

# A Study of the Principles of Three Major Sects for Creating Buddhist Sacred Places

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to establish the principles for the creation of Buddhist sacred places based on primary sources of the three major sects, namely, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, and studied architecture based on promising secondary sources through case studies. The stated research question is to understand the interaction among Buddhist principles, human activities, and Buddhist architecture in order to develop the criteria for creating Buddhist sacred places in the context of the modern world. The results indicate that criteria should be considered in two aspects. First, a method is required to characterize the context and environment that promotes the practice of virtues such as concentration and wisdom, resulting in mental development. Second, and a method is needed for characterization of the context and activities performed that are appropriate for spiritual cultivation. The proposed criteria offer appropriate methods for developing sacred places in various societies, and contexts comprising any circumstances.

**Keywords:** Buddhist architecture, Buddhist sects, creating space, virtues – concentration – wisdom, spiritual cultivation

## INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced society, with the evolution of technology, changes in lifestyle in various dimensions, including ways of thinking, perspectives, and attitudes, have become more noticeable. People in the society have, for example, conducted studies in numerous fields to establish a body of knowledge that can be applied to their daily living. One of the established philosophies that guides people's lives is Buddhism. At present, Buddhism is applied and presented through pieces of advice, using simplified and informal words to interest modern people in Dhamma, or the Buddhist doctrine, and make it more accessible to all. This applied Buddhist doctrine plays an increasingly critical role in the society as it emphasizes neither the presentation nor explanation of the principles in the Tripitaka scriptures, unlike its intense customary teaching in the past. This change is no different from the modern-day approach to the construction of Buddhist architecture. The views and the ways of thinking about the physical features of temples, which once were strictly in accordance with the conventional Thai architecture, have been reinterpreted. At present, the essence of the Buddhist space is viewed in various dimensions in accordance with the roles of politics, society, or the economy as vital factors that have an impact on contemporary Buddhist architecture. This can be seen, for example, in the development of its form -- in particular, the space for Buddhist activities and the creation of it that enables Buddhists to relate themselves to Buddhism. All these dimensions are noted as observations, and they pose questions about the purposes of the Buddhist architecture and various Dhamma objects that are intended to suit the social context.

To date, however, Buddhist architectural studies have been quite eclectic, including those of Zhang et al. (2011) who studied sound, acoustics, and bells in Chinese temples to discover how the environment informs human activities and sharpens concentration through sensory devices. The Buckee (2014) study of an historical temple in India seems to contribute more to the (mandala) origin of Buddhist sacred space, and might have informed the conceptual diagram used. Chantaree et al. (2015) discussed more symbolic motifs in Luang Prabang temples.

Buddhist architecture and nature were additionally discussed by De Silva (2017). These studies, however, point to the limited scope of studies relating to the conceptual or overall perspective. On the other hand, the study of the articulation of space defined for the Buddha relics provided to allow monks and laymen to investigate the meaning and conservation of the Buddhist architecture in the context of Thailand by Khanjanusthiti (1996) points out an interesting key, that is, the balance between the religious functions and the modern-day requirements that can conserve and enhance the spirit of the sacred place. As can be seen, most of the existing studies are merely concerned with the Buddhist architecture in particular sects, while the latter is in line with the author's study, which aims to establish principles for creation of sacred places or Buddhist architecture appropriate to all three sects, in a dimension of the concept consistent with the changing world.

In this article, two significant issues are highlighted that comprise a fundamental approach. The first issue is that the Buddhist space is an area of learning, practice, and mental development for monks and the laity to achieve liberation from suffering according to the teachings of the Buddha. In other words, it is an area devoted to learning Dhamma for mental development based on the Four Noble Truths and awareness of the law (state) of Tilakkhaṇa, or the three characteristics of existence, which is the dominant theme of Buddhism and which lies at the heart of Buddhist teachings. The second issue is that Buddhism has been passed down for more than 2500 years and has evolved and divided into smaller groups, including the three leading sects of Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna that are widely known and accepted. Despite their clearly different guidelines for teaching and practices, the three sects' goals are all targeted at liberation from transmigration.

Consideration of these two issues is the central adopted approach of this study, which considers the Buddhist space as a specific area, or so-called sacred place, for promoting human beliefs and activities related to Buddhist principles. Furthermore, the Buddhist space is also a specific place which consists of noble persons and Dharma objects as spiritual anchors, as well as providing some spiritual activities for laymen who have faith. All of these considerations signify

the Sappāya of a place that enables humans to develop their own nobility. Therefore, this article emphasizes the study of the relationship among humans, Buddhist principles, activities, and Buddhist architecture through analyses with respect to the Dhamma principles, case studies concerned with the creation of sacred places of the three sects, and conversations with monks and practitioners to facilitate clearer understanding of data and to help draw conclusions.

## BACKGROUND

### Buddhist Principles

The fundamental aspects of Dhamma from Tipiṭaka by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (1996), a primary source, along with the writings of Payutto (1996) and Buddhadasa (2016), were thoroughly examined in order to comprehend the Buddhist principles. The writings explicitly describe the essence of Buddhism that must be first understood; that is, Dhamma perceives all things as elements, a state of existence, being as they are. In other words, all things exist according to their own nature as elements in ordinary conditions, existing as normal as they are. Although it can basically be stated that all those things (dhātu, nāma-rūpa) are composed of various elements, they are in fact in the form of a flow. These things are composed as an object; meanwhile, that object can be separated into parts. In this manner, all things are perceived to exist in the form of a stream. Each constituent element of the stream is dependent on the other elements in an unbroken flow of appearance and decline. They cannot be counted as an animal, a person, an ego, or one's identity, which can be owned possessed or commanded because they are all impermanent and unstable. This stated essence is considered to be the principal conceptual structure in the study of Buddhism (Payutto, 1996).

The fundamental laws of nature lead us to understand that the flow of appearance and decline causes all things to possess three key characteristics in common: the stream of conditioned phenomena that makes things unstable (impermanence), the inability to survive

and change (stress and conflict) and lack of ability to be taken as their own or controlled (selflessness). These three common aspects are called Tilakkhaṇa of the Buddhist principles. The way all things are interrelated depends on factors, and the essence of their spontaneity and existence was explicitly described by the Buddha in Pratītyasamutpāda (dependent origination) in the Buddhist teachings. Both Tilakkhaṇa and Pratītyasamutpāda are Buddhist principles based on this natural law, but each is described in different terms of approach and orientation. To clarify, Pratītyasamutpāda focuses on the mind and factors of appearance which cause the mind to remain in transmigration (Payutto, 1996). Enlightenment through wisdom causes the mind to see selflessness, to be free from these factors, and ultimately attain the highest enlightenment (Arahattaphala).

