

Chapter 3

Background of *Wat Phra Kaeo*

3.1. *Wat Phra Kaeo*: Name and Location

3.1.1. Name

Wat Phra Kaeo , formally called *Wat Phra Sriratana Sasadaram*, literally means the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. This name comes from the Buddha image enshrined within. The image, carved from a solid piece of jade, measuring 66cm high including the base and 48.3cm wide at the widest point, is popularly called *Phra Kaeo* or the Emerald Buddha because of its colour. It is said that it is the most venerated Buddha image in Thailand. There is a story telling that this Buddha image was moved to different places in Thailand.

(Starting in Chieng Rai) ... in the year AD 1434 when a Buddha statue covered with stucco was found there inside a *chedi* which had been struck by lightning. The image was subsequently transferred to the residence of the temple's abbot who one day discovered that some of the stucco had flaked off. Underneath was hidden a green image. The stucco was duly removed and thus the Emerald Buddha was revealed. (Narula 1994: 6)

Hearing of the find, King Samfangkaen, King of Chieng Mai which had suzerainty over Chieng Rai, ordered that the image be brought to Chieng Mai. However the elephant bearing the Emerald Buddha repeatedly turned off towards Lampang and thus the king allowed the statue to remain in Lampang.

Later in 1468 in the reign King Tilokaraj of Chieng Mai, the image was finally brought to Chieng Mai. In 1564 King Chaichettha fled the Burmese down to Vientiane taking the

Emerald Buddha with him. The image was to remain there for 214 years until in 1778, Phraya Chakri, as a general in the army of King Taksin, captured Vientiane and brought the Emerald Buddha back to Thailand. It was first installed in Thonburi in a pavilion next to the Ubosot of Wat Arun, and later was moved to the temple of the Emerald Buddha on 22 March 1784. (Suksri 1998 : 50)

The chronicle of the Emerald Buddha is written in the style of a myth rather than the language of historical documents. However the myth of the image of the Emerald Buddha tells us that the image had travelled greatly and was tranfered from place to place long before being enshrined in *Wat Phra Kaeo* in Bangkok. Narula says;

The chronicle embodies a belief. And it is belief, as faith, which forms the backbone of religion. (Narula 1994: 7)

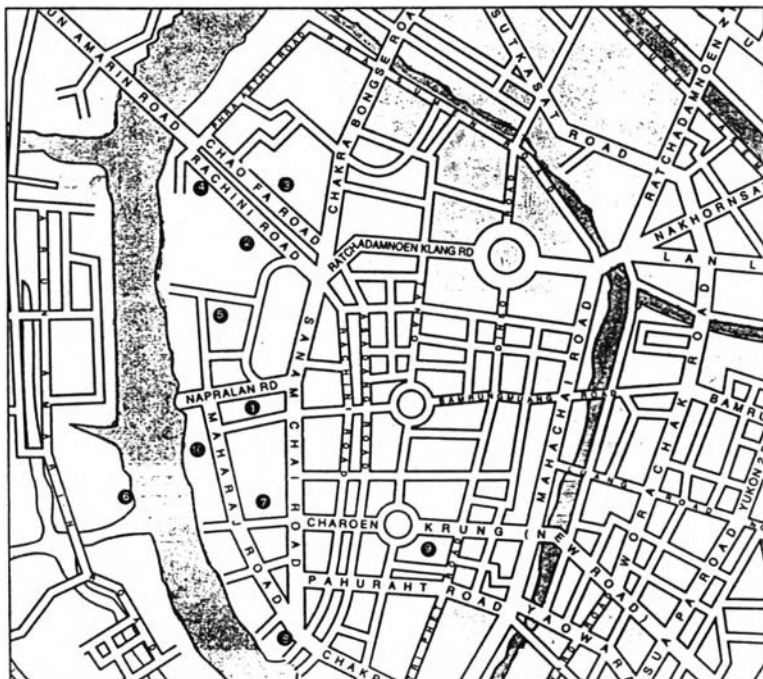
The Emerald Buddha embodies Thai beliefs, and *Wat Phra Kaeo* which enshrines the *Phra Kaeo* should form the backbone of Thai religion.

3.1.2. Location

The Temple of the Emerald Buddha is located within the Grand Palace compound as the Royal Chapel. It has no resident monks. The Grand Palace itself is situated in the west of Bangkok on Chao Phraya River bank facing north. It is on a triangular piece of land between *Wat Pho* and *Wat Mahathat* with the river to the west and a road to the east (see Plan 1). The site was originally occupied by a Chinese community whom King Rama I had transferred to an area outside, and to the south of the city walls. The area is known today as Chinatown. The Temple complex is situated in the north-east corner of the Grand Palace compound (see Plan 2). It is surrounded by many hundreds of metres

of cloister walls covered with mural paintings on all four sides; these separate it from the other royal areas. Within the complex are many buildings of religious importance and diverse purposes, differing in style and with numerous sculptures (see Plan 3).

