A CASE STUDY ON THE CONSECRATION OF SPACE AT THE MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY SALAYA CAMPUS

Jane Dillon

Introduction

Mahidol University is an autonomous research institute in Thailand that implements modern philosophy in its academic pursuits is still religious with a sacred overtone in its cultural practice. Religion has become a part of public life at the university along with other religious rituals that were revived and performed all year round in the communal space. The revival of religion at the university is due, in part, to the spirit presence and the occurrence of tragic incidents that are perceived to be related. James Taylor, in his work Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand: The Religiosity in Urban Space, described contemporary Thai Buddhist society to be disenchanted due to the impact of modernity and secularization. Taylor suggests that the process of globalization produced a sense of insecurity and dislocation among the people. This insecurity was perpetuated by political and economic instability and the increasing fragmentation and polarization of the Thai metropolis. Taylor states that religious history and tradition have lost their significance in Thailand, and that Thai Buddhism is caught up in contradictions of history and traditions, with this national religion becoming more marginal to the lives of people, or assuming a more private form of practice.[1]

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[1]   James Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imagings in Thailand*: *The Religiosity in Urban Space* (Surrey: Routledge, 2008), 1–2.

The revival of religious pracitice at Mahidol University Salaya campus refutes this claim: studies reveals that religion remains significant for the contemporary Buddhist community in the institution. The dichotomy between religion and modern academia is due to the fact that religion is particularly superstitious, which compromises the integrity of modern philosophy in its ethos. Modernity is intertwined with science and secularism which is in conflict with religion.[2] In A Secular Age, Charles Taylor dissects secularity into three different senses. The first sense is found in a situation in which the political organization and other public practices are 'emptied of God' or of any reference to ultimate reality. The second sense is in "falling off of religious belief and practice", in people turning from God, and the third sense focuses on the condition of belief that persists in a society where 'belief in God is understood to be one option among others'.[3] At Mahidol University secularism is applied in the first sense where secular academic practice is bracketed from the cosmos that is in communication with the spirit. In Max Weber's distinction of differentiation, it is believed that modernity will result in religious demarcation rather than religious disappearance, in which religion matters prominently in some affairs and not in others.[4] According to Weber, religion will continue to remain relevant in a specific place, time, and function in the modern context. Although religion is excluded from academic pursuits at Mahidol University Salaya campus, its presence is rested in the public life which presents an interesting case for the study of the sacred and the modern in Thailand.

Objectives

The significance of this study is to understand the religious space on the Mahidol University Salaya campus. The objectives of this study are

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[2] Scott E. Hendrix, "Superstition and modernity: The conflict thesis, secularization thesis, and anti-Catholicism," in *Religion in the Era of Postsecularism,* ed. Uchenna Okeja (London: Routledge, 2019), 103.

[3] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2–3.

[4] Philip Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 339.

to: (1) examine the phenomenon of sacred landscape at Mahidol University Salaya campus; (2) identify the socio-religious foundation of the contemporary Thai Buddhist community at Mahidol University Salaya campus.

Sources and Methods

This study relies on primary and secondary sources to present the phenomenon of religious revival at Mahidol University Salaya campus. The primary source presents data on materialized artifacts in the public space of Mahidol University Salaya campus, the Golden Jubilee Medical Center, and Mahidol Wittayanusorn Demonstrative School. The data presents the number of religious artifacts disseminated in the communal space of the institution. The findings on artifacts were used to: (1) catalogue and classify into representations based on cultural authority; (2) analyze the data to identify the socio-religious foundation of the contemporary Thai Buddhist community at Mahidol University Salaya campus.

The secondary source presents the narrative literature on the hierophanies at Mahidol University Salaya campus. The study employs the published work of Dr. Phunphit who was the director of the Institute for Language and Culture Research for Rural Development at Mahidol University and Dr. Sugree Charoensook who is the founder of the College of Music at Mahidol University, as a secondary database on religious phenomena at Mahidol University Salaya campus. The narrative literature of the two professors was based on the phenomenology of personal encounters with spirits among students, professors, and university officers that reveals the axis-mundi on campus. The narrative literature on spirit encounters at the university campus provides an insight of the cosmology and the collective worldview of the contemporary Thai Buddhist community at Mahidol University Salaya campus.