Renunciation of self and Saṃsāra (liberation) comprise the ultimate goal of Buddhism. However, not everyone can reach Arahattaphala easily due to the limitations of their own abilities. The Buddha, therefore, established the Four Noble Truths for everyone to perceive and follow, and as tools to lead people's minds to be free from transmigration. Therefore, the Four Noble Truths are the major principles presented in a process to guide an individual to consider the nature of suffering (Dukkha), recognize the causes of suffering (Samudaya), be aware of the solutions that end suffering (Nirodha), and follow guided practices to escape from suffering (Magga). These are the fundamental concepts and issues of Buddhism, and they are considered to be the standard for all the detailed principles of Tripitaka, which guide individuals to perceive and practice Buddhism. That the Buddhist teachings are detailed, broad, and insightful allows both monks and laymen to apply them in response to their needs, according to individual state of mind, context, ability, and manner.

### Three Nikāyas Movement

After the death of the Buddha, the Buddhist saṅgha (monastic community) revealed differences in the interpretation of the Buddha's teachings, and various opinions have been expressed. The details of these different teaching vary according to groups and conditions, and,

consequently, have resulted in contradictions arising in the Buddhist conceptual philosophy. Following the death of the Buddha, conflict caused new sects to emerge, with clearly contradictory ways of practice. During AD 1, a clear split occurred, resulting in two large sects. One of these was the main group, Theravāda, which attempted to adhere to the teachings of the Buddha, transmitted through the words of senior monks of the Buddhist order in the first “Buddhist Lineage” (The Dharma initially preached was considered to comprise the principles of Theravāda). The other group called itself Mahāyāna due to its contrary opinions about the regulations and Vinaya Piṭaka (the discipline) of monks. The group claimed that the Buddha’s words could be modified whenever appropriate, and its different interpretation of the principles regarding the discourse was, and continues to be, specifically aimed at updating Sutta Piṭaka (the Buddha’s teachings). Both Theravāda and Mahāyāna have, however, been divided into sub-sects over time, based on different contexts and factors. Their different teachings have spread to Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and Indonesia. While some sects have disappeared, others have merged to form new ones. However, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the arrival of Islam and its political transformation in the Indian peninsula caused Buddhism to disappear from its country of origin, while Buddhism in other countries flourished. Theravāda is practiced in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia and Mahāyāna has spread to China, Japan, Korea, and Indochina, while Vajrayāna is most dominant in Tibet and the Himalayas.

Mahāyāna itself has been divided into various sub-sects. After it was evangelized in China, numerous sub-sects emerged, each with its own philosophical differences and practices (like those of Vajrayāna). The word “Mahāyāna” literally means “a large vehicle” and is a metaphor to depict the concept that Mahāyāna has great benevolence in saving all beings from suffering and making each of them a Bodhisattva. It is stated by Mahāyāna that the Buddha rotated the Dharma wheel three times. The first time, he preached about Dharmacakrapravartana Sūtra, while the second and third times, he preached about Śūnyatā (emptiness), continuity (the links of dependent origination phenomena), and Bodhicitta (the mind

of enlightenment). Śūnyatā and continuity are comparable to the selflessness and continuity of the soul (Pratītyasamutpāda-dependent origination) in Theravāda (Sathirasut, 1978). As the highest goal of Mahāyāna, Bodhicitta has been, particularly, reinterpreted, and that reinterpretation changed the understanding of the ideal of nirvana, which is different from that of Theravāda, focusing on attaining nirvana by oneself. Nagarjuna, the founder of Mahāyāna Buddhism, stated in the Dvadasamukha sutra that Mahāyāna was a greater vehicle than the inferior vehicle of Hinayana. However, the principal concepts regarding the Buddha’s teachings in Theravāda and Mahāyāna are not at all different. In fact, they contain similar beliefs and practices of Dhamma, like the Four Noble Truths, the Karma principles, Tilakkhaṇa (the three characteristics of existence), and Pratītyasamutpāda (the dependent origination) (Inta-sra, 2007, p. 7).

Vajrayāna is a Buddhist sect established after Mahāyāna. During the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was discovered that this Tibetan form of Buddhism originated in two places. The first spread from the medieval Indian subcontinent in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when King Trisong Detsen invited Śāntarakṣita and Padma-sambhava to establish this Tibetan Buddhism in his kingdom. Padmasambhava, in particular, is venerated as the “second Buddha” by Tibetans. In AD 787, the Samye monastery was founded, and the first Tibetan monks were ordained, giving birth to the Nyingmapa sect. During this time, many Tibetan philosophers gathered to translate the Buddhist principles into Tibetic language. As for the other form of Buddhism established in Tibet, it originated from the Zhangzhung kingdom, which is believed to have been on Mount Kailash, in the west of modern-day Tibet. This original Buddhism, also known as the ancient Buddhism of Central Asia (Beckwith, 1993), is called “Bon”, or “Yungdrung Bon” to be more precise (Dakpa, 2006). The Zhangzhung people became Buddhists after the Buddhist teachings had been spread to Tibet by Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche, who was invited to visit the country and who made spread the teachings effectively there. Although the Buddhist teachings that spread from India in the following period caused political and religious conflicts, the two main sects contain the same fundamental

concepts of Bodhisattva and emptiness (Śūnyatā).

## The Ideals and Significant Points of Buddhist Teachings

It is a fact that the basis of Buddhist principles is liberation as an ideology, and that the Four Noble Truths and Pratītyasamutpāda from Tipiṭaka are the common teachings of every Buddhist sect (Lama, 2009, p. 21). According to the study of Buddhist teaching approaches, the points of view and attitudes of venerable gurus towards Buddhism have resulted in concepts or philosophies used to describe the Buddhist principles or Dhamma. The interpretations of venerable gurus are also considered as teaching techniques that can be easily understood by the public; therefore, the different perspectives have led to different teaching approaches.