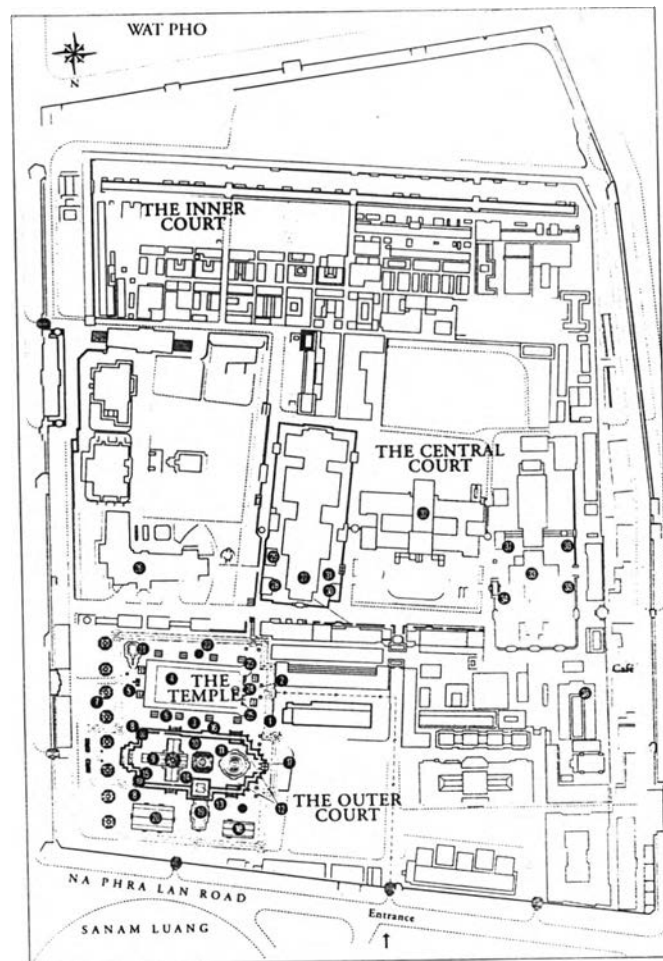
(Plan 1) The Area around the Grand Palace.



1 Grand Palace, 2 National Museum, 3 National Gallery, 4 National Theatre, 5 Wat Mahathat, 6 Wat Arun, 7 Wat Pho, 8 Flower Market, 9 Chinatown, 10 Boat pier to Wat Arun

Source: Suksri "The Grand Palace" 1998, Bangkok: River Books Guide

(Plan 2) The Grand Palace.