Method

i) Collect material artifacts at Mahidol University Salaya campus, the Golden Jubilee Medical Center and Mahidol Wittayanusorn Demonstrative School.

ii) Catalogue the findings through classification of artifacts based on cultural representations.

iii)Analyze the result to identify the socio-religious foundation of the community at Mahidol University Salaya campus.

The revival of religion at Mahidol University Salaya Campus

Mahidol University Salaya campus is a contact zone between modern philosophy and sacred geography. Geographically, Mahidol University was established in Bangkok as a modern institution in 1943, while academically its education is grounded on positivistic epistemology with its core in medical science. In 1971, the university acquired a large property in the west of Bangkok in the province of Nakorn Prathom. The new campus was built in 1975, in a sub-district called Salaya. Mahidol University Salaya campus was officially opened on 23 July 1983. The new campus was constructed to accommodate the expansion of new faculties and the first-year medical students. Over the years, the Mahidol University Salaya campus had transformed into a religious space where religious rituals are performed all year round in the public space organized by the community on campus and religious artifacts have materialized onto the landscape of the university as sacred objects.[5]

The revival of religion at the Salaya campus was a result of spirit manifestations; according to both university personnel and students, there are spirits wandering on campus among those living within the university.[6] The removal of spirit shrines during the construction of the university became a controversy that many believed to be the source of the chaos on the Salaya campus. Prior to the establishment of the institution, spirit shrines were part of the religious artifact in village religious culture. It is believed that there is a sacred order to the cohabitation between the living and the spirits. There were many spirit shines that were consecrated on the property when the university inherited the

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[5] Apilluck Kasemphonkul, *Retelling the Legend of Salaya* (Nakhon Pathom: Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, 2009), 221–223.

[6] Sugree Charoensook and Phunphit Amtaykullah, ความเชื่อเรื่องเจ้าที่ในพื้นที่มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล ณ ศาลายา เจ้าขุนทุ่ง (Nakorn Prathom: College of Music, Mahidol University, 2009), 6–10.
Kasemphonkul, *Retelling the Legend of Salaya,* 215.

estate. During the construction of the university, all the shrines were removed, and the Mahidol University Salaya campus was established as a secular space from 1975 to 1988.

The first religious artifact to be installed on the property was a Buddha statue, which was presented to the university as a gift on 28 June 1988 from Mom Rachawong Songsri Kedsingh, a Mahidol professor at the Bangkok campus and a doctor at the Siriraj Hospital. The second Buddha statue was presented to the university by Princess Sirindhorn on 8 May 1992. The arrival of two Buddhist artifacts on the university campus were due to the myth of spirit manifestations on the Mahidol University Salaya campus that had travelled from Salaya to Bangkok by way of the university students. Dr. Auay Kedsingh and Princess Sirindorn were informed of the legend at the Salaya campus and presented the Buddha artifacts to the university.[7] The Buddha statues were placed at the Salaya campus as the religious centre of the community; however, the Buddhist community reinstated the spirit of the soil shrine as the sacred centre of the campus.

The consecration of the first spirit shrine on campus was organized by the university community in 1991. The shrine of the spirit of the soil is called a Jao Thi; the term Jao refers to lordship and Thi is the landscape. The spirit of the soil is believed to be the spirit chief of the living community. In the anthropological ethnographies of Thai culture, the cult of spirit, is largely centred on a concept of power that is regarded as intrinsic to a specific territory, usually the village. The village belongs to pre-modern geographical construct of muang or town. The spirit is the deity of the local community, and according to Mus the locality itself is perceived as a god. An impersonal god defined above all by a localization, the notion of power in this epistemology is found within a specific place that accounts for the dynamism of life associated with locality, its energy or its ethos depending on the social nature of its associated territoriality.[8] The Jao Thi shrine is worshipped by the community as a sacred object; its power is confined to a particular space

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[7]   Charoensook and Amtaykullah, ความเชื่อเรื่องเจ้าที่ในพื้นที่มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล ณ ศาลายา เจ้าขุนทุ่ง, 6.

