

Conflicts in Managing Chiang Mai's Abandoned Monasteries

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ABSTRACT

In Chiang Mai's old town district, there are many monasteries that are still standing, some 'living' and some abandoned. These abandoned monasteries stand in the modern environment without any direct policymaking from the official stakeholders concerning their upkeep or protection. In this way, the remains of abandoned sacred places face a hostile environment and their survival is threatened. Each place is used in various ways, such as being utilized for government offices, being used as sacred places of elementary schools, or existing among poor communities; some are in the process of being revitalized. Most of the problems they face involve local people and how long-term management of these locations can be secured. This study intends to elucidate the 2006 procedure of the Thai government Fine Arts Department (FAD) with respect to the ten abandoned monasteries of old town Chiang Mai.

Chiang Mai's authenticity and cultural identity are crucial. People's understanding and interpretation about these key aspects of the city fluctuate and depend on the different 'goals' of the stakeholders. Seeking to understand Chiang Mai's true identity might be for a key factor in sustainable development of not only in tourism, but also the lives of local residents, and cultural heritage protection.

Keywords: Chiang Mai, abandoned monastery, dead monument, ancient monument, authenticity, sacred heritage

INTRODUCTION

When focusing on the Thai approach to conservation, it is obvious that a critical and problematic root conflict exists between the Buddhist beliefs of local people and the Venice Charter which underlies the policies of the Thai government's Fine Art Department (FAD). It is also obvious that this conflict between the FAD approach and the traditional approach, which is based on the 're-completely process' to reinvigorate heritage monuments, is unsustainable. Ordinary people who believe in basic Buddhist doctrines are typically concerned with the 'merit-making' aspects of those doctrines (Charoenwongsa, 1995; Laos PDR (Ministry of Information and Culture) and Chiang Mai University (Fine art Department), 1994; Suksawaddee, 1996), but the Venice Charter focuses on geographic and physical preservation. The traditional point of view is intended to maintain 'authenticity', but in a way that preserves Buddhist religious custom and ritual. Obviously, the FAD approach is far different, and might even be in opposition to the religious community. All of this is involved in the problematic issues of instilling *different goals* into a given heritage site.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review article intends to discuss some conflict between approaches that have led to unsustainable conservation practices of the Fine Art Department with respect to 10 abandoned monasteries. The study consisted of literature review, in-depth interviews, and study of 10 abandoned monasteries. Both Thai and English documents were reviewed in an attempt to identify the latest key thinking in research about abandoned monasteries. This process focuses on the managerial 'approaches' and solutions based on the basic assumption that *different approaches lead to different outcomes*. In this way, the stakeholders are mainly defined as those using the 'official approach' (official agents, laws and academic researches) or those using the 'local approach' (local community members, local Buddhist organization, abbots, and local religious customs). Interviews of many official agents with both direct and indirect

responsibilities were carried out, including interviews with local voices, particularly people who live and work every day within the changed abandoned monastery properties. Twelve interviews were carried out with administrative officers, and 21 interviews were completed with the local voices, allowing the different approaches of the 'official approach' and 'local approach' to be elucidated.

With respect to the 10 abandoned monasteries that still remain in the old town area of Chiang Mai, the 'official approach' and the 'local approach' are different because of their different *goals*. Relationships between the current land-using local people and the religious remains are being maintained and emphasized rather than prioritizing official procedures alone. Abandoned monastery remains are also part of a larger rethinking that involves broader consideration of 'religious heritage' rather than simply preservation of historic sites. Hence this analysis aims to identify the key factors of a 'sustainable approach' by linking these sites to everyday lives and identifying local people's awareness as a primary *goal*.

Objectives of the Study

To evaluate the 2006 procedures of the Fine Arts Department (FAD) with respect to old town Chiang Mai's 10 abandoned monasteries, as follows;

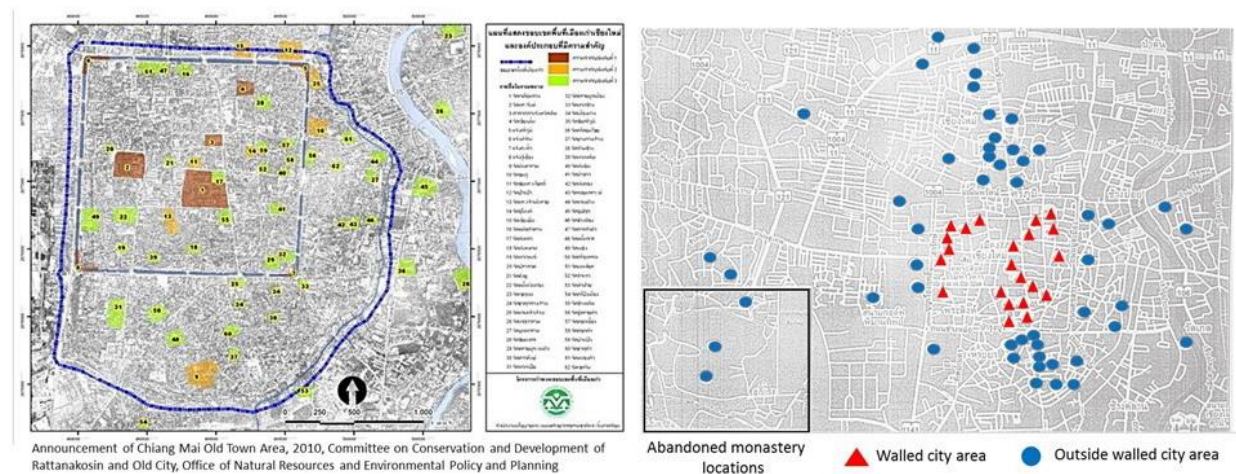
- conflicts between 'laws' and 'authorities'
- conflicts between the Venice Charter and Buddhist doctrine
- conflicts between 'authenticity' and 'renewal'
- conflicts between 'people' and the 'FAD approach'
- conflicts between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' preservation