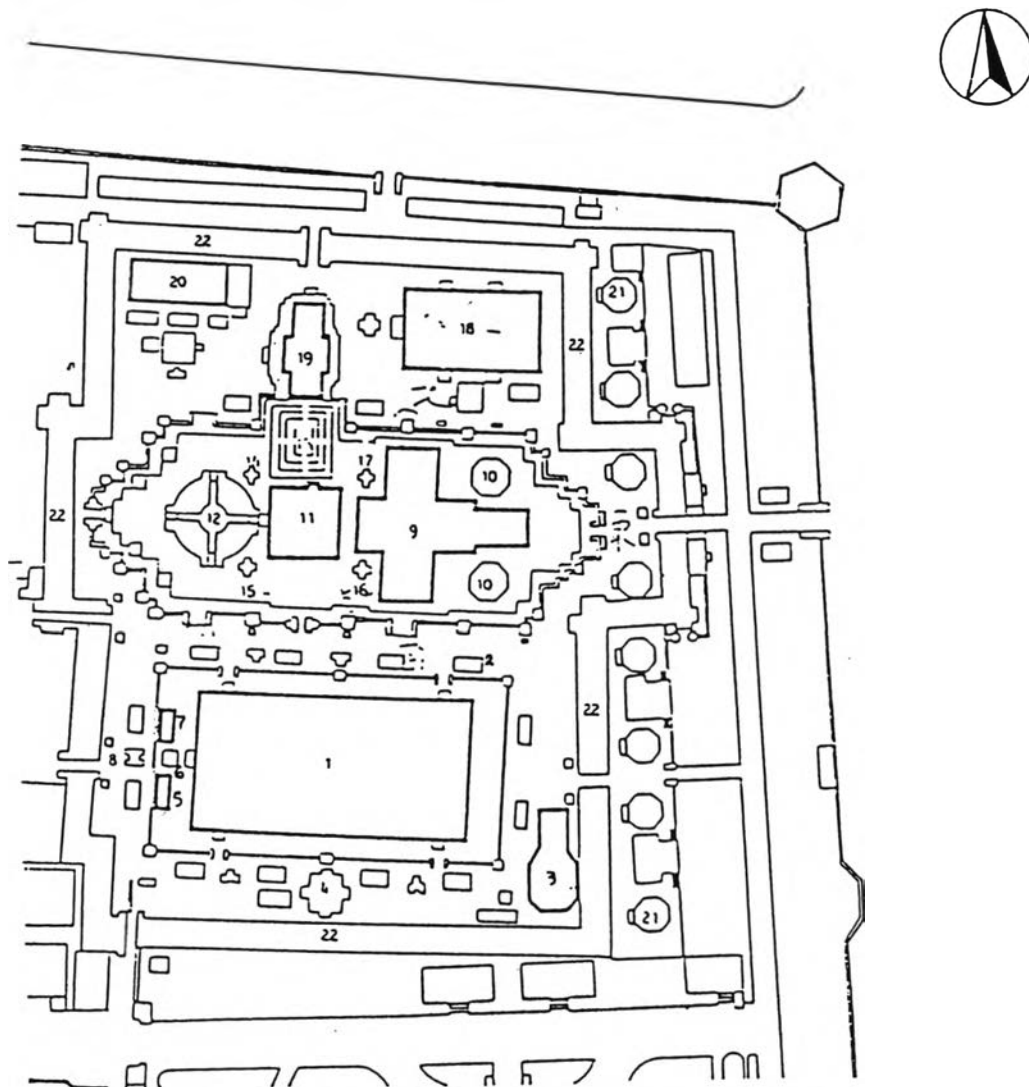


Source: Suksri "The Grand Palace" 1998, Bangkok: River Books Guide

Note: The Temple's architectures (①~②⑤) are mentioned on the next page.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ②⑥ Phra Thinang Boromphiman | ③⑩ Phra Thinang Dusit Maha Prasat |
| ②⑦ Phra Thinang Amarin Winichai | ③⑪ Phra Thinang Aporn Phimok Prasat |
| ②⑧ Ho Sastrakhom | ③⑫ Ho Plueng Krueng |
| ②⑨ Phra Thinang Racharuedee | ③⑬ Mount Kailasa |
| ③④ Dusidaphirom Pavilion | ③⑭ Phra Thinang Rachakaranya Sapha |
| ③⑤ Sanam Chan Pavilion | ③⑮ Emerald Buddha Temple Museum |
| ③⑯ Phra Thinang Chakri Maha Prasat | |

(Plan 3) The Temple of the Emerald Buddha.



Source: Diskul "History of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha"

Bangkok: The Bureau of the Royal Household.

1. The Ubosot, 2. Twelve small open pavillions, 3. Viharn of the Gandara Buddha
4. Belfry, 5. Ho Rachapongsanusorn, 6. Phra Pothithat Piman, 7. Ho Rachakaramanusorn
8. Figure of a seated hermit, 9. The Royal Pantheon, 10. Two gilt stupa,
11. Phra Mondop (The Library), 12. Phra Si Ratana Chedi, 13. Model of Angkor Wat,
14. Monument of King Rama I~III, 15. Monument of King RamaIV, 16. Monument of King RamaV,
17. Monument of King RamaVI~IX, 18. Ho Phra Monthien Tham(The Supplementary Library), 19. Viharn Yod, 20. Viharn Phra Nak, 21. eight prang,
22. galleries



3.2. A Short History of *Wat Phra Kaeo*

When King Rama I established the city of Bangkok as his capital in 1782 A.D., he followed the tradition of constructing a Buddhist temple in the precincts of the Royal Palace as was the case since the Sukhothai period. The King had the Temple of the Emerald Buddha constructed in the eastern section of the Royal Palace in order to enshrine the Emerald Buddha as the palladium of the Thai Kingdom.