[8]   John Clifford Holt, *Spirits of the Place, Buddhism and Lao Religious Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 24.

and its sphere of influence is localized. The power of the spirit of the soil does not extend beyond its geographical location. The spirit of the soil is associated with the village that operates autonomously outside of modern-day Theravada Buddhism.

The revival of spirit artifacts on campus was due to the ongoing tragedies that had occurred on the campus from the time of the construction of the university. Several accidents occurred on campus as well as murders at the Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies which were believed to be orchestrated by the spirits. In 1986, Dr. Phunphit Amataykullah shared his encounter with the spirits at the university with a monk (พระครูภาวนาจารณ์ วัดพระเชตุพน). The Buddhist monk affirm that the incidents on campus were manipulated by the Jao Thi and suggested that Dr. Phunpit consecrate a shrine for the spirit of the soil on campus. After the monk had passed away, Dr. Phunphit consulted with a lay female spirit medium (คนเข้าทรง) regarding the unexplained situation at the university and received the same instruction. In this way, the consecration of a shrine for the spirit of the soil at the campus was performed to restore the sacred order on the Salaya campus. The consecration of the shrine was performed through an animist and a Buddhist ritual. The animist ritual was performed by the lay spirit medium, and the Buddhist ritual was performed by ninety-nine monks.[9] The spirit shrine was consecrated behind the International College on the Salaya campus, and the location of the shrine was revealed by the spirit through its communication with the medium. The religious event was organized by Dr. Phunphit and attended by high-ranking university officials. The existence of the main spirit or Jao Thi can be understood as the village guard or the village chief that is treated as the intermediary between the divine and the human; it is also regarded as being endowed with the power of the "god of the soil", which is believed to be the ancestors of the village who also embody the power of the soil. The village chief stands in a relationship of "lineage" to the social past of the given place.[10] The revival of the sacred centre and the reinstatement of

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[9]   Charoensook and Amtaykullah, ความเชื่อเรื่องเจ้าที่ในพื้นที่มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล ณ ศาลายา เจ้าขุ่น ทุ่ง, 11–12.
[10]   Holt, *Spirits of the Place Buddhism and Lao Religious Culture*, 27.

the spirit shrines were a collective effort of the contemporary community on campus to restore the sacred centre within the university. The spirit of the soil was deified as the lord of the campus community, and he is referred to as Jao Khun Tung. Figure 1 shows a picture from the university website taken on 25 November 2019, of Professor Dr. Piyasakol Sakolsataydorn, the president of the University Council and the members of the council's official visitation of the Salaya campus sacred sites, which included the shrine of Prince Mahidol, the king's mother and Jao Khun Tung, and the Buddhist statues.

Figure 1: Professor Dr. Piyasakol Sakolsataydorn[11]

According to Figure 1, the community of Mahidol University officially recognizes Jao Khun Tung as a deity. It became a tradition for the community to pay tribute to the shrine through a rite of passage before

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[11]   https://mahidol.ac.th/th/2019/university-council-president/

an event or major constructions to take place at the university; however, a tribute was not performed to the shrine prior to the construction of the College of Music at the Mahidol University Salaya campus. The tragic incidents recurred during the construction of the college and Dr. Sugree, who was the director of the College of Music at Mahidol University, recieved a personal visit by the spirit of Jao Khun Tung on campus in 1999. The professor was warned by the spirit of his misconduct and demanded Dr. Sugree to honour the tradition or deaths would continue to recur during the construction of the College. Dr. Sugree organized a ritual and renovated the spirit shrine in 2001 to appease the spirit. The renovation was funded by the faculties within the Mahidol University Salaya campus. After the renovation, the spirit shrine of Jao Khun Tung became physically more prominent and visible in comparison to other sprit shrines on campus. The Buddhist community on campus makes offerings to the spirit in exchange for grades, promotion, and funding for the institution, and this behaviour can be described as an exchange between the living and the spirits.[12]