Area of the Study

The study area of this review article comprise the 2006 procedures of the Fine Arts Department (FAD) with respect to Chiang Mai's 10 remaining abandoned monasteries, namely Wat Pa Dang Luang, Wat Pah-Tan, Wat Pan Sat, Wat Pah-Oy, Wat San-Ta-Hoi, Wat Inthakhin, Wat Nong-Lom, Wat Chiang-Khong, Wat Lao Siang, and Wat That-Klang.

Figure 1

Locations of Chiang Mai abandoned monasteries



Note. Adapted from the *Announcement of Chiang Mai Old Town Area (2010)*, by Committee on Conservation and Development of Rattanakosin and Old City Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, 2010 (<https://nced.onep.go.th>). Copyright 2021 by Tanwutta Thaisuntad

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In focusing on the abandoned monasteries among their religious communities, most of members routinely act in a passive way in preference to the main legitimacies of the FAD and the Office of National Buddhism (ONB) collaborations (Tianprasert, 1999). Most Thai people trust and believe that the FAD *must* be responsible and have high regard for all registered sacred monuments with physical sustainability. In fact, the local communities, who are the real owners, seem to be *excluded* by the FAD law and FAD's misunderstanding. Relationships between the local people and their abandoned sacred places have been changed, leading to alienation and misunderstandings; increasingly, people seem to believe that the long-term management, periodic preservation, yearly maintenance and all financial support *must* be the responsibility of the FAD alone.

This study found five conflicts in the FAD approaches to Chiang Mai's 10 abandoned monasteries, which are discussed one-by-one in this section.

Figure 2

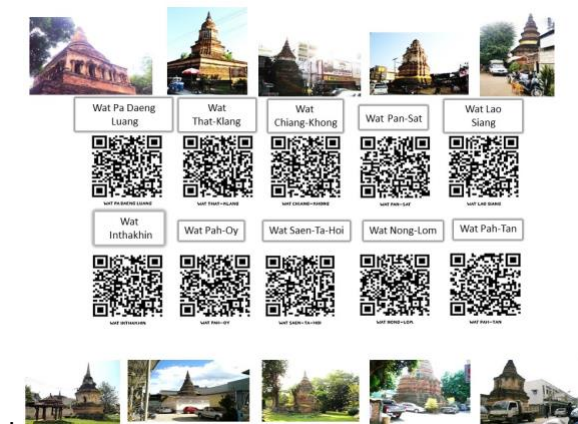
10 abandoned monasteries on study map



Note. Adapted from *Chiang Mai Map*, by Google Map, 2021 (<https://www.google.com/maps/@18.7864704,98.9869953,15.06z>). Copyright 2021 by Tanwutta Thaisuntad

Figure 3

QR codes of 10 abandoned monasteries are linked to the [https:// maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com) real-time navigation



Conflicts between ‘Laws’ and ‘Authorities’

In the reign of King Rama VI, influenced by the École Française de l'Extrême-Orient (French School of Far Eastern Region), the Fine Arts Department (FAD) was established in 1911 to protect and preserve both objects and buildings of cultural heritage (Akagawa & Tiamsoon, 2005). The French EFEO intended to explore and preserve countless historic sites in the French Indochinese territories, and it believed in the theory of “not restore but uphold” (Fine Arts Department [FAD], 1989, p. 95). Moreover, French scholars wrote many scientific and popular reference books that were concerned with this region and Thailand as well. As a result, in the beginning, the FAD’s conservation projects used the French academy.

During the years from 1963-1977, FAD was gradually transformed by many officers who had been trained by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) of Italy; therefore, restoration approaches and methodology in this period followed the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, which is commonly known as the Venice Charter (1964) (Akagawa & Tiamsoon, 2005). The Italian academic approach differed from French conservation theory in terms of function and diversity of objectives to historic sites. It was also believed that historic sites should not only

be conserved and maintained on a permanent basis, but also that they should be utilized for socially useful purposes.

The training of FAD officers by the ICCROM remains the main influence on national scholarship in the field today. The Venice Charter is the role model for the Thai FAD approach to conservation (Akagawa & Tiamsoon, 2005). The rise of the ‘conservation guideline’ for implementation, the so-called *Regulation on Ancient Monument/Site Conservation 1985* or ‘The Bangkok Charter’ (Peleggi, 2002, p. 28), was also greatly influenced by the Venice Charter’s approach, although it was adapted to the Thai social context.

