Nung Bussabok Mala Maha Chakkapad Piman and Phra Tan Rachabunlun which represents the king's status. This can be seen in the lowest of personal sculpture like Krutyudnak (Garuda captured Naga) which is interpreted as around the foothills of Khao Phra Sumen as the habitat of Himmapan animals. The next upper level shows sculpture of gods surrounding the mountain in a position of paying respect in the paradise called "Jatumaharachika", god's residence". At the top, the king's palace is the peak of Khao Phra Sumen residence called the Intra. Therefore, the status of the king is like the divine who resides at the center of the universe, the Intra, decoded as the might of the universe (Fig. 18).



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 18 A part of painting about the universe perspective from the Triphum book, Ayudaya issue. Kao Phra Sumen, Kao Satboripat abd Maha Nathi Sritondorn (a), All angel musicians dwelling at the foothill of Kao Phra Sumen (b) and Garuda residence, upper level of the foothill of Kao Phra Sumen (c)

Source: Fine Art, Dept. Triphum Bible, Audhaya issue-Thonburi issue, Book 1 (Bangkok: Ammarin Printying and publishing, 1999).

At the ceiling of the throne-hall is shown the sky of paradise, the painter used red color which represents the heavenly sky color in the beliefs of Thai customs. Across the sky are wooden stars covered with lacquer and applied gold leaf. The walls and poles of the throne-hall were painted with repeated shapes of flowers which depicts flowers sprinkling from paradise. The upper end of the counterbalance is painted with figures of the gods turning to face the throne-hall which can be interpreted as all gods having an audience with the Intra at the center of the

universe. The doors and windows of the throne-hall are painted with figures of gods and giants on their guarding duty (Fig. 19-21). This painting may have been created after the renovation of the throne-hall in the reign of king Rama III (A.C. 1824-1851) using the tempera technique by applying lacquer and gold leaf. It can be seen that the decorators of the interior of the throne-hall had the intention of presenting "Khao Phra Sumenthe" (Mount Meru) as the centre of paradise, which was the universe's perspective of people in the past that persisted till the early of Ratanakosin era.



Fig. 19 The site and the interior decoration of the throne-hall
Source: Bureau of the Royal Household Grand Palace (Bangkok, Thai Watthanaphanit, 2004)

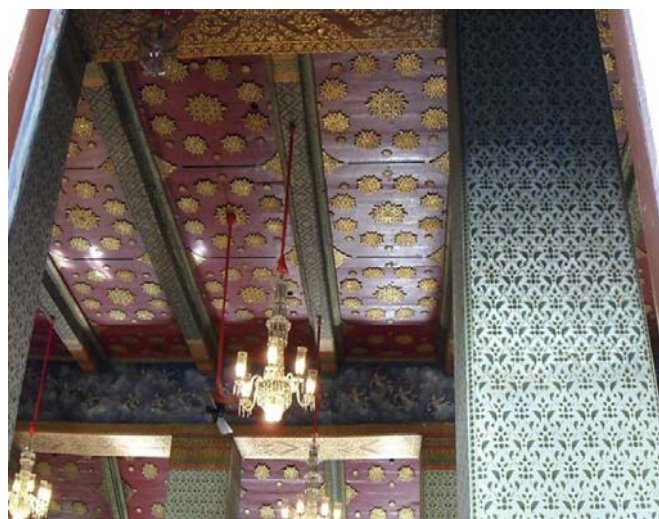


Fig. 20 The sky painting at the ceiling and the painting inside the throne-hall



Fig. 21 Guarding angles and giants at the doors and windows of the throne-hall

Source: Bureau of the Royal Household Grand Palace (Bangkok, Thai Watthanaphanit, 2004)

V. CONCLUSIONS

Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall is the most important throne hall in the old Bangkok, Rattanakosin city, Thailand. The throne hall was built in the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Phutthayotfa Chulalok, king Rama I, in A.C. 1782 and received a major renovation in the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Nang Klua Chao Yu Hua, king Rama III (A.C. 1824-1851). The major role of Amarindra-vinitchai mahai-suraya Bhiman throne hall was to give a public audience to government officials and a site for royal ceremonies.

Since the early Rattanakosin era, the status of the king, in accordance with the absolute monarchy derived from Ayudhya era has been that of the divine god who is the highest in hierarchy and royal prerogative in the kingdom. Thus the Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman throne hall was directly built for the king with specific fine art architecture as a symbolic expression of "Prasada" or "Viman", the palace of god in Thai architectural costumes. This system was derived from the era of Ayudhya (A.C. 1350-1767). The cement molding figures at the building's basement called "Than Singha" (lion shaped pedestal), is the highest level of royal design in Thai architecture. The doors and windows have been designed in arch shapes called "Song Bun Talang", made of cement with gold leaf applied and decorated with mirror. The roof had been designed as multi-level of gable roof which represents the word "Prasada", the multi-level palace of the gods. The front of gable roof has an exclusive designed for the king which is called "Krueng Lumyong Chorfa Hanghong" fasten with wood applied lacquer and gold leaf

The interior of the throne hall is designed as the center of the paradise in line with beliefs in the cosmological perspective of the people in the past as explained in the Thebumikatha (Thiphum) bible, written by Pha Maha Dhummaraja the first of Sukhothai (A.C. 1347-1368).

The throne was supposed to be the Kao Pha Sumen, the center of the universe. The top of Kao Pha Sumen was the palace of the Intra, the head of the gods. When the king stayed on the throne, he maintained the Intra's status, according to the wishes of the divine god (king as the god) while at the same time serving as the master of the universe. The name of the throne hall also sends a clear message of its significance. For example, "Amarindra" means the Intra, "Vinitchai" means a decision or consideration, and "Mahaisuraya Bhiman" means the palace in paradise. When put all together, "Amarindra-vinitchai-mahaisuraya Bhiman" means the palace for the Intra to decide on all cases.

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