The sacred and the profane

In The Elementary Form of Religious Life, Durkheim defines the sacred and the profane as a common characteristic of religious beliefs that presuppose the classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which one thinks in two classes or opposed groups generally designate by two distinct terms. This divided the world into two domains one of which contains all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought; the beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends that are either representations or systems of representation which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with the profane things.[13] The sacred according to William E. Paden is the supernatural and the transcendent reality, which manifests itself in various places, times and

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[12]   Kasemphonkul, *Retelling the Legend of Salaya*, 223.
[13]   Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Form of The Religious Life* (London: The Free Press, 1965), 52

objects;[14] the sacred order indicates mere orderly arrangements as opposed to messiness, randomness or chaos.[15] The distinction between the sacred and the profane in phenomenology is characterized between the physical and supernatural dimension within human affairs and the modes of thought of being in the world that are divided into two modalities of experience. The sacred is the opposite of the profane: in the sacred modality, it refers to an experience that is not physical but sacrament, that is, a communion with the sacred.[16] The sacred and the profane existential dimensions exist as a part of a single existence; it is when an absolute reality has been revealed where an absolute fixed point can be established.[17] The sacred manifests as a reality of a different order from the "natural" realities outside of a secular life or the profane. In the profane, space is homogeneous and neutral without a qualitative differentiation or orientation given by virtue of its inherent structure.[18] The manifestations on the university campus revealed a sacred order of the space to be intertwined with the supernatural in a single reality. The spirit shrine represents a fixed point of orientation in the homogeneity as the axis-mundi. The experience on the campus detached the territory of the university from its profane surrounding. The consecration of space in the university makes the campus open to another dimension in its communication, Eliade describes this as the paradoxical point of passage from one mode of being to another;[19] it is when the spirit becomes an integral part of our "profane" world in sacred geography. The shrine as a profane object became a sacred artifact through rituals performed by the agent. The process of consecration is a technique of orientation for the construction of sacred space that reinstate the sacred order on campus to end the chaos. It is the cosmicization of the unknown territories into an organized space that can become habitable for settlement. In traditional societies, a sacred place constitutes a break

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[14] William E. Paden, *New Patterns for Comparative Religion: Passage to an Evolutionary Perspective* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 45

[15] Paden, *New Patterns for Comparative Religion: Passage to an Evolutionary Perspective*, 48

[16] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: A Harvest Book, Inc., 1959), 14.

[17] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 21–22.

[18] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 22.

[19] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 26.

in the homogeneity of space that symbolizes a passage from one cosmic region to another in communication with another dimension.[20]

Royal-Modern Institution

Historically, universities in Thailand were established and supported by the Chakri dynasty from the nineteenth-century in the period of modernization, with Chulalongkorn University being the first modern university in Thailand founded by his successor King Vajiravudh. Chulalongkorn University was the first modern university in Thailand to offer secular education with the aim to produce civil officials for the kingdom. Although the university practices secular education, the institution was established under the pre-modern political construct of absolutism under religious influence. Modern movements in Thailand were introduced through royal initiative in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (r.1856–1910). King Chulalongkorn was responsible for the modern movement and Thai modernity is understood through the notion of the king as the father of modernity in the framework of paternalism or the king as a father of the people. This concept of kingship was established in the late thirteenth century in the adaptation of Theravada Buddhism in the principle of paternalism with Buddhism.[21] In this epistemology, modern knowledge was not a result of a new understanding of the world. Literacy and education in Thailand were implemented through the traditional narrative that is connected with Buddhist kingship.

In the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Siriraj Hospital (1888) and the Royal Medical College (1983), known as Bhatayakorn School (โรงเรียนแพทยากร), were established. Modern hospitals and secular education were implemented by the traditional monarch. The glory of King Chulalongkorn is accredited through the Thai modern movement and phrases such as Ratchawong Chakri (Chakri dynasty) or Borommaha

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[20] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 37.
[21] Siriporn Dabphet, "State and Religious Ideology in Nineteenth-Century Thailand," *Journal of the Siam Society* (1990): 53.