The present Chakri Dynasty is also called the Bangkok or Rattanakosin Dynasty. The word "Rattanakosin" refers to "great gem" or "Lord Indra's gem". According to the legend, "great gem" or "Lord Indra's gem" implies the Emerald Buddha itself. The fact that King Rama I named his new Dynasty 'Ratanakosin' tells us how much the Emerald Buddha meant to his new Dynasty and how important the Temple was for him. Below is the legend (Narula 1994: 7-8):

He ⁽⁴⁾ was aided by the Aryan god of thunder and battle, Lord Indra, who, together with the celestial architect Visukamma, went to procure a certain precious stone from under the guard of a thousand genii on Mount Vipulla. The genii were reluctant to part with that particular stone as it belonged to the Universal Monarch. They proposed in its place a magnificent green gem, 'four times the size of the fist and three fingers in width, and almost one cubit one hand in length'. Once in possession of the jewel. Nagasena wondered who would carve the image. Visukamma came to his aid in the guise of a sculptor. Taking the precious stone away, he went to the realm of angels where celestial beings carved it in seven days and seven nights. Under Indra's order, Visukamma returned to earth, carrying the image upon his shoulder; Nagasena was overjoyed by the figure of the Buddha.

On the night of its consecration, the moon was full. Under its rays, the statue was given the title of Phra Kaeo Amarkata Sing Dieo, or the Unique Emerald Buddha. Nagasena then brought out a golden vessel containing seven relics of the Buddha and made an invocation: 'May these relics go into this Buddha if for the blessing of all men and angels, his image is to last as long as five thousand years.' The relics then entered the statue, and Nagasena continued: 'This image of the Buddha is assuredly going to give religion the most brilliant importance in five lands...'

As Nagasena predicted, Buddhism did indeed spread to countries beyond the borders of India, and Theravada Buddhism, in particular, to Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. Close to the heart of people the Emerald Buddha had travelled extensively through those countries until it was placed in its present site. According to the history of the Emerald Buddha, in 1778 during the Thonburi period, when King Rama I was still a general, he captured Vientiane, where the Emerald Buddha had resided for 214 years, and brought it back to Thailand. It was first placed in Thonburi in a pavilion next to the *ubosot* of Wat Arun. However, when Rama I became the first King of the Chakri Dynasty, he had *Wat Phra Kaeo* constructed within the Grand Palace and enshrined the Emerald Buddha in it as the palladium of Thailand.

The construction of the Temple took two years to finish. Since then development and renovations to the Temple have continued for over two centuries throughout the nine reigns of the Chakri Dynasty. It is possible to say that successive Kings have contributed to the development of the Temple for the purpose of gaining merit, to honor the Buddhist faith and to pay respect to the Emerald Buddha as well.

For Thai Buddhists, including Kings, building a temple and repairing a *wat* are thought to have great meaning. Kaufman ⁽⁵⁾ and Tambiah did a study on

this. They asked Thai adults to rank the Buddhist activities that are perceived to gain the most merit. According to Kaufman, building a temple or contributing enough money for the construction of a temple came in second only to becoming a monk as having the most merit. Tambiah did a similar exercise and found that contributing the money to build a temple is the most meritorious act for Thai Buddhists.

The temples are important in Thailand and *Wat Phra Kaeo* is the most important Royal and National Buddhist temple for all Thais. Huge amounts of physical and financial aid have been collected from the Buddhist public from all over the country to build and repair *Wat Phra Kaeo*. It has also resulted in a huge amount of merit for the Buddhist public.

Below is the history of renovations to the Temple. It can be said that it is a history of Buddhist faith made by the Chakri Kings as well as Thai Buddhists.

(Table 1): The Renovation History of the Temple

Year	Reign	History (restoration/change/addition)	☆
1782	King Rama I	• The original structure of <i>Wat Phra Kaeo</i> was constructed by King Rama I between 1782 and 1785.	
1809		• The <i>ubosot</i> was the first building to be constructed. • King Rama I had two seasonal costumes made for the Emerald Buddha, one for summer and one for rainy season.	1
1824	King Rama III	• <i>Wat Phra Kaeo</i> was extensively restored for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Bangkok in 1832.	
1851		• The superstructure of the <i>ubosot</i> was restored and changed as follows. (Changed) * Exterior walls: gold on red lacquer → as appears today/	1

		gilt-stucco decorated with colored glass	
		* mural paintings: <u>on the upper part of the lateral walls</u>	
		inside the assembly of the celestial beings who came to the Emerald Buddha → the life of the Buddha	
1824	King	<u>on the walls between the windows</u>	
	Rama III	the life of the Buddha →	
1851		the various scenes from the <i>jartaka</i>	
		(Added)	
		* mural paintings: <u>on the lower part of the northern wall</u>	
		inside a royal procession on land	
		<u>on the lower part of the southern wall</u>	
		a royal procession in water	
		* a winter costume for the Emerald Buddha	
		* 112 figures of Garuda holding Naga around the base	
		* An intermediary base to the throne of the Emerald Buddha	
		* 2 large standing crowned Buddha images dedicated to Rama I and Rama II	
		• The superstructure of the Temple complex was restored and changed as follows.	
		(Added)	
		* Viharn Yod (in the place of White Viharn)	19
		* Viharn Phra Nak (in the place of Ho Phra Nak and Ho Phra Thep Bidorn)	20
		* Figure of a seated hermit	8
		* small artificial stone hill/ stone seats/ flower pots/	
		* paths/ Chinese stone sculptures	
		* 8 demon gate-guardians	
		(Restored)	
		* Phra Mondop (The Library)	11