The process of registration of cultural heritage under state protection was first begun in France in 1873 (Akagawa & Tiamsoon, 2005). In the case of Thailand, this process began following passage of the second Act of *Ancient Monument, Antiques, Object of Art and National Museum 1961 (amended 1992)*, or the so-called ‘Monument Act’, which has been in force for the past 60 years, although few ordinary people would be aware of the roles and responsibilities it gives to the FAD. Section 7 of the second Act is the critical section that empowers the FAD to declare some historic sites to be ‘Ancient Monuments’, with powers laid out as follows:

Section 7 The Director-General shall, for the purpose of keeping, maintaining and controlling ancient monuments under this Act, have the power to cause, by means of notification in the Government Gazette, any ancient monument as he thinks fit to be registered, and to determine such area of land as he thinks fit to be its compound; which area shall also be considered as an ancient monument. Cancellation and modification of the same may likewise be made.

If the ancient monument to be registered under the foregoing paragraph is owned or lawfully possessed by any person, the Director-General shall notify in writing the owner or possessor thereof. The owner or possessor shall, if not satisfied therewith, be entitled within thirty days from the date of his or her being aware of the Director-General’s notification, to apply for an order of the Court requiring the Director-General

to stop registration and/or determination of such area of land as ancient monuments, as the case may be. If the owner or possessor fails to apply for the order of the Court or the Court gives, when the case is final, the order rejecting the application, the Director-General shall proceed with the registration. (Fine Arts Department [FAD], 1961, section 7); (Fine Arts Department, 1961).

The Monument Act was amended in 1992 but only some sections were improved without a true reform of the whole structure. As for definitions detailed in the latest edition, significant issues with respect to 'Ancient Monuments' include provisions about place characteristics, and artistic and historical evidence, and the surrounding areas considered as historic sites and parks (Akagawa & Tiamsoon, 2005).

In the original Monument Act, the significant aspects of an 'Ancient Monument' were identified as the 'age' being at least 100 years of existence, and the lack of clear and definite boundaries that resulted in critical invasion into many historic sites. It covered only the registered Ancient Monuments, which has led to numerous, more recent, heritage sites to deteriorate without their heritage values being properly secured. At present, under the amended Monument Act, the declaration of any historic site to be an 'Ancient Monument' is identified by the relative factors of significant values. For example, the age of a site does not necessarily have to be 100 years if its significant value is generally accepted. In such cases, even a site in existence for 40 years, but having outstanding historical value, could be accepted. The weak points of age, definite boundaries and significant values in the original law were reconsidered and amended and are the key distinctions between the original act and the amended version. The amended Act also covers many historic sites that are still not registered as Ancient Monuments in order to protect against further ruin. Establishing more definite boundaries has also proceeded as well, as noted in the comment of an administrator of FAD in Chiang Mai:

The FAD's procedures with respect to historic sites, whether registered to be an Ancient Monument or not, are the same; the differences are only the penalties. We cannot register all of them, but it is necessary to select only some of those of highest significance because official registration always requires more government funds for maintenance (FAD, 1989, p. 66; S. Nannha, personal communication, November 28, 2006).

As the funding support is crucial, the current 'possession' of an Ancient Monument always needs to be identified. The FAD's principals under the law regarding financial support are as follows:

In case of the Ancient Monument sites that are not owned, it will be necessary for the FAD to obtain financial support.

In case where the Ancient Monument is possessed by a government office, the office would take responsibility for financial support of restoration and maintenance. The restoration process must be controlled under the FAD's conservation principal.

In cases where the Ancient Monument is possessed by a private owner, the owner takes responsibility for financial support of both restoration and maintenance. The restoration process must be controlled under the FAD's conservation principle (FAD, 1989, pp. 72-73).

In addition, both editions of the Monument Act (1961 and amended 1992 versions) empower the FAD to register a lot of valuable historic sites as Ancient Monuments. Since 1935, over 2,200 monuments have been listed (Akagawa & Tiamsoon, 2005). In the case of Chiang Mai, 95 historic sites have been registered (www.finearts.go.th). In many cases, the abandoned monastery remains have been declared Ancient Monuments, but the Office of National Buddhism has never been concerned about providing the needed financial support for preservation. For instance, the rental occupants of the abandoned monastery's land properties, such as schools and government offices, have been given the direct responsibility in financial maintenance and restoration.

A sense of the centrality of power dates back to the outdated 'Three Seals Law' that was used from the late Ayutthaya period to the beginning of the Bangkok Period, before the arrival of modernization in the late 19th century. When the FAD was established in the reign of the King Rama VI, in 1911, along with the establishment of the 'Monument Act' 1961 (amended 1992), it could be said that the political power of the centralized absolute monarchy and latter dictatorship of military government still remained (Satayanurak, 2007). With the passage of the Monument Act in 1961, the core power and principles of the FAD arose at the same time as the declaration of the first National Economic and Social Development Plan (1961-1966) and the Cold War (1946-1990), during which Thailand was ruled by military governments; this is referred to as the so-called 'dictatorship period'. There were almost two decades of rule under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963) and Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachon (1963-1973), who attempted to rule Thai society by totalitarian power and decisive control (Satayanurak, 2007, p. 5). This absoluteness of 'power' possibly still remains today, and is reflected in the unsustainable approaches and preservation attitudes that are combined with the 'tools' in use by the FAD today.