Chakri Wong (the Great Chakri dynasty) only came to be used in the reign of King Chulalongkorn.[22]

The shift towards modern politics under constitutional monarchy had only taken place in 1932. The country was under a new form of government after the revolution led by Field Marshal Plaek Phibun-songkhram that ended absolute monarchy. This government limited the role of the king and the place of royalism in the public; one of the extreme cases was the restriction on the young King Bhumibol Adulyadej (r. 1946–2016) from leaving the capital.[23] This resulted in the decline of the Thai royal institution and the role of the monarch was reduced during the anti-monarchist period. Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram's government attempted to de-emphasis the royal role in state institutions, and the Royal Medical College became the University of Medical Sciences in February 1943. The collapse of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhramin's government in 1950 resulted in a new political chapter in Thailand. General Sarit Thanarat revived the legacy of Thai royal institution and royalist nationalism in 1957. This government laid a religious foundation for the return of the god-king by combining the constitutional monarchy with pre-modern notions of kingship. King Bhumibol Adulyadej placed the royal institution at the centre of nationalist discourse in Thai identity with the process of rehabilitation of the Thai monarchy.[24] The notion of god-king was part of the traditional ideology of devaraja of the Hindu framework. This ideology emphasized the divine element of a monarch that was adopted into society in the fourteenth century. This includes court etiquette and Hindu-Brahman rituals to the divine element of a monarch.[25] In this political ideology the monarch is presented as the spiritual centre

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[22] Attachak Sattayanurak: "The Intellectual Aspects of Strong Kingship in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Siam Society* (2000): 91.

[23] Matthew Kosuta, "King Naresuan's Victory in Elephant Duel: A Tale of Two Monuments," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 34, no.3 (2019): 584, https://doi.org/10.1355/sj34-3d.

[24] Peter A. Jackson: "Virtual Divinity: A 21st-Century Discourse of Thai Royal Influence," in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, ed. Soren Ivarsson and Lotte Soren (Singapore: NiAS Press, 2010), 30.

[25] Siriporn Dabphet, "State and Religious Ideology in Nineteenth-Century Thailand," *Journal of the Siam Society* (1990): 54.

and the head of the modern Thai nation, and as the protector of Thai democracy legitimized by the religious power of meritorious authority. The monarch is not presented as a secular man: he is the moral legislator, moral judge, and supreme protector of the religion. The Thai monarch is responsible for the success or failure of the political order, and, by implication, of the social order which became a symbol for the moral protector of good karma and the preventer of evil.[26] In the reign of King Bhumibol, there were statements such as "King and Nation are one and indivisible", "Army or the king", and "government headed by the king".[27] Moreover, the late King is often attributed with 'mystique' and his popularity is regarded as possessing almost supernatural powers. In his reign, there was increasingly use of the traditional royal language that highlighted the sacred status of the Thai monarch with magical overtones; according to a report in the Financial Times, King Bhumibol was described as 'a monarch styled as a demi-god'.[28] The legacy of Thai royalism was successfully restored through the rehabilitation that resulted in the rise of royalism in the twentieth century.

The implication of the rehabilitation of the Thai royal institution in the late 1950s created a sacred overtone on the identity of Mahidol University. The name Mahidol was granted to the university by the late King Bhumibol to honour his father Prince Mahidol of Songkhla who became the "Father of Modern Medical Science and Public Health of Thailand". The University of Medical Sciences officially took on a new identity as Mahidol University on 29 July 1969, with Prince Mahidol of Songkhla as the emblem of the institution. The royal symbol of Prince Mahidol was granted to the institution as the symbol of the university combined with the motto: Attānaṁ upamaṁ kare อตฺตานํ อุปมํ กเร, written in Pali, which translates as the Golden Rule in English: 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you'. The writing in Pali reflects the symbolic connection between the royal institution and Buddhism producing a sacred overtone in the identity of the institution; the symbol of the institution reflects the narrative of religion and

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[26] Norman Jacobs, *Modernization Without Development: Thailand as an Asian Cases Study* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 32-33.