Furthermore, as Buddhism has merged with different social contexts in different time periods, its physical results have come out in the form of diverse traditions or beliefs. For example, the precepts (Śīla), the Buddhist code of conduct, differ in detail between the Buddhist sects, and different meditation practices are found in each sect. While the Theravāda teachings emphasize the development of the mind for individual intuition attainment, and contain straightforward practices based on Buddhist principles, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna employ tactics to teach Buddhism. With regard to the Theravāda teachings, Payutto (1996) describes the emphasized concepts of Dhamma learning known as Pariyatti, Pañipatti, and Pañivedha. In other words, he points out the significance of the order of actions, and asserts that access to awareness or enlightenment in Dharma (Pañivedha) must come from practice as well, and not through an understanding of learning (Pariyatti) alone. Therefore, the Theravāda sect primarily focuses on completing the spiritual practice, samādhi, with the two types of meditation, namely, Samatha (practice of concentrating the mind) and Vipassanā (practice of insight-knowledge). The practices of Vipassanā explicitly use the establishment of mindfulness -- a method called Satipaṭṭhāna (the four foundations of mindfulness) -- to make one aware of the existence of the body, sensations,

consciousness, and Dharma until the five aggregates become conscious as Tilakkhaṇa (Anālayo, 2003).

With regard to Mahāyāna practices, Taiken (2018) and Williams (2008) said in their books that, although Mahāyāna contains the same basic meditation practices (Samatha and Vipassanā) as those of Theravāda, its difference lies in the ideal of a Bodhisattva. This ideal leads people to aspire to and focus on the Buddha-field (pure land) to expand opportunities for saving mankind from Saṃsāra (transmigration). Although liberation is the main ideology, this does not mean that people should just focus on liberation from suffering without paying attention to all beings. Mahāyāna, in fact, adheres to the three principles: the great wisdom, the great compassion, and the great stratagem. With regard to the first principle, Mahāyāna describes the principle of Anattā, selflessness, in a wider, deeper and more eccentric way than does Theravāda; in other words, Mahāyāna uses the word "emptiness" (Śūnyatā) instead of "selflessness" (Anattā). Mahāyāna, moreover, assumes that liberation can be reached by engaging in the accomplishment of Śūnyatā, which has two levels: Puggalā Śūnyatā and Dharma Śūnyatā. Puggalā Śūnyatā is the recognition of the absence of self, which is the path to Arahant, whereas Dharma Śūnyatā is defined as recognition of no attachment in Nirvana, the Bodhisattva Magga. ~~but all beings~~. The second principle of Mahāyāna focuses on leading the mind towards the Buddha-field. According to Mahāyāna's ideal, although one has not reached the Buddha-field yet, he or she still needs to make merit along the way to embrace mankind. As a result, Mahāyāna has reduced the number of Dasa-parami, originally called the Ten Supreme Perfections, to six, which are Dāna pāramitā (generosity), Śīla pāramitā (proper conduct), Kṣānti pāramitā (patience), Vīrya pāramitā (diligence), Dhyāna pāramitā (contemplation), and Prajñā pāramitā (wisdom). The virtues of proper conduct, contemplation and wisdom, in particular, provide elaborate and profound descriptions, saying that the one who has achieved enlightenment needs to reach transcendental meditation (Dhyāna) in the Puggalā Śūnyatā and Dharma Śūnyatā states. The last principle of Mahāyāna explicitly underlines the stratagem of the Bodhisattva.

That is, to save all animals, the Bodhisattva must be ingenious in reaching out to the state of mind of all beings. As for the last principle, Mahāyāna includes many Buddhist doctrines and formal procedures that do not appear in Theravāda teachings. It merely considers these elements to comprise a strategy to lead people to understanding throughout the Dharma truth. Therefore, the subtleties and teaching approach to the practices of Mahāyāna can be said to focus on one goal, the Śīla of Bodhisattva, causing laymen's spirits to adopt the principles of the great wisdom and the great compassion mentioned previously.

In Vajrayāna, skillful means and wisdom are emphasized. The Lamrim doctrines (Sonam, 1997) state that Vajrayāna focuses on the relationship between the disciple and the guru, or the guiding teacher, who lays a solid foundation in practitioners. This ideal can prevent non-practitioners who lack a sequenced fundamental practice from comprehending the intrinsic essence of the objectives hidden in its practice approach. However, in Vajrayāna's practice approach, the Bodhichitta is set at the heart as in Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna provides three paths to achieve the Buddha's enlightenment: The Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen. These sequential paths are believed to increase understanding of Śūnyatā, or enlightenment, and eliminate ignorance and the karma strain (Kabilsingh, 2011, p. 75). The path of Sutra explicitly focuses on the elimination of defilements, which are the cause of ignorance, to liberate all beings from Duḥkha (suffering). On the other hand, the path of Tantra focuses on changing the defilements into wisdom, not getting rid of the defilements or sufferings. This path does not teach struggle with sufferings, but teaches to embrace them instead (Trungpa, 1991, p. 24). This method teaches the practitioner to recognize the "truth" of suffering completely until it changes into wisdom. The last path, Dzogchen, indicates that the defilements should disintegrate by themselves, without the need to get rid of, admit or transform them. Therefore, this path teaches one to ignore the defilements and merely elevate the Rigpa (the mind to obtain an awakening state with wisdom). As pointed out, the three paths are of different forms and perspectives, but the ultimate goal of each is the same: for one to achieve enlightenment. In connection with practices,

Vajrayāna is particularly outstanding as it includes many forms of spiritual practice through the use of the Tantra path of "visualization" as a tool for developing the mind, leading to integration of the body, words and mind as a whole. By following these three paths, one can attain the highest level of mental development (Dzogchen) that is related to the state of mind and other senses, including sight, hearing and touch, and linked to enlightenment (Trungpa, 1987, p. 67). Therefore, the Vajrayāna sect emphasizes completing the wisdom, or paññā, through the skillful means or practices suitable to the various states of mind of practitioners.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This article discusses a body of knowledge concerning Buddhist principles and architecture in order to recognize value and propose concepts for managing environmental context for the development of the human mind and life. As theoretically-oriented qualitative research, it was conducted in pursuit of the knowledge required for identifying the Buddhist principles of each sect through study of their primary scriptures, a comparison of secondary documents related to the architecture of each sect, and interviews with monks and practitioners in the sites of study. The field work was done for over a period of two years with the aim of understanding the Buddhist principles and activities through direct experience.

The Buddhist principles of each sect were thoroughly examined through their scriptures and books that expound teaching guidelines. To clarify, the primary documents, consisting of the Tipitaka scriptures (Thai version), comprised the major documents for reference and examination of Buddhist principles, together with the important Mahāyāna scriptures of Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya, the Vajrayāna scriptures of Lamrim, and historical documents related to architecture and selected areas of study for exploring the relevant forms of construction. The secondary documents consisted of works by widely respected monks of each sect, and books about Buddhist principles compiled and synthesized by monks and religious scholars who are well-recognized in

each sect. Examples of such documents include works by Somdet Phra Buddhakosajarn (Prayudh Payutto), Phra Dharmakosācārya (Nguam Indapañño) Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, Nāgārjuna, Geshe Sonam Rinchen, Satien Phothinantha and Krisadawan Metavikul. These documents and books were examined for the purposes of analysis and synthesis of the principles of various aspects. Research data were additionally obtained from a selected group of people whose experiences are related to the content of this research, such as practitioners and monks, or others whose views are related to Buddhism and Buddhist architecture.