Conflicts between the Venice Charter and the Buddhist Doctrine

The FAD's role in conservation practice is empowered by legislation under the *Ancient Monument Antiques, Object of Art and National Museum 1961 (amended 1992)* and the *Regulation on Ancient Monument/Site Conservation 1985*. The definition of an 'Ancient Monument' by the Monument Act 1961 seems awkward in light of present day conservation trends. The connotations of 'ancient' (in both Thai and English) are obsolete, past, isolated from the current issues, and already dead. The term 'ancient' can also be used to describe the attitudes of Thai society and leaders towards many historical sites. The negative connotation of 'ancient' as meaning anachronistic implies a dimension of the past that is separated from everyday lives, which leads to alienation for the

locals and the general public concerned with living with and maintaining heritage sites. The term 'ancient' tends, itself, to be anachronistic in view of the current heritage approach that stresses the importance of linking heritage to everyday lives and future community existence.

Nowadays, widespread comprehensive awareness of conservation exists, making replacement of the word 'ancient' with the term 'heritage' an alternative choice that tends to provide the three dimensions of past, present and future in a more holistic way. These three dimensions of 'heritage' tend to encourage people to feel more of a sense of ownership, relationship, and togetherness. In the same way, the word 'historic site/place' tends to connect with the sense of 'ancient', and it is typically mentioned in the sense of archaic periods. Thus, the use of the phrase 'Ancient Monument' in the FAD law tends to imply the 'death' of the heritage. If ordinary people and the FAD believe that the heritage sites are already dead, it will be extremely difficult to acquire the successful accumulation of awareness and sense of ownership that is critical for sustainability. Also, it should be mentioned that these connotations are echoed in the preservation approaches, attitudes and misunderstandings which can lead to different managerial approaches in people's minds.

Clearly, the way that Thai society looks at numerous heritage sites is critical, for the connotation of 'Ancient Monument' in the official wording has a latent coding that might reflect poorly on the potential for successful conservation in both the FAD and Thai context. Due to the FAD word usage of 'Ancient Monument', Thai society may have learned to look negatively at heritage monuments, which could result in unsustainable development taking place today.

Before the arrival of French conservation theory, the establishment of FAD and the beginning of Westernization in late 19th century, Siamese society was saturated with Buddhist ideology in its capacity as a traditional kingdom and religious society. Buddhism tended to be a crucial factor in the paradigm of Siamese social order, and was manifest in political and socio-economic spheres, and particularly in people's ordinary ways of life (this persists even today in traditional communities).

The heritage sites from the past are like universal objects; they have life, breath and a circle of life. Birth, old-age, sickness and death are the core concepts that can describe the eventual deterioration and destruction of a monument. People of both royal institutions and the lowest classes of society have roles to play in maintaining and sustaining the religion, and passing it to the next generation. Survival and sustainability of the religious does not exist in the monastery buildings, but in the *mentality* of the believers (V. Lieorungruang, personal communication, December 16, 2006). Most significant heritage buildings are only part of the religion, and not its essence; they deteriorate every single minute and die, like all things (Hanilton, 1995; Panyananta Bhikkhu, n.d.).

One good examples of this 'living' can be found in the ways people think about the fragments of Buddhist statues and ruins of the Chedi (Buddhist Stupa). In Buddhist terms, the notion of heritage and the human life being the same is a notion that possibly can be embedded into Buddhist followers towards the religious heritage. For example, this occurs when people in traditional society find fragments of Buddhist statues, and when believers usually pay attention to 'completeness' by seeking out the missing pieces (i.e. torso, head, hand and decoration pieces) and then trying to reassemble the pieces (Charoenwongsa, 1995; Prasert & Griswold 1992, p. 393, as cited in Peleggi, 2002). Sometimes Buddhist statues still in use from the past have been reassembled from their broken parts. However, a variety of Buddhist statue's pieces have also been 're-completed' by creating a new larger Buddhist statue through collecting all the original pieces of multiple statues and using them (Prasert & Griswold 1992, as cited in Peleggi, 2002), such as bronze pieces being melted together or mortar pieces enlarged by the same material.

There was another case of a Chedi ruin in a religious community where the believers rejected concerns with the 'authenticity' of its architectural aspects and instead preferred to make the Chedi complete again as a living sacred monument (Charoenwongsa, 1995). The 'ko-kuam' ('enlarging' in the northern language) is the re-completing process of the north (Suksawadee, 1996). At present, confrontation between the 're-completing process' and the Venice Charter is

ongoing, along with conflicts concerning the FAD approach and the customs of religious believers. As Buddhist doctrine describes, if believers can give 'birth' to heritage buildings, then deterioration and ruins are 'disease' and 'death'. The death of the monument can also be identified in Buddhist ideology, depending upon the degree of ruin. As the 'death' of a monument is critically related to the degree of physical ruin, if it is unable to be restored, it may become a 'dead monument'. However, the believers can empower and give 'rebirth' by completely renovating it through contemporary techniques and style.