[27] Kosuta, *King Naresuan's Victory in Elephant Duel,* 578.

[28] Jackson, "Virtual Divinity: A 21st-Century Discourse of Thai Royal Influence," 30, 34.

the king in Thai royal nationalism. The statue of Prince Mahidol of Songkhla was deified and worshiped as a sacred artifact by the community at the Salaya campus on Mahidol Day.

Mahidol University Graduation

The overlap between the sacred and the profane at the institution is presented in the graduation ceremony. A graduation ceremony is the most important event at the university; it is when all faculties come together collectively as a unit to host a ceremony from both liberal arts and science disciplines, as well as to include all levels of academic achievements from undergraduate to postgraduate students. It is a celebration of the technical-legal fact of the successful completion of one's studies and it is one of the most important ceremonies for all students as it marks the end of an academic chapter. Mahidol University graduation is a public event that provides a clear indication of the sacred order at the university. The graduation is performed as a religious ritual with a line of Buddhist sangha monastics chanting on stage and the sworn statement of the graduates referencing the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and other sacred things. The university diplomas are presented to the graduates by a member of the Thai royal family. The Thai royal institution is considered as Ramathibodi and a divine, signifying the ceremony's status as a sacred ritual. The graduates' families are not permitted to attend the ceremony as it is treated as a sacred event.

Graduation Declaration

"I, (each graduate declares his or her own first name and surname), do solemnly pledge before the *Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and all things sacred*, in the presence of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn who presides over this ceremony on behalf of His Majesty the King, with all those assembled here as witnesses, that I will pursue my profession using the knowledge, experience and skills instilled in me by Mahidol University, to the best of my ability, and hold steadfast in my loyalty to my *country, my religion and my Sovereign*. I will respect my teachers and use my knowledge and expertise only for the public good and will not associate myself with misconduct or evil. I will strive to extend the prestige of my community and

my profession, to foster harmony and to sacrifice personal gains for public benefit. This pledge I will uphold as being even more precious than my life".[29]

Result

Data on cultural artifacts

The list of religious artifacts at Mahidol University Salaya campus is presented in Table 1. The table is divided into three categories: (1) the Thai royal institution, (2) animism, and (3) Buddhism. A further breakdown on artifacts of the Thai royal institution is presented in Table 2. This is divided into six categories based on members of the Thai royal family: Prince Mahidol, Princess Srinagarindra, Princess Sirindorn, Princess Galayani Vadhana, King Maha Vajiralongkorn, and King Bhumibol Adulaydej.

Table 1: The number of artifacts

	Royal	Animist	Buddhist
Quantity	10 (48%)	9 (43%)	2 (9%)
Material symbol	statues and photographs	shrines and statues	statues

Table 2: The number of the royal artifacts

	Prince Mahidol	Princess Srinagarindra	Princess Sirindorn	Princess Galayani Vadhana	King Maha Vajiralongkorn	King Bhumibol Adulyadej
Quantity	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)

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29   Mahidol University Graduation Ceremony, 2018.

The finding regarding the public dissemination of royal statues and photographs on campus is as follows:

1. Statues of Prince Mahidol are located at the office of the president, the Mahidol learning centre, the Faculty of Medical Technology, and at the Golden Jubilee Medical Center.
2. A statue of Princess Srinagarindra is located at the Faculty of Nursing and the Ramathibodi School of Nursing.
3. A bust of Princess Sirindhorn is located at the College of Music in front of the Young Artist Music Programme.
4. A statue of Princess Galayani Vadhana is located at Bhumibol Gankeet Building D of the College of Music.
5. A photograph of King Maha Vajiralongkorn is located on the ground floor of the Faculty of Liberal Arts.
6. A photograph of King Bhumibol Adulyadej is located at Prince Mahidol Hall.