		* Ho Phra Monthien Tham (The Supplementary Library)	18
		* small open pavilions around the <i>ubosot</i>	2
		* two golden stupa	10
		* eight <i>prang</i> (towers)	21
		* belfry	4
1851	King RamaIV	• The superstructure of the Temple complex was restored and changed.	
1868		(Added)	
		* Royal Pantheon	9
		* two gilt stupa (in the place of the former by King RamaI)	10
		* Phra Si Natana Chedi	12
		* model of Angkor Wat (started during this reign and finished in the reign of King RamaV)	
		* new belfry (on the site of original one)	4
		* Phra Pothithat Piman (to house an old bronze prang)	6
		* Ho Rachakaramanusorn (to house 34 small Buddha images dedicated to Ayudhya and Thonburi)	7
		* Ho Rachapongsanusorn (to house 8 small Buddha images dedicated to Chakri kings)	5
		(Restored)	
		* Phra Mondop (The Library)	11
		* Galleries (started repainting of Ramakien story during this reign but finished in the next reign)	22
		• The <i>ubosot</i> was extensively restored.	1
		(Restored)	
		* roof/ floor/ window	
		* mural paintings on the lateral walls	
		* glazed terracotta tiles around the base	
1868	King	• The Temple was completely renovated to celebrate Bangkok's	

	Rama V	centenary anniversary in 1882.	
1910		(Added)	
		* gilt bronze figures of mythical beings on the terrace around the Royal Pantheon.	9
		* golden mosaic to the entire Phra Si Ratana Chedi	12
		* poems concerning <i>Ramakien</i> story on gallery pillars opposite paintings of the same episode or on the walls near the paintings	22
		* demon and monkey caryatides to support the two gilt stupa in front of the Royal Pantheon	9
		* two large pairs of demon-guardians at the gates	
		* monument of Kings Rama I, II, III	14
		* monument of Kings Rama IV	15
		* monument of Kings Rama V	16
		* Some foreign objects acquired by the King from various other countries were arranged in the Temple as offerings to the Emerald Buddha.	
1910	King	• The Temple had minor changes and repairs.	
	Rama VI	(Changed)	
1925		* Royal Pantheon (empty) → Royal Pantheon of the Chakri Dynasty	9
		* two gilt stupa moved to the present site	10
		* steps of the six staircases of the <i>ubosot</i> lowered	1
		* the stone seat of King Ram Khamhaeng the Great moved to Dusit Pavillion	
		(Added)	
		* four grand marble staircases to the Phra Si Ratana Chedi	12
1925	King	• Bangkok celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1932 and	
	Rama VII	<i>Wat Phra Kaeo</i> was totally restored again.	
1935		(Restored)	

1946	King Rama IX	* the paintings of <i>Ramakien</i> along the galleries were completely repainted.	22
		(Changed)	
		* the stone seat of King Ram Khamhaeng the Great → Ananta Samakhom Audience Hall → Viharn Yod	19
		• During the present reign, that of King Rama IX, Bangkok celebrated its bicentenary in 1982. Every building in <i>Wat Phra Kaeo</i> was restored in detail under the chairmanship of the committee for the Restoration of <i>Wat Phra Kaeo</i> , H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.	
		(Restored)	
		* golden throne of the Emerald Buddha	1
		* Buddha images in the <i>ubosot</i>	
		* the paintings of <i>Ramakien</i> along the galleries	22
		(Changed)	
		* the stone seat of King Ram Khamhaeng the Great → museum	
		(Added)	
		* Monument of Kings Rama VI, VII, VIII, IX	17

Source: Diskul "History of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha"

Bangkok: The Bureau of the Royal Household.

☆ See Plan 3 on page 25

3.3. The status of *Wat Phra Kaeo*

Warren (1988: 222) states that "Of all Thailand's 27,000 wats, ... none contains such a magnificent display of traditional Thai art, nor does any house an image as greatly venerated as the Emerald Buddha." Other books view *Wat Phra Kaeo* as the temple which enshrines the Emerald Buddha and as the most sacred temple which has the highest status in Thailand, particularly for the Royal Family. Below are the statements from the books covering the views and opinions on *Wat Phra Kaeo*.