Furthermore, the core Buddhist principles of the three sects, including the Four Noble Truths, *Tilakkhaṇa* (the three characteristics of existence) and *Pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) were investigated and employed as a framework for the principal analysis of the other Buddhist sects. With regard to the teaching approaches of the three sects, the author's attempt to comprehend the approaches to explain Dhamma and the distinctive methods of each sect that lead to ultimate pathways was achieved. To clarify, the author reviewed books containing analyses of Buddhist principles, interpretations, and related critical issues such as the Buddhadhamma books of Theravāda, the Prajnaparamita Sutra of Mahāyāna, and the Lamrim scriptures of Vajrayāna in search of the "principles and objectives" that each sect provides to their practitioners in order to help them to follow and achieve the results according to Buddhist principles.

With regard to the selected case studies, the sites previously mentioned include important temples of each sect such as Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkhalaram Rajwaramahawihara Temple and Pathum Wanaram Ratcha Wora Vihara Temple of the Theravāda sect, Shaolin Temple, and White Horse Temple of the Mahāyāna sect, as well as Jokhang Monastery and Samye Monastery of the Vajrayāna sect. The author would like to clarify that these selected case studies are not broadly or wholly representative of each sect since, in each sect, there are subgroups that perform slightly different forms of activities. The criteria for selecting the temples were as follows: 1) the temples must have sacred Dharma objects or venerable gurus who are highly influential in the laity's mind; 2)

the temples have constantly engaged Buddhists in activities that allow practitioners to express their beliefs and connection to sacred things such as worship activities and activities for various important occasions. The temples must also have a pattern of traditions and customs for Buddhists to follow; 3) the temples were built according to beliefs or principles that reflect each sect's vision, such as the belief in the Buddhist cosmology or Bodhisattva; 4) each temple must be in its original condition; in other words, it must not be so deteriorated as to render study impractical or impossible. Moreover, it must not have been renovated to such a degree that its original architectural style cannot be recognized. These criteria were employed as a framework for exploring the context, form, physical aspects of the architecture, and art elements of the Buddhist places. The criteria also enabled the author to understand the layout, composition and internal environment of the temples, and to discover the beliefs and principles that have been passed down as a symbolic system representing Buddhist principles. Furthermore, the author obtained data about organized Buddhist activities and direct experience. To be more specific, the author participated in learning about relevant principles and gained knowledge from exchanged experiences with practitioners, including both monks and the laity. Based on the collected data, the author was consequently able to summarize significant points for this research.

Based on data analysis and synthesis, as well as compilation and summary of the criteria, the author conducted the activities as follows: 1) the framework, practice and principles of creating Buddhist places of each sect were summarized; 2) the activities that occurred in the Buddhist places, also known as the spiritual activities of each sect, were analyzed in order to understand the system of relationships among people, activities and places, and to identify a tool that enables the interaction between people and places be linked together; 3) a body of knowledge was compiled as guidelines and criteria for creating Buddhist places; in other words, the body of knowledge reveals the elements that make a Buddhist place a space that can communicate with the mind of people, and this body of knowledge comprises the principles of creating such a spiritual space.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A place of virtues – concentration – wisdom

In general, the concept of “virtues – concentration – wisdom” is the essential Dharma principle of Buddhism, and it is also intrinsic to the Four Noble Truths which are foundational in all three sects. However, each sect emphasizes different methods for preaching the Buddhist philosophy so as to be the first point of entry for laymen entering the study of Buddhist practices. The concept of virtues – concentration – wisdom requires that one's body, speech, and mind remain in a “normal” state, which is suitable for mental development. Concentration is solely the determination or adherence to a particular emotion until the mind reaches the state of Dharma. The meditation practices of the three sects can be said to be based on Samatha and Vipassanā. The Samatha meditation enables the mind to remain calm. In other words, it enjoys peace as its base, while the Vipassanā meditation is the consideration of Dharma that occurs within the mind, which leads the mind to awareness and accesses the enlightened wisdom in the state of the five aggregates and all beings. The significance of virtues, concentration and wisdom in terms of mental development lies in the concept of “balance”; that is, virtues – concentration – wisdom function as three poles that support each other, and none of them can be lost or of a different proportion to the other poles. This balance permits the mind to reach emptiness and clarity. Emptiness is a state of the mind in which there is the renunciation of ego. Furthermore, clarity is the power of the mind that is free from attachment. These, consequently, represent the state of enlightenment.

Although in Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, the precepts are based on the same Vinaya Piṭaka, or Buddhist scripture, and direct guidelines, they differ considerably in their details. For example, the ideals of a Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna contain more details in description than the ideal of a Bodhisattva in Theravāda. In Mahāyāna, the precepts are called Bodhisattva-śīla, or rules for the forming of a bodhisattva, and in Vajrayāna, the practice of Yidam meditation (visualization of self-

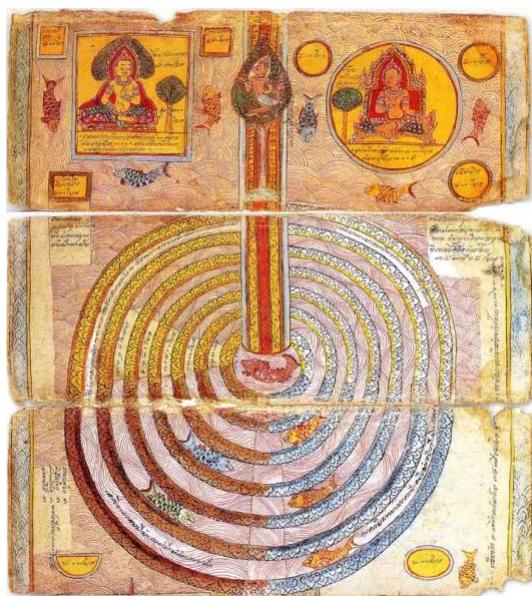
generation-as-Deity) has been added in addition to its existing precepts. However, the principles of the precepts of each sect are all the same in that they are intended to cleanse the body, speech and, especially, the mind to be free from defilements and ready for mental development. Regardless of practices or the Dharma by either monks or the laity, the approach or technique used by each sect varies and consists of numerous methods, such as, for example, the mindfulness meditation by following the breath (Mindfulness) in Theravāda, the calming of the body for the unity of the mind in Zen, or the Tantra meditation and Rig-pa (wakeful mind) for the mind to be merged and settled with the state of Dharma in Vajrayāna. It can, therefore, be stated that the essence of meditation practices of each sect is comparable to “a model of approaching intelligence” based on the philosophies, ideas, and ideals of each sect. This is, interestingly, inconsistent with the study of the Vajrayāna meditation practice by Kozhevnikov (2019). In his study, Theravāda and Mahāyāna meditation practices were compared, and their strengths were pointed out. Despite the differences, the results of their practices were found to bring about calmness, awareness and awakening, the elements that lead either one person or all living things to the enlightened wisdom and the release of Saṃsāra.