On the other hand, the FAD approach, which is based on the Venice Charter, usually focuses on the 'authenticity' of the site, particularly its physical condition and architectural style, and minimizes any alterations in reference documents. Since traditional belief in conservation is *renovation* (continuity, dynamic, spiritual method, and livelihood) and the Venice Charter is *preservation* (static, scientific method, and dead), then this has become a critical conflict between the traditional religious communities and the FAD approach through time. Possibly, this dilemma commonly occurs because the 'authenticity' concept of the Venice Charter is an unfamiliar and awkward concept for traditional Thai society, particularly in Buddhist monasteries and traditional communities (Jokilehto, 1995; Suksawaddee, 1996).

Conflicts between 'Authenticity' and 'Renewal'

Certainly, Buddhism has many levels for followers, and these levels can be metaphorically seen as comprising a 'pyramid of wisdom' that is obtainable by all classes of people. Depending upon the wisdom levels of the believers, the Buddhism of the local people may differ from that of scholars and philosophers (Suksawaddee, 1996; Tambiah, 1984). Ordinary people prefer to believe in practical rituals, cults and supernatural powers rather than essence, philosophy and logical systems. Like the basic component of most religions, the first step in this approach seems to be the 'faith' of the followers. From the ordinary person's viewpoint, merit-making can be explained as something that the followers should

do in such a way that when a good thing is given, then the good thing will be returned. Getting 'the good thing(s)' might be wealth, good health, a good job, a good partnership, or a path towards a better life in the rebirth (Charoenmuang, 2006). This traditional belief of the Buddhist community affects the local conservation approaches as well, especially in monastery properties. A great deal of merit-making can be practiced at the religious institution through patronage, donation, construction of new infrastructure and facilities, and also through the construction new religious buildings. Like everything that the religion is concerned with, the followers always give their 'best' in offerings, including ideas about restoration, rebuilding, renovation and removal of the religious building. The 'best' of the patrons is very simple; it is something that is new, fresh, invaluable, and complete. This is a reason why the religious believers attempt to sustain the good condition of 'completeness' and 'renewal' of any monastery over time, as reflected in the following statement:

The followers also believe that, what they give in this life-they would get the same in their next life; this is the reason why traditional people prefer to construct a new building rather than restoration (Charoenmuang, 2006, p. 464).

Along with the 'authenticity' aspects, if the Venice Charter focuses on geographic and physical preservation, then it can be also said that the traditional point of view is intended to respect 'authenticity', but in the way of religious custom and ritual that supports the survival of Buddhism. This authenticity is also focused to the intangibles of faith and 'authentic belief' ingrained in the mentality of the followers. Because any religious building can be ruined by nature, it is merely 'a thing' in the universal circle of life, and it can be rebuilt, but religious faith and belief *cannot be rebuilt* in the same way and should be gained through one's best efforts. In the same way, just as religion and most religious buildings can survive through the faith of people, the functions of these sacred buildings and places are can also accumulate and contribute to the faith experiences of the next generation.

Moreover, by using the latest technology and material in renovation and restoration, the 'best' offerings of the religious patrons are also concerned with the 'present functions' of the

sacred place rather than its history and perspective (Suksawaddee, 1996). As with the simple idea of the determination of physical condition of the general buildings, if any (religious) building such as a Vihara, a monk's shelter, or an ordination hall are critically deteriorated and unable to function anymore, then they probably do not need to be preserved. Due to concern for people's safety, most buildings using impermanent materials, like wooden buildings, are removed and rebuilt to renew their function. In the view of followers, the religion always exists in people's minds, not in the physical 'authenticity'. It is likely that these religious beliefs and traditional approaches have contributed to Buddhism's survival over 2,500 years, not the doctrines like those of the FAD and the Venice Charter's roles, which arose relatively recently, in 1960s.

On the other hand, in terms of the national law that empowers the FAD, even though the first act was legislated in 1961, before the Venice Charter (1964), which came four years later, each is similar in attempting 'authenticity' protection. *The Ancient Monument Antiques, Object of Art and National Museum 1961 (amended 1992)*, or so-called 'Monument Act', makes it the role of the FAD to protect historic sites by registration and declaration of prominent and long-surviving historical heritage to be a national 'Ancient Monuments'. This securing of the most historic sites also gives authority to the 'FAD' to punish an 'offender' of the law:

Section 32. Any person who trespasses on an ancient monument, or who damages, destroys, causes depreciation in value to or makes useless any ancient monument, shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years, or to a fine not exceeding seven hundred thousand Baht, or both.

If the offence under Paragraph One is committed against a registered ancient monument, the offender shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years, or to a fine not exceeding one million Baht, or both.

Section 7 bis. No person shall construct any building according to the law on the control of building construction within the compound of ancient monument registered

by the Director-General except permit has been obtained from the Director-General.