The finding regarding the public dissemination of spirit shrines on campus is as follows:

1. There are three shrines located at Mahidol Wittayanusorn Demonstrative School: a Brahman shrine and two local ancestral shrines referred to as grandma and grandpa (ศาลตายาย).
2. There is one phra phum shrine at Ratchasuda College and the Thai House.
3. There are two busts of the donors for the funding and continuation of the College of Religious Studies located in the courtyard of the college.
4. A spirit shrine is located at the former building of the Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies.
5. A Kru Mee Khak statue located at the Musical Arboretum at the College of Music; this is a local character of Thai literature.
6. The main spirit shrine on the Salaya campus is the shrine of lord father Khun Thung (the name of the spirit), which is located behind the International College that was consecrated by the spirit medium initiated by Dr. Phunpit Amataykullah in 1991.

The finding of the public dissemination of Buddhist statues on campus is as follows:

1. One Buddha statue is in front of the Student Dormitory
2. One Buddha Statue is located at the Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies which was placed after the murder incident.

Discussion

The finding on artifacts at Mahidol University Salaya campus reveals the religious notion of kingship and the socio-religious space in the pre-modern cosmology. Thailand in the nineteenth century was a period of a new intellectual movement; modern knowledge was introduced into the country through the traditional monarch. The Thai political culture is never divorced from religion, nor Buddhist cosmology, religion is intertwined with Thai politics through the notion of Buddhist kingship. Buddhism became politicized in Thai modern period through the carefully crafted narrative of the civilized of Thai culture by the political elites; since culture is the common theme in virtually every definition of civilization,[30] religion became an effective means to categorize people based on their way of life. The Thai political elites used Buddhism to support the class structure and to promote cultural superiority of centre and periphery relations, by dividing the space into different degrees of sacred dimension. This was based on the premise that the city was the enlightened space that is the most developed. The epistemology of siwilai (civilized) in the modern period has placed the cosmos and space in a hierarchical structure in the "umbrella of merit" where the centre of merit is placed at the capital within the proximity of dharma and the cosmic power of kingship. The village is refered as the periphery located in the provincial areas that was considered a backward space; in the domain of simplicity, superstition, ignorance and the less civilized. In this ethos, Bangkok is the symbol of merit being the centre of Buddhist cosmology where the king is situated while the rural is the area outside

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[30] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster paperbacks, 2003), 42.

the sphere of merit.[31] The centre-periphery relation provides a foundati-
on of the sacred space in the modern period, Mahidol University Salaya
campus is located at the periphery in the "backward space", according
to the Thai etymology of the civilized. The dissemination of artifacts on
campus reveals the cosmology inside the campus to be in the the sphere
of village influence, and the artifact of the royal institution represents
the centre of merit in the religious political sphere, with the two toge-
ther belonging to the pre-modern ontological construct.

   In the pre-modern period, Thai religious culture was purely animistic.
Buddhism only became the centre of spiritual authority in the hierarchy
of beliefs in the nineteenth century. This resulted in the superiority of re-
ligion in Thai religious culture that is demonstrated through state policy.
Jonathan Fox describes Thai religious policy as multi-tiered preferences
where one religion receives the most benefits. In Thailand, Buddhism
receives the most support from the state as the first tier, followed by Is-
lam and Christianity as the second tier.[32] At Mahidol University Salaya
campus, Buddhism represents the sacred centre in "The memories of
Mahidol University (2012)," Mahidol University exclusively records the
Buddhist artifacts of Phra Phutmahidol พระพุทธมหิดลมงคลวรญาณ and
Phra Mahalarb พระมหาลาภ as religious artifacts of the campus. The spirit
shrine of Jao Khun Tung was completely dismissed in the official record
which is conflicted with the practice of the community presented in
Figure 1. The narrative of the Jao Khun Tung shrine is recorded in
the published work of Mahidol University professors written by Dr.
Phuphit Amataykullah and Dr. Sugree Charoensook (2009) at the li-
brary of Mahidol University Salaya campus, and in the publication by
Pattana Kitiarsa (2012), Mediums, Monks, & Amulets, Thai Popular
Buddhism Today.[33]