With regard to creating Buddhist places, the physical characteristics of Buddhist architecture are based on two fundamental factors. The first factor is the context of the relevant areas or countries that determines the style and elements of architecture. For example, in the studies of Sudikno (2004) and Miller (2015), it was found that the original philosophies of the selected areas of study revealed their evolution according to historical currents and their effects on the form of architecture. In other words, the architecture, like a shell, reflects the beliefs and context of the communities. The second factor is the Buddhist ideology, regarded as the texture of the Buddhist architecture. This factor is oftentimes related to the so-called symbolic system that reflects the teachings recorded in the Buddhist scriptures interpreted into two dimensions through, for example, paintings and murals, and into three dimensions through, for example, Dharma objects (statues) or architectural planning. All of these are, therefore, the principles employed in

the design of Buddhist architecture, the aim of which is to promote the transmission of Dhamma in various ways to those who do not need to be literate or read the scriptures alone. The symbolic system was mentioned, for example, in the books composed by Snodgrass (1985) and Brauen (1997). These significant books examined the nature of the stupa and the symbols used in its layout which describe Mount Meru, the core of the universe. The symbolic system is also devised to raise awareness of the ideals of the great mercy of the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva (Guanyin Goddess) that is present in almost every Mahāyāna temple. It, furthermore, reminds Buddhists of Dhamma, which is like an anchor for those who have faith, and which is intended for instruction about the Dhamma state of the Buddha, a Sambhokha-kaya, through various images of Thangka and Yidam in Vajrayāna. That Buddhist beliefs are reflected in the symbolic system, which makes certain areas or architecture exceptional places that support the beliefs and faith of humans who embrace religion as the basis of their lives.

### Figure 1

Buddhist cosmology



**Note.** The picture presents the plan of Buddhist cosmology, the concept of Tiloka which was adopted in the design of the Buddhist architecture. From *Buddhist cosmology* (n.d.), E-Shann. <https://e-shann.com/นพศิลป์พันธุ์>. Copyright by E-Shann.

In connection with the areas of *virtues – concentration – wisdom*, it is indispensable to the discussion of the *qualitative aspects of the environment and elements of the Buddhist architecture*. Conceptual quality, the first aspect, refers to the environment that facilitates the learning and practice of the virtues – concentration – wisdom principles so that “balance” can occur and exist as described previously. Context quality, the second aspect, refers to the environment that “affects” the human mind, emotional state, and feeling of calmness. This calmness is fundamental to the “efficiency” of perception, learning and practice. After analyzing and synthesizing the collected data, the author discovered three following characteristics that should be present when creating Buddhist sacred places.

- The place should assist an individuals' body, speech, and mind in creating calmness, which is a significant foundation of virtue. This is related to the concept of creating a calm atmosphere in Buddhist architecture so that the inside is different from the outside. For example, inside an area, a calm atmosphere should be fostered, as can be seen in Buddhist architecture where walls are layered with Buddhist cosmology concepts. The calm atmosphere creates a step of access to a chapel, going through each layer of the walls and leading into the most important place. In addition, the serenity, cleanliness, and refinement of the architecture provide an atmosphere that allows the mind to enter a spiritual space barred from the outer world.

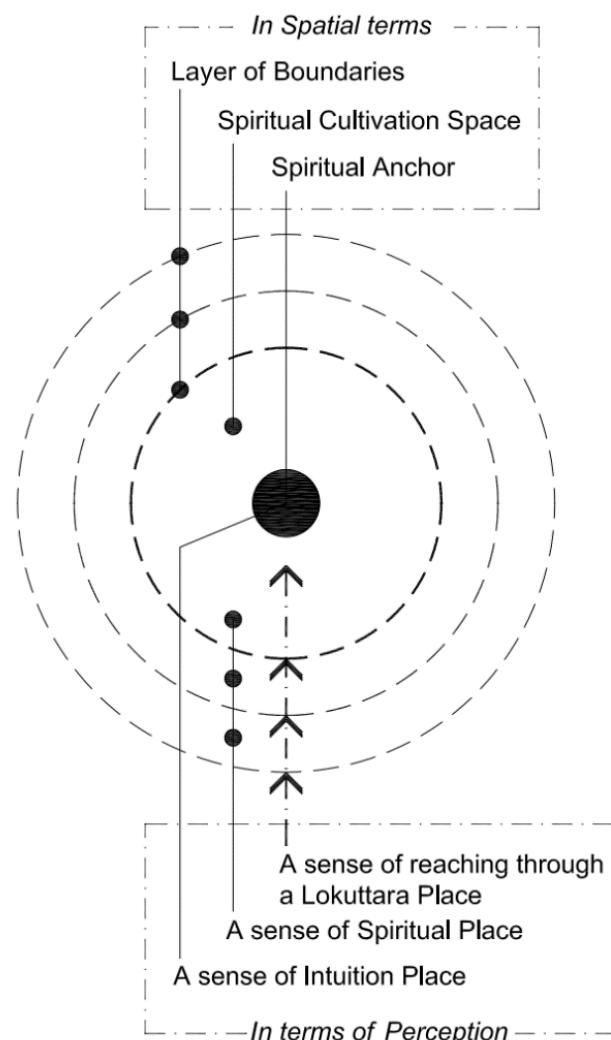
- The place should assist an individual's body, speech, and mind in reaching tranquility and stability, which is a significant foundation for learning the Dharma principles through various activities. This is related to the concept of a court between layered walls and a chapel. This kind of area enables the mind to recognize, through spatial awareness, an auspicious space that brings about a positive, relaxed, and dependable sense in the mind. The exquisite Buddhist architecture and various Dharma objects such as Buddha images are, thus, believed to enable the minds of faithful individuals to be associated with what they consider auspicious. The Buddhist architecture is like an anchor, or the center that causes individuals to develop their potential for opening up and understanding more deeply about Dhamma included in various activities.