Section 10. No person shall repair, modify, alter, demolish, add to, destroy, remove any ancient monument or its parts or excavate for anything or construct any building within the compound of ancient monument, except by order of the Director-General, or permit has been obtained from the Director-General. If the permit contains any conditions, they shall be complied with.

Section 35. Any person who violates section 10 or does not comply with the conditions imposed by the Director-General in the license under section 10, shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years, or to a fine not exceeding three hundred thousand Baht, or both (FAD, 1961, section 7, 10, 32, 35).

In this way, the highest objective of the law is the attempt to secure historic sites from any change by definite penalty. Moreover, any change of the historic site, particularly to that of a registered Ancient Monument, must also require agreement from the 'Director-General' of the FAD. Use of the phrases '*any person*' and '*no person*' are obvious evidence of the FAD's power over the public concern. Paradoxically, compared with the outdated 'Three Seals Law' that has many excessive penalties, even though the Monument Act of FAD is less severe with penalties, following the trends of modern democratic society, the law remains embedded with a sense of 'hegemonic power' of the ruler, similar to the former periods of absolute monarchy. Possibly, the power of ancient law still remains within the contemporary FAD's top-down approach.

Conflicts between 'People' and the 'FAD Approach'

Nowadays, the outlook on heritage conservation tends to focus on integration and an interdisciplinary 'humanization', with a focus on the relationship between 'man and town', and concern for the 'human policy of life and future' as other viable conservation choices (Genovese, 2005). As Genovese (2005) argues, only the balance between public and private actions (each

one developing its own specific role) can guarantee the conservation of the cultural heritage for the benefit of the community.

This argument contributes to the concept of the sustainability of heritage places, which always need people who are concerned with maintaining 'balance between tangible and intangible values' (Genovese, 2005). Relationships with people always require integrative processes. Unfortunately, the FAD approach to conservation employed so far is very different, as the operation is usually based only on the law and physical reinforcement, without concern for people. This concern exists with respect to the FAD Chiang Mai Office as well, which has said, regarding relationships with the people, that "It is such a good choice, but the FAD process is not quite often done in this term; we lack expertise" (S. Nannha, personal communication, November 28, 2006). By way of example, there is the FAD's description of abandoned monastery remains, described as a 'dead monument' which "used to be functioning in the past, but was abandoned by some reason, including with its society and tradition is not concerned with the present. Status ruins or is a remnant from the past rather than present functioning..." (FAD, 1989, pp. 34-35).

In a personal interview with Sahawat Nannha, Director of the FAD Chiang Mai Office 8, on 28 November 2006, he said that, "The way of the FAD in looking at the abandoned monastery case is normal and not a special case. It is always treated in the same approach and regulation of the others." In fact, the cases of abandoned monasteries are more complex, multifaceted and fluctuating than the FAD's description. They have hibernated and are awaiting revival. This characteristic means that they do not exist as a completely 'dead monument' under the definition. The most important factor is that they *could be reawakened*. Certainly not all abandoned monastery remains can be revitalized, as many related factors and timing must be considered. Despite the fact that, for some, it may be impossible to be reawakened, they still remain as sacred places in some way, as the status of a sacred place is always entwined with the needs and concerns the believers.

This practice of sacred place management is similar for other local monuments in Thailand, as the central FAD regularly sets centralized policies and restoration schemes without incorporating

the concerns of local organizations. The FAD's officers have been instructed in and are familiar with the conservation research following the Venice Charter, rather than employing an integrative conservation approach and cooperative management (FAD, 1989). Also, the charter focuses on safeguarding authenticity only in terms of physical reinforcement, and the architectural and characteristic aspects that are considered to be a good *first step* in the management process. But a sustainable approach inevitably requires more people who are concerned with types of ownership, participation, and community integration as the *next steps*. These further steps follow the recommendations of current international approaches such as the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage (2002), Conclusions and Recommendations of the Conference Linking Universal and Local Values, Managing a Sustainable Future for World Heritage Amsterdam, 22-24 May 2003, and The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (January 2008). Despite the fact that the FAD has carried out various roles in the conservation of monuments, it has always lacked a focus on local public benefits (FAD, 1989). Prioritizing only physical reinforcement could be inadequate, and can generate a conservation 'gap' that leads to unsustainable management of heritage through time, particularly in the cases of religious heritage. The lack of participation from local religious, social, and scholarly authorities, which represent the real ownership, produces a critical conflict as an outgrowth of the lack of awareness and participation. Unfortunately, the FAD conservation practices still being carried out only result in a state of a 'good beginning', but cannot reach to the contemporary and relative living needs of both heritage places and the people concerned (Dumrikul, 1986).