(Table 2) Reputations of *Wat Phra Kaeo*

<u>Title/ Author</u>	
<p data-bbox="210 1123 446 1221"><u>The Grand Palace</u> William Warren</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="473 1123 1376 1543">• <i>Wat Phra Siratana Sasadarden</i>, more popularly known as <i>Wat Phra Kaeo</i>, is certainly a most precious jewel. Of all Thailand's 27,000 wats, or <u>Buddhist temple complexes</u>, none contains such a magnificent display of <u>traditional Thai art</u>, nor does any house an image as greatly venerated as <u>the Emerald Buddha</u>, regarded as the palladium of the Thai kingdom for over two centuries. <li data-bbox="473 1574 1376 1743">• As <u>the pre-eminent Buddhist temple</u> in Thailand, <i>Wat Phra Kaeo</i> is the most fantastic and the one most treasured by Thai's for <u>its cultural and historical wealth</u>. <li data-bbox="473 1774 1376 1995">• During its 200-year history, <i>Wat Phra Kaeo</i> has undergone a major restoration roughly over fifty years. The work being sponsored by <u>the reigning monarch of the time</u> with donations made by <u>devout Buddhists from all over the kingdom</u>.

- History of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha
M. C. Subhadradis Diskul
- The tradition of constructing a Buddhist temple in the precincts of the Royal Palace has existed in Thailand since the Sukhothai period (1240-C. 1438 AD). When King Rama I (1782-1809) of Bangkok established the city of Bangkok, or Ratanakosin, as his capital in 1782 AD, he had the temple of the Emerald Buddha constructed in the eastern section of the Royal Palace.....
- Guide to the Grand Palace
distributed by the temple
- Just north of the Royal Residence of the Mahamontien from which there is a connecting gate lies the ground of the Chapel Royal of the Emerald Buddha. It consists of all architectural features of a monastery without however residential quarters, for monks who do not live here. The assembly hall, or Ubosot, serves as the monarch's private chapel.
- The Grand Palace
River Books
Guide
- To enter the *Ubosot* the visitor must pass through two walls. These separate the building from the rest of the compound, thereby emphasizing its sacred nature. The wall is topped by double sema stones covered with gold leaf. Such stones traditionally designate a Buddhist building where the ordination of monks may be carried out.
- History of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha
Foreword by
H. R. H. Princess
Maha Chakri
Sirindorn
- The Temple of the Emerald Buddha is both a sacred structure and the repository of the spirit of the entire Thai people. Not only is it a site where royal ceremonies are performed nearly the whole year round, but it is also a place to which the people repair for many purposes: to listen sermons on Buddhist holy days and Sundays, to venerate the Emerald Buddha for auspicious benefits, to engage in meditation in order to develop a peaceful mind, to admire the beauty of the

temple, or to study for themselves many aspects of art, etc.