- The place should assist individuals to reach wisdom. This is related to the concepts concerning the arrangement of suitable space for Buddhist practice, following the emphasized ideals and methods of each sect to achieve the Dharma goals. This point explains the use of the area for learning and teaching the Buddhist doctrine by monks as gurus. In terms of religious learning, practitioners can learn and understand the background of the Buddhist art and architecture. In consequence, they will appreciate the Buddhist teachings hidden in Buddhist objects; such appreciation is called rational faith, not ignorant faith. The space additionally

maintains the bonding between the practitioners and the highest goal of Dharma, and provides a spiritual anchor. For example, as the majority of people in Mahāyāna revere the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, they usually create spaces, such as almshouses, for merit-related or charitable activities that reflect the great ideology and ideal of Mahāyāna. Another example is the setting aside of space for the Abhiseka ceremony (the teaching being conferred) between gurus and their disciples in Vajrayāna, which shows commitment to each other and reflects the ideal raising the gurus to equivalency with the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the monks.

**Figure 2**

*The diagram of an area of virtues*



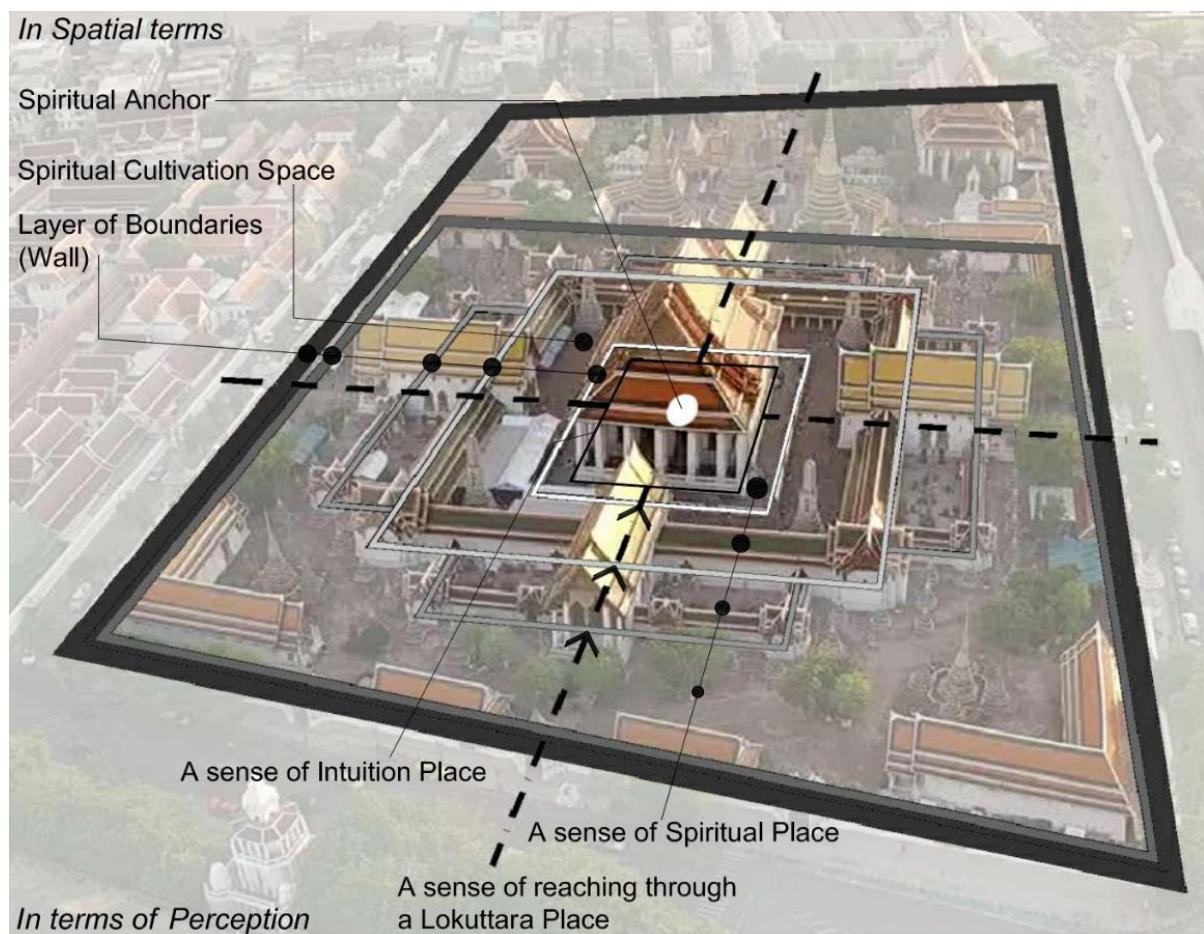
*Note.* The diagram demonstrates an area of virtues – concentration – wisdom in terms of spatial and perception.

These three characteristics are identifiable by categorical and sequential analysis of the elements of the Buddhist architecture in each sect with the principles of virtues – concentration – wisdom (as shown in Figure 2). Figures 3-5 demonstrate the overlaid conceptual diagram concerning the three sects of Buddhist architectural layout. In terms of space, the layers of boundaries, including walls, steps, or stairs, in all three case studies divide the area as a sequence providing access to the main chapel. The pathway that leads to the main chapel is normally settled along the axis; in addition, at the end of the pathway, the main court embraces the main chapel, and this area is frequently treated as a cultivation space for spiritual activities such

as worship, observance, or Buddhist ceremonies of each sect that are connected to spiritual anchors (Buddhist sacred objects). The formation of perception and sense of place is based on the intention of the laymen who recognize these sacred things, eg. Buddhist statues or monks with strong faithfulness in their minds. Therefore, the concurrent perception while accessing a sacred place can be sensed. The perception of a sense of reaching a Lokuttara Place, a sense of Spiritual Place, and a sense of Intuition are considered as simultaneous perception, and a sense of spiritual place becomes more explicit when laymen become closer to their spiritual anchors settled in a chapel, which is represented as the intuition place.