Conflicts between 'Qualitative' and 'Quantitative' Preservation

It is clear that the FAD's role, under its legal empowerment, as a practical matter, only focuses on the 'authenticity' of the physical concerns. Periodic reinforcement and restoration usually occur as part of the FAD's core duties. It

is impossible for the numerous heritage sites and the roughly 2,200 registered Ancient Monuments to be looked after by the FAD alone (Akagawa & Tiamsoon, 2005; V. Lieorungruang, personal communication, December 16, 2006). Despite these key elements of the country's heritage being national treasures, the FAD finds it necessary to prioritize the securing of sites by a ranking of the most outstanding and significance values (Ditsakul, 1995, p. 108; FAD, 1989, p. 66). The dependency upon this bureaucratic system generates the problems of restrictions in government funding and delay. Conservation schemes under the national expenditure budgets are also critical, as it can be asserted that a lack of funds is a permanent source of arguments and complaints (Laos PDR (Ministry of Information and Culture) and Chiang Mai University (Fine art Department), 1994). Briefly, it should be noted that long project periods and lack of financial support are the crucial challenges that are inherent in the FAD's conservation practices.

A good example of the 2006 FAD approach, attitude and practice might be observed in the operations of the regional FAD office in Chiang Mai, the so-called FAD Chiang Mai Office 8, which is responsible for the four provinces of the northern region - Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun and Maehongson. Following the FAD approach into Ancient Monuments, there are 165 registered Ancient Monuments in this region (Chiang Mai 95 sites, Chiang Rai 46 sites, Lamphun 18 sites and Maehongson 6 sites) (www.archeological-data.go.th). Excluded from these numbers are numerous historic sites that have still not been registered or surveyed, particularly many abandoned monastery remains in Chiang San of Chiang Rai, and the old city of Lamphun. In the case of the FAD Chiang Mai Office 8, with its extensive number and diversity of sites to manage, the structure of administrative staffing is as follows:

1. Director of the FAD Chiang Mai Office 8
1 position
2. Section of general administration 2
positions
3. Section of archeology 4 positions
4. Section of architectural design and
restoration of historic site 5 positions
5. General officers 8 positions

The FAD Chiang Mai Office 8 does not operate all the processes of conservation practice, but only designates, plans, and controls the improvement of physical condition. Although there are temporary employees and contractors associated with most of the conservation projects, the proportion between FAD officers and registered Ancient Monuments is 1:8.25. A mere 20 officers of the FAD must take into account all the significant heritage sites that are not registered as well, as required in the Second Monument Act 1961 that was amended in 1992. This proportion is obviously inadequate and makes it difficult for operations to proceed in an efficient way. As most Thai historic sites are sacred places (Tangcharoun, 2004), more of the FAD's tasks since 1992 have included sites that have almost been abandoned, yet which are still living heritage sites. The actual number of these sites is unclear, but must be accounted for. Certainly, most of the historic sites will not face immediate destruction at the same moment (except in cases of natural forces), but they all face gradual deterioration; the efforts of the FAD at periodic reinforcement only serve to leave them in a spiraling system of ruin. Along with the policy of prioritizing the significance of the sites, sometimes the degree of ruin results in 'urgent preservation projects', in which steps must be taken for immediate reinforcement while awaiting later supplement budget allocations. Even though the Second Act is intended to secure all significant heritage sites, it is a matter of fact that the FAD has found it impossible to proceed effectively with procedures all meeting the same standard. As the Director of the FAD Chiang Mai Office 8 once noted, "We agreed that the quality of the last year projects is approximately 95% because there were an overwhelming number of conservation projects which [we were] unable to bear" (S. Nannha, personal communication, November 28, 2006).

Along with its scholarly critics, there are many other critics of the FAD role in conservation practice. It is reasonable to mention that inadequate resources of the bureaucratic structure, government funding and time limitations are crucial related factors of these ineffective practices. Because the annual projects of the FAD rely on funding from the national expenditure budgets, results are inevitably measured by the 'quantitative

outcomes'. Limited yearly dispersals of government funds necessitate many projects to, unnecessarily, be finished within the last four months of the project period (W. Bunyasurat, personal communication, January 9, 2007). With project completion regularly being controlled according to this last four months procedure, it is almost impossible to expect high quality in the physical improvement of sites. These weaknesses are frequently critiqued by scholars, who argue in various media that the method of qualitative conservation would be improved by a decrease in the quantity of projects and a refocus on increasing quality. The FAD conservators argue that "the quantity of conserved Ancient Monuments must be in accordance with the yearly master plan, which can guarantee that the government funds were proceeded then not to be returned" (Kanchanakom, 1991, p. 85). The qualitative approach is also difficult to define and evaluate, requiring longer periods of time, skill and devotion; in short, it is seen as the 'hard way'. Effective management and economy, less time and investment always produces more profitability, with the so-called economic approach seen as the 'easy way'. The key point is that the 'hard way' and the 'easy way' represent the important choice faced by the government and the FAD. Even though the economic approach is necessary for management, more quality is needed in terms of the art, cultural heritage, and conservation and safeguarding of heritage monuments in order to find more sustainable practices. Thus, while the FAD achieves 'quantitative outcomes', it is unsuccessful in the role of being a 'good conservator' (Kanchanakom, 1991; W. Bunyasurat, personal communication, January 9, 2007). Unavoidably, the goal of the FAD is 'yearly budget management' that does not lead to success in its role as the 'authenticity protector', following the Venice Charter and its *Regulation on Ancient Monument/Site Conservation 1985*.