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[31] Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai'; A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational
    Thinking in the Late Nineteeth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam," *Journal of Aisan Studies*
    59, no. 3 (2000): 537, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911800014327.
[32] Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University
    Press, 2015), 44.
[33] Pattana Kitiarsa, *Mediums, Monks, & Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today* (Chiang Mai:
    Silkworm Books, 2012), 137-140

The published work of Dr. Phuphit Amataykullah and Dr. Sugree Charoensook (2009) reveals the religious practice of the community at Mahidol University Salaya campus to be dictated by the animist sphere of influence. There are many religious rituals on campus that are organized with animist elements and some that are purely animist, e.g. the wai kru ceremony hosted by the Thai music department, the worship of the campus spiritual shrine of Khun Tung organized by the community of faculty members, the blessing of new construction projects, auspicious times to begin a project or Lek (ฤกษ์), ceremonial practice of grand openings, initiation rites for new students, etc. According to the religious behaviour of the community, it is salient that the subjective consciousness and the collective reality of the community is animistic, the deification of the local spirit inside the institution and the spread of spirit shrines on the property reinforces the authority of the religious culture of the village within the university. The shrine of the lord of the soil or Jao Thi on the campus represents the pre-modern socio-religious organization of the village community,[34] and the spirit shrines, such as grandma-grandpa shrines, are identified with the community at the village level. The cultural practice at the university reflects the socio-religious organization of the pre-modern construct where the peasants were ruled by local village headmen and the regional aristocracy were under the authority of the capital.[35]

The findings concerning the spiritual imprint at Mahidol University Salaya campus has shown the Thai royal family and the village spirit cult to be the dominant cultural imprint based on the data. The two represent a fully pre-modern worldview, that, taken together, are juxtaposed with the scientific academic mission that creates a dichotomy between sacred and secular. The spirit shrines represent the spirit cult of the pre-modern cosmology of muang in its metaphysical nature and ethics of power. The artifacts of the Thai royal family symbolize the religious role of Thai traditional kingship propagated by Sarit Thanarat's government that was brought back in the twentieth-century along with traditional

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[34] Holt, *Spirits of the Place Buddhism and Lao Religious Culture*, 18.
[35] Kenneth R. Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia: Maritime Trade and Sate Development, 100-1500* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC: 2011), 6.

rituals and language. The dissemination of the Thai royal family at Mahidol University Salaya campus reflects the institutional cultural value as part of the royalist nationalist historiography. The political ideology of the twentieth century reinstituted royalism, religiousism and nationalism where the Thai royal institution is connected with the divine and Thai religiosity. The study reveals the socio-religious foundation at Mahidol University Salaya campus to be conditioned by the religious politics that cleaves from the principle of the secular academic approach of modern philosophy.

Conclusion

The consecration and renovation of the Jao Khun Tung shrine marks the revival of sacred geography of village religious culture, while the spread of the spirit shrine at Mahidol University Salaya campus demonstrates the dominance of the village religious authority in the community within the university. Although Buddhism represents the religious identity of the Thais supported by the state, the religious practice surrounding the community has shown the contemporary Buddhist community to be in the sphere of animist influence. The representations of spirit shrines on campus illustrates the collective ontology of the community to be informed and conditioned by the pre-modern geographical construct of space. The royal institution and the village spirit cult represent a fully pre-modern worldview, which, taken together, support the foundation of the sacred in the public space at Mahidol University Salaya campus. The network of royal representations promotes the notion of traditional kingship and its link to the Brahmanical symbolism of royal absolutism via the pre-modern worldview under religious constructs where the King has acquired renewed potency alongside Buddhism as a basis of political legitimation in the twenty-first century.[36] The spirit shrines represent the cosmological structure of the metaphysics in pre-modern times and the implementation of royalist nationalism ideology that supports the rise of pre-modern cosmology to re-emerge in the Thai public sphere. The traditional bond of the pre-

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[36] Jackson, "Virtual Divinity," 29.

-modern past has resurfaced as a consequence of the religious character of Thai politics in the twentieth century. The religious phenomena at Mahidol University Salaya campus presents a paradox between religion and modernity in the Thai academic institution that is treated as sacred ground among staff and students alike.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

B i b l i o g r a p h y

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