**Figure 3**

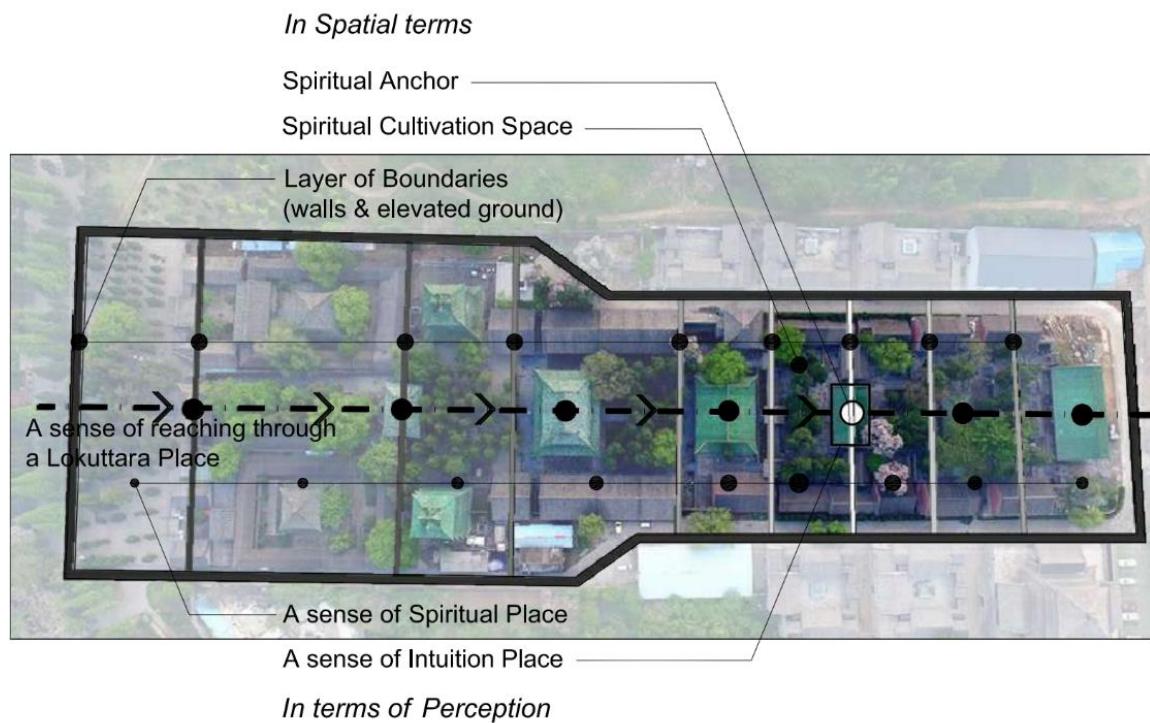
*Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkhalaram Rajwaramahawihara*



**Note.** This aerial view of Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkhalaram Rajwaramahawihara, Theravāda temple, demonstrates the conceptual diagram of virtues – concentration – wisdom in terms of space and perception. Adapted from *An aerial view of Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkhalaram Rajwaramahawihara*, by Wat Pho, 2016 (<https://www.facebook.com/watphonews/photos/a.602213159881238/1478425598926652>). Copyright 2016 by Wat Pho.

**Figure 4**

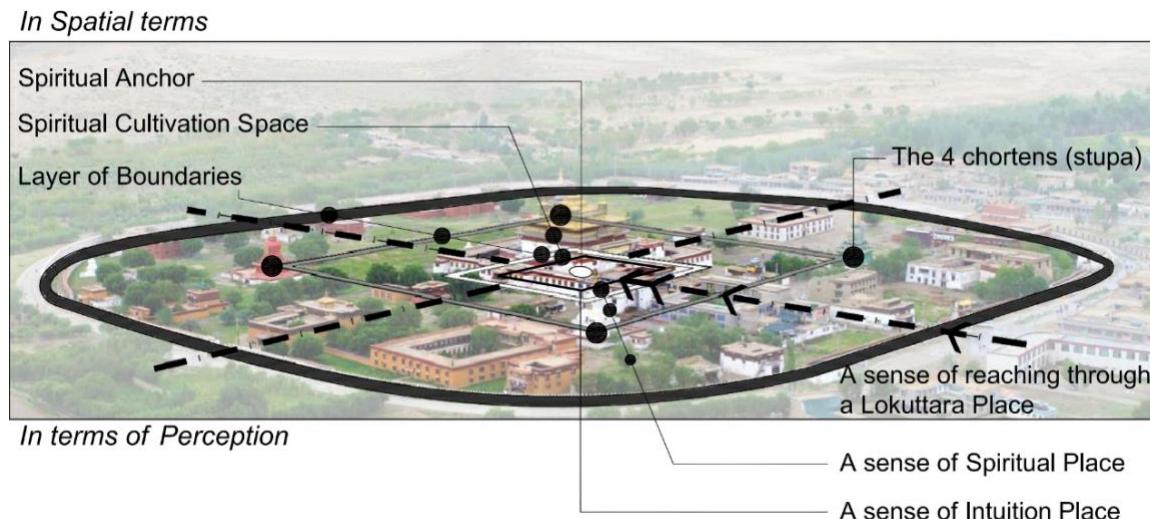
*Shaolin temple, Mahāyāna temple*



*Note.* This aerial view of Shaolin temple, a Mahāyāna temple, demonstrates the conceptual diagram of virtues – concentration – wisdom in terms of space and perception. Adapted from *An aerial view of Shaolin temple in Dengfeng*, by Xinhua, 2016, China Daily ([https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/travel/2016-04/30/content\\_24983498\\_4.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/travel/2016-04/30/content_24983498_4.htm)). Copyright 2016 by China Daily.

**Figure 5**

*Samye monastery, Vajrayāna temple*



*Note.* The aerial view of Samye monastery, Vajrayāna temple, demonstrates the conceptual diagram of virtues – concentration – wisdom in terms of space and perception. Adapted from *An aerial view of Samye monastery* by Gewarongbu999, 2016, Shanxin Zhiguang ([http://www.shanxinzhiguang.com/index.php/Index/library\\_detail/id/280](http://www.shanxinzhiguang.com/index.php/Index/library_detail/id/280)). Copyright 2016 by Shanxin Zhiguang.

The layouts of the architecture in these three case studies are based on the Buddhist ideology and context that, basically, elevate the land to become a virtual image of a Lokuttara place by using a layer of boundaries that separate the land from Lokiya. Therefore, with realization of place, time, and faith, laymen's bodies and minds will be naturally composed when they reach the walls representing the area of virtues; meanwhile, their connection with the spiritual anchor will keep them in focus, representing the area of concentration. Consequently, this process supports an individual's senses and helps that individual recognize spiritual anchors (Dhamma objects), all of which represent the area of wisdom. The established space promotes a sense of pathways that lead them to the ultimate goals of Dhamma; the pathways refer to activities as well as Dhamma learning and practice.