Sympathetically, excluding the capacity of the officers and administrators, the FAD's bureaucratic system and the administration structure has always suffered and been criticized for having a lack of personnel and budget (Northern Post, 2003, p. 10). The allocated budget of the Ministry of Culture in the year 2006 was merely 0.03% of all the national expenditure budgets for that year. Moreover, the FAD, which

plays a key role in the Ministry of Culture, gained only 118 million Baht for the whole conservation from which, 'we can carry out the conservation tasks upon our passive capability' (S. Nannha, personal communication, November 28, 2006). For the cases of sacred heritage places, a FAD conservator and administrator argued that most of the problems are due to a lack of budget as well as a lack of understanding on the conservation standards employed by the FAD, other government authorities, and Wat authorities (A. Suwan, personal communication, October 11, 2007; S. Nannha, personal communication, November 28, 2006.) The problematic budget makes it mostly impossible to create a sustainable future for historic sites through the FAD's legitimate role alone, especially in the case of abandoned monastery remains that will always be regarded as being of less significance. In the face of dependence on the fluctuating state of current economic issues, the bureaucratic system practically acts as a large national firm that inevitably falls into using an economic approach. The basic principles of that management approach currently employed could be simplified by stating that any government authority producing less, in terms of social and economic profitability, will find it difficult to have more financial support approved or promoted because 'any investment of cultural heritage conservation is wasting and lost' (FAD, 1989, p. 11).

The Venice Charter comprises international guidance about conservation, restoration, historic sites, excavation and publication that is intended to secure the 'authenticity' of only the physical aspects of these sites; unfortunately, it seems to be outdated, biased, and 'criticized for being too 'Eurocentric' with respect to current preservation practices (Droste & Bertilsson, 1995, p. 14). The FAD shares these basic principles, and they are reflected in the comments of an FAD administrator who remarked that, "We should believe in authenticity" (S. Nannha, personal communication, November 28, 2006). Moreover this 'authenticity' influence can be seen in the *Regulation on Ancient Monument/Site Conservation 1985*, which arose from and was adapted and based on the Venice Charter (1964) (Akagawa & Tiamsoon, 2005; A. Suwan, personal communication, October 11, 2007).

The concern with safeguarding 'authenticity' found in the Venice Charter focuses on physical condition in preservation and reinforcement, but lacks interdisciplinary cooperation, spiritual value, and local community participation. Most remaining historic sites in Thailand are sacred and religious places (Tangcharoun, 2004), so they need to maintain the intangible 'sacredness' and spiritual aspects of the ordinary people rather than being only concerned with physical maintenance or rehabilitation. Fortunately, the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) is a critical element in progress toward the safeguarding of heritage; it more strongly emphasizes the 'specific nature and need' of the sites, saying that "Heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong." This approach is also incorporated in the statements of the 16th ICOMOS General Assembly, held from September 29th to October 4th 2008 in Quebec, which focus on the 'genius loci' or the 'spirit of place' as the main theme. Possibly, with the sustainable approach, there is no need to choose only between the Venice Charter or traditional Buddhist approach; perhaps both can be united. Perhaps in the near future it will be possible to encourage local awareness, rather than asking the local residents to only take on subsidiary roles of contractors under the planning, control and approval of the FAD (Laos PDR and Chiang Mai University, 1994).

CONCLUSION

In 2021, fifteen years after the adoption of the 2006 procedures of the Fine Arts Department (FAD), the approach of the FAD Chiang Mai Office 8 (now is the FAD Chiang Mai Office 7 operates on 8 provinces; Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Maehongson, Nan, Phayao, Phrae, and Lampang), is still so far different than it should be that it might be said to be in opposition to local religious communities. In fact, most conflicts between the Venice Charter and Buddhist doctrine, including this conflict between religious faith and the FAD approach, are very simple. They are all concerned with the problematic root of instilling *different goals* into the heritage site. Because the FAD and the

Venice Charter set the target as being only the authenticity of its physical condition, this target satisfies only the first state of sustainable management. It is the Buddhist doctrine and traditional believers who pay attention to the survival of the religion by periodic renewal. It is a matter of fact that with these opposing forces, reach a consensus becomes impossible. This matrix is a causing divergence in the preservation of religious and sacred places, which depend upon *different criteria* for evaluating the heritage *significance* (Suksawaddee, 1996). FAD practices at sacred places create the dilemma of significant conflict between 'modern' and 'traditional' conservation approaches that may be more critical than it is at other heritage monuments. The dilemma of the conflict between the FAD's 'conservator' function and the traditional 'restorer' function is also reflected in the situation where the local artisans of Thai architecture can become *suitably adjusted* to local architectural techniques and sometimes use the same original materials without differentiation to historical period (Laos PDR (Ministry of Information and Culture) and Chiang Mai University (Fine art Department), 1994, p. 107; Suksawaddee, 1996). Certainly, if the local artisan approach cannot meet approval with the Venice Charter in terms of authentic preservation, possibly the 'best' or most appropriate conservation methods and management for the Thai social context can be united in the future.

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