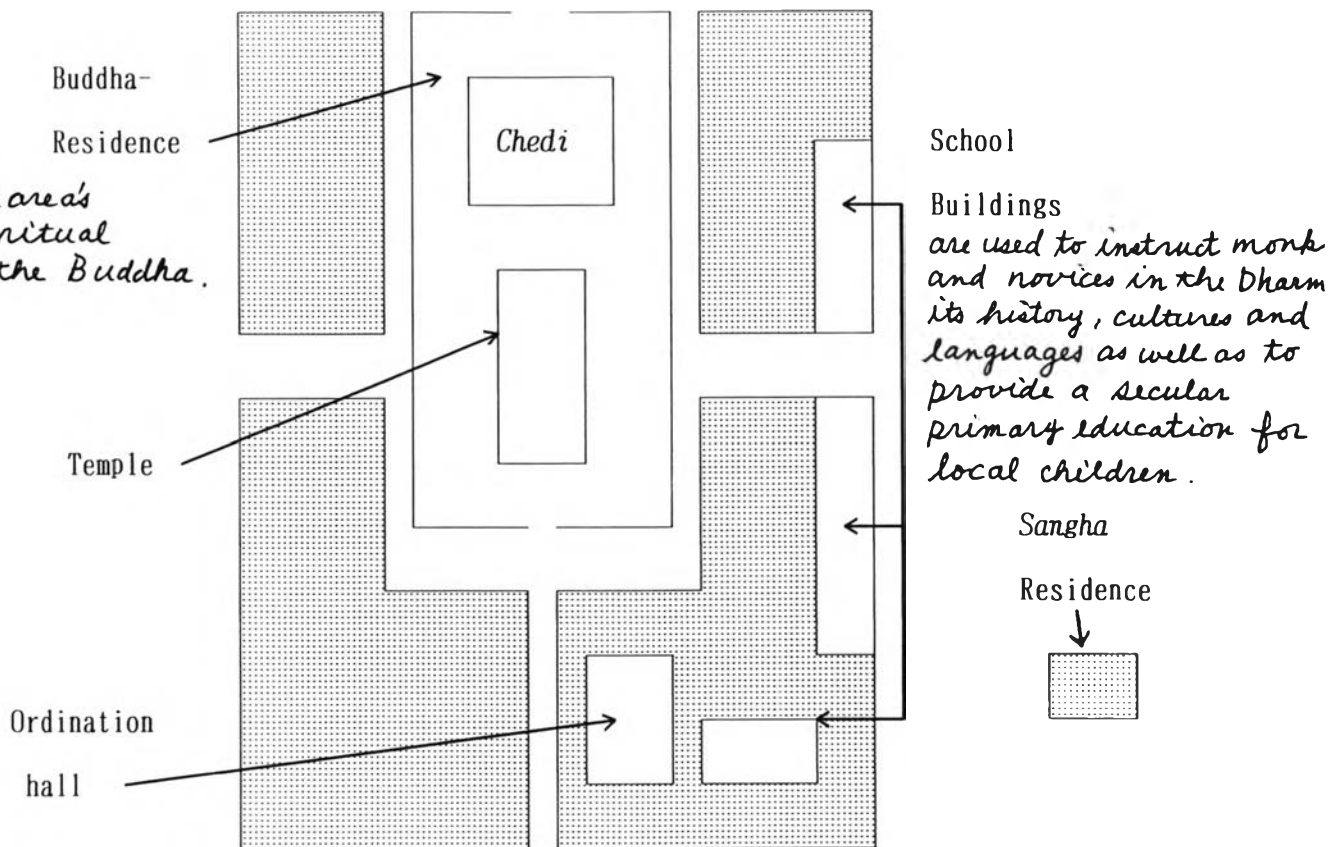
Apart from the Thai people, many foreigners also come often to visit the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

Given the above statements, it can be said that *Wat Phra Kaeo* has four facets. Firstly, as a Buddhist temple, secondly, as a highest standing Royal Temple, thirdly, as a National temple for the entire Thai people, and finally, as a National heritage of Thai art.

3.3.1. The status as a Buddhist temple

"Wat" in Thai is usually translated as "temple" in English. Although "temple" is the closest word, it does not really convey the full meaning of the word "*wat*" as used in Thailand.

Swearer ⁽⁶⁾ (1976) described a model of a *wat* in a rural area. According to him, the ideal monastic complex has two separate areas. One is reserved for the *Sangha*, including living quarters and buildings for its own esoteric ritual and its educational endeavors. The other is devoted to the Buddha, containing the *chedi* and several temples where the majority of the *wat*'s exoteric ceremonies and rituals occur, uniting monks and laity. The ground plan of these two areas is presented in Figure 3.

(Figure 3) Ground Plan on a Thai Wat described by Swearer ⁽⁶⁾

Source: Richard H. Robinson/ Willard L. Johnson
 "The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction"
 1982 California: Wadsworth Publishing Company

The Sangha areas surround and orient themselves toward the Buddha residence area, which faces east. At the symbolic center of the entire establishment stands the chedi which should contain a Buddha relic. The Buddha area's purpose is ritual service to the Buddha, made present in the chedi's symbolism and honored in the temple's activities. The temple enshrines Buddha images, to which offerings of candles, flowers and incense may be made before the ceremonies that regularly unite monks and laity. The Sangha-residence area houses the monks' dormitories, school buildings, kitchen, bell tower, library, storage areas, a

bodhi tree, and most importantly, an ordination hall, a holy corporate center. These are essential to the Sangha's livelihood and mission. (Robinson 1982: 122)

As mentioned above, *wat* or Thai temple is not simply a place of religious activities, but it is more than that. It functions not only as a religious center, but also as a monastery, a community center, an education center, and so on. In this sense, it can be said that *wat* is the religious and social institution that unite monks and laity and also link the people in the community together.

In case of *Wat Phra Kaeo*, unlike other *wats*, there are no residential quarters for monks, but it consists of all the architectural features like other *wats*. *Wat Phra Kaeo* contains specific Thai Buddhist temple structures such as *ubosot* and *chedi*. Every *wan phra* (Buddhist day), monks from other *wats* are invited to give sermons at *Wat Phra Kaeo* to the Buddhist public. Even though *Wat Phra Kaeo* does not belong to a specific community and does not function as a community center, it belongs symbolically to every Thai Buddhist ranging from the King to villagers. In this respect, it unites monks, the King, laity and the nation. It can then be seen as fulfilling the same functions as religious and social institutions in other *wats*.