## **Sacred places: Spiritual Cultivation, Spiritual Bonding, and Spiritual Anchor**

What makes a sacred area so meaningful is its contribution to the individuals' seriousness of learning and practice to achieve spiritual development based on the virtues – concentration – wisdom principles in an area of spiritual cultivation. Spiritual cultivation, in particular, nurtures individuals and enables them to lean towards Buddhist principles through their faith, which is known as spiritual bonding. It also contributes to the stability of the spiritual anchor within the mind, and it is the core connecting the principles, human beings, activities, and Buddhist architecture together. However, if viewed from another approach, or traced back to the creation of Buddhist architecture of the three sects, it can be seen that what these unique areas all have in common is that they primarily embrace "spiritual cultivation" activities through a symbolic system of beliefs as a form of the environment that encompasses these areas. In the meantime, the spiritual cultivation activities in all sects are based on the same principles of virtues, concentration, and wisdom -- the focal point of this article. In other words, the principles comprise the core that can connect Buddhist principles, humans, activities, and Buddhist architecture of all sects.

**Figure 6**

*Wat Pathum Wanaram Ratcha Wora Vihara, Theravāda temple*



*Note. Monks led laymen observance an evening chant and meditation at Wat Pathum Wanaram Ratcha Wora Vihara, Theravāda temple*

**Figure 7**

*Shaolin temple, Mahāyāna temple*



*Note. Buddhists worshipped to their spiritual anchors (Metteyya statue and Bodhidharma statue) at Shaolin temple, Mahāyāna temple*

**Figure 8**

*Jokhang Monastery, Vajrayāna temple*



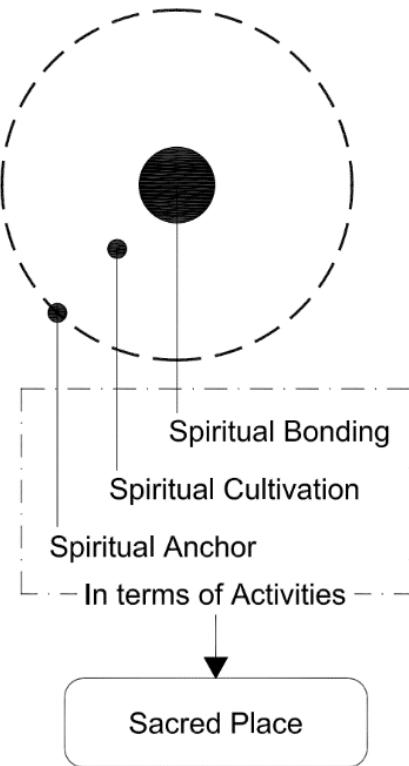
*Note.* Laymen made a Chag Tsel (prostration observance) in front of the gate of Jokhang Monastery, Vajrayāna temple

A sacred place maintains the spiritual cultivation of strong faithfulness in laymen, and it plays a role in spiritual bonding. In terms of activities, as shown in Figures 7-8, spiritual bonding is the key that brings people to the temple with purpose, and to perform observances with respect to a spiritual anchor in their minds. Spiritual bonding can be thought of as a boundary that defines those who rely on the Buddhist pathways; furthermore, solid bonding can assist Buddhists in becoming faithful practitioners when their spiritual cultivation follows a spiritual anchor based in Buddhist principles. Therefore, spiritual bonding, spiritual cultivation, and a spiritual anchor are the crucial elements that establish a sacred place. A concurrent consideration among the three elements and spatial activities can demonstrate the relationship as shown in figure 9. In terms of space, spiritual bonding can be reflected the ideal of a layer of boundaries where Dharma objects, with the implications of Buddhist principles, embrace the major court of spiritual cultivation where the main chapel is settled in the center as a spiritual anchor. In terms of activities, this ideal of the boundary can be represented in

the commitment of laymen follow the Buddhist pathways. Thus, in this condition, spiritual cultivation is based on Buddhist Magga (virtue - concentration – wisdom) as a spiritual anchor.

**Figure 9**

*The diagram of an area for the sacred space*



*Note.* The diagram demonstrates the three characteristics that are common elements of an area for the forming of an inner sacred space (sacred place).

The body of knowledge gained from this research results in a deeper understanding of the essence of a sacred place. With this study's attention to the elements of Buddhist sacred places, this novel understanding enables us to *focus* on the relationships and consequences of transforming Buddhist architecture so that it is appropriate areas, contexts, society, and cultures. Any given sacred place is considered to be a Buddhist area because of its spiritual cultivation activities that are based on the spiritual development of Buddhism. The characteristics described in this paper can be regarded as a presentation of the principles and methods of developing a spiritual space that makes the Buddhist place an area that can communicate with the mind of faithful

individuals. Providing knowledge for individuals and promoting an understanding of the origins of Buddhist arts and architecture among them can also create appreciation for the underlying Buddhist principles, also known as rational faith, not foolish belief. The sacred place additionally helps to maintain a connection between individuals and the ultimate goals of Dhamma, and acts as the spiritual anchor that facilitates the bonding and form in itself. It fosters the development of the mind, allowing it to be in a calm, peaceful state that promotes a divine life. All of these characteristics, consequently, make Buddhist sacred places perfect.

## CONCLUSION

This article is intended to be a starting point for discussing and understanding the Buddhist architecture of the three sects holistically as every sect has the same spiritual goals as its foundation. Moreover, the criteria presented in this article are not meant to conclude or represent new rules for how a Buddhist space must be designed. On the contrary, this research recognizes the dimensions of the various principles of each Buddhist sect and addresses significant issues of spiritual cultivation, spiritual bonding and spiritual anchors in order to qualify an area (space of virtues – concentration – wisdom) as a path of learning, practice and development of the human mind (for both monks and laymen) and for one to achieve the enlightened state of Dharma in the soulless morality (the state of the five aggregates) according to the teachings of the Buddha, which is the same highest ideal that all sects strive for.

In practice, the presented criteria are intended for the development of areas in terms of context and environment to elevate the efficacy of activities within the virtues – concentration – wisdom framework. In addition, when considering Buddhist architecture based on the human – activities – architecture principles, it becomes apparent that mental development is well-maintained in the track of practice. These principles can, therefore, be applied as a conceptual framework for creating Buddhist sacred spaces in line with changes in the modern world. This concept is independent of the need for traditional ideals or national identity because it

focuses on the essence of the methods of spiritual development according to Dhamma. It enables the new generation to relate to Buddhism more easily and allows the Buddhist way to remain in society, resulting in sustainable development. The principles, moreover, suggest that Dhamma can be applied indefinitely as a framework for living and allowing individuals to reach self-realization and recognize happiness based on various factors in reality, and that, ultimately, one can enjoy a life of wisdom.

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