3.3.2. The status as a Royal temple

Unlike other *wats*, many Royal ceremonies are performed nearly the whole year round in *Wat Phra Kaeo*. For example, the ceremony of changing the costume of the Emerald Buddha. It is performed by the King and is an evidence that it has the highest status among the Royal temples.

In addition, the history of *Wat Phra Kaeo* also tells of its highest Royal status as seen in Table 1. Through the renovation history of the Temple one can see how devoted the successive Kings were to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Starting with Rama I, the founder of the Chakri Dynasty and continuing up to

the present reign of His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej. There is no other *wat* like *Wat Phra Kaeo* in this respect.

It is interesting to note that one can see the identification of the Chakri Kings and the most sacred Emerald Buddha, in other words identifying the King's power with the Emerald Buddha's sacred power. Concerning this point Reynolds shows his interesting view.

Having considered the way in which the symbolism of the Holy Emerald Jewel (the Emerald Buddha) was both extended and given a specifically Buddhist and even more specially Theravadin form through various associations which connected it with Indra, the Buddha-Chakkavatti and Mahavessantara, we may now turn our attention to the last of the four associations which have widely affirmed in the course of its history, that which relates it to the figure of Rama. There is no reason to believe that this relationship was affirmed during the earlier periods of the Jewel's history, but its importance during the Bangkok era is demonstrated by the fact that in the Chapel of the Holy Emerald Jewel in Bangkok the galleries which surround the Jewel are literally covered with murals depicting scenes from the *Ramakien* in which Rama is the great hero. (Reynolds 1978: 184-185)

In the identification that Reynolds suggests between the Chakri Kings and the Emerald Buddha one can see an important role that the Emerald Buddha has played in legitimatizing the status of the Thai Kings. It can be said that the Emerald Buddha is the legitimatizing symbol for the Chakri Dynasty. One can find rich meanings in this symbolism of the Emerald Buddha.

... the Chakri dynasty chose to identify itself with the figure of Rama. When this crucial element in the situation is taken into account, it becomes self-evident that the very vivid and very public portrayal of the connection

between the Jewel and Rama is meant to convey to the people of the Bangkok kingdom the identity between the religious merit and sovereign power of the jewel and the religious merit and sovereign power of the reigning dynasty founded by King Rama I and presently represented by his lineal descendant, King Rama IX. (Reynolds 1978: 185)

This extended relationship between the religious merit and the sovereign power of the Emerald Buddha and the religious merit and sovereign power of the Chakri Kings lead us to understand how important the role of *Wat Phra Kaeo* plays in legitimatizing the Thai Kingship and why *Wat Phra Kaeo* is ranked the highest status among all the Royal temples.

3.3.3. The status as a National temple

There is a word "pilgrimage", which means the act of journeying to scared places for devotional purposes. In Theravada Buddhist countries, the holy temples can be the destinations of pilgrimage. *Wat Phra Kaeo* is the most famous pilgrimage place for Thai Buddhists.

According to Pruess (1974), the sacred places which attract pilgrims are identified with various kinds of meaningful entities: persons, events, topographical features, images, or other symbols associated with religious tradition. For Theravada Buddhism such entities are reminders of the Buddha. He also gives us the list of the most popular twenty-five Buddhist pilgrimage centers ⁽⁷⁾ in Thailand, one of which is *Wat Phra Kaeo*. This shows that it has a status of National temple. It does not belong to any specific community but attracts all Thai people from all over the country as a pilgrimage center. *Wat Phra Kaeo* has a status of National temple in respect of pilgrimage centers.

3.3.4. The status as a National heritage

Apart from Thai Buddhists, many foreigners or non-Buddhists also come to visit *Wat Phra Kaeo*. In most cases they visit *Wat Phra Kaeo* in order to admire the beauty of the Temple or to study aspects of Thai art. The Temple displays a magnificent traditional Thai art and it is a veritable textbook of architectural and decorative forms reflecting centuries of artistic traditions.

Describing his first impression of Thai temple structures Somerset Maugham once wrote ⁽⁸⁾ ;

They are unlike anything in the world, so that you are taken aback, and you cannot fit them into the scheme of the things you know. It makes you laugh with delight that anything so fantastic could exist on this somber earth. They are gorgeous; they glitter with gold and whitewash, yet are not garish; against that vivid sky, in that dazzling sunlight, they hold their own, defying the brilliancy of nature and supplementing it with the playful boldness of man.

Like Somerset Maugham everyone who visits *Wat Phra Kaeo* must surely be impressed by its fantastic Thai art and architecture. They must also realize the status of the Temple as a National heritage treasured for its magnificent Thai art.