

The Replication Theory: a New Approach to Buddha Image Iconography

Introduction

In the past, to classify Buddha images, art historians in Thailand usually relied on the similarity in forms of Buddha images and their evolution as criteria and framework for the study of Buddha image iconography. Classification and evolution of Sukhothai Buddha images are most studied by art historians(pl.1). These art historians include H.R.H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1926,p. 110 - 111) who classified Sukhothai Buddha images into 3 categories according to facial characteristics, Luang Boriban Buriphan and Alexander B. Griswold (1952, p. 32 - 35) who classified Sukhothai Buddha images into 5 schools of arts according to the common characteristics of the Buddha. However, Alexander B. Griswold (1953, p.16 - 34) later turned to rely on the western theory of art evolution in classifying Sukhothai Buddha images. Thailand's important sculptor Khian Yimsiri (1957, p. 81 - 84) integrated 2 conceptions: Luang Boriban Buriphan's classification based on school of art and Griswold's then reordered the conception and provided an explanation following Griswold's guidelines (Soomjinda 2005, p.10)

Problems of Relying on Western Art Perception in Studying Thailand's Buddha Image Iconography

The above approach is widely accepted and it seems to be practical. That is, when we find a Buddha image with characteristics that are similar to those of Buddha images within a category, such Buddha image will then be included in the established category having the period prescribed for each category. This uncomplicated approach has then become part of the study of Buddha image iconography and has been regarded as Thai knowledge. However, careful consideration shows that such classification is a western approach and perception which is very different from philosophy and beliefs applied in the Thai study of Buddha arts.

Western study of arts mainly relies on style as it is believed that style is like a person with unique character. The creation of arts thus reflects the character of each artist. An aggregation of artists under common tradition or cultural framework with common characteristics of works of art is called a school of art. Then, there is a classification of work of art to show difference among schools of art. Western classification of work of art is, in addition, aimed at classifying objects created by human according to period. This is because works of art sharing common characteristics reflect social

factors that cause such similarity. A change to these factors is a change to the work of art. The variation among schools of art reflects contemporary taste. Distinguishing features of each school of art therefore represent a period or an epoch (Krairiksh 1990, p.36 - 38).

Fundamental of Replication Theory

Unlike western art conception, the making of Buddha images in the perception of Buddhists, particularly in Thailand is not the creation of work that focuses on the representation of individualism of artists and the expression of novelty. In the western world, the creation of work of art aims at expressing the individualism of the artist so those who appreciate such work of art knows who has created it. On the contrary, Buddha images are made in commemoration of the Buddha, and sometimes as a concrete expression of the abstract principles of Buddhist philosophy. If a Buddha image is made arbitrarily, the work will not convey the meaning of Buddhist philosophy (Krairiksh 1999, p. 10 - 43). The similarity or difference among Buddha images is not caused by taste of artists from each period from different social and cultural settings thus leading to representation of taste, period by each school of art according to the western conception. Different characteristics of Buddha image, however, come from the intention of Buddhists to replicate characteristics of their revered Buddha images and to best uphold the importance and reverence of the original Buddha image. (Krairiksh 2002, p. 52)

Phra Patima Buddha Image made of sandalwood is an example of how a Buddha image is a replication of important and revered Buddha images. Legend has it that King Pasenadi of the Kingdom of Kosala ordered the making of Buddha image using sandalwood with the aim to replicate characteristics of the Buddha so the image can be revered as the Buddha himself when he was teaching his mother in Heaven of 33 angles. When the Buddha descended from the heaven, there was a miracle whereby the sandalwood Buddha image moved away from where it had been placed so the Buddha can sit. The Buddha then prohibited the Buddha image from doing so and permitted the image to return to its place. The Buddha ordered that the sandalwood Buddha image be the prototype for the making of Buddha images. Therefore, the sandalwood Buddha image is considered the first image made by Buddhist for worship.

The Sandalwood Buddha Image has a number of special characteristics such as its resemblance to the Buddha and its liveliness. It has been used as the prototype for the making of Buddha images by the order of the Buddha. The importance and reverence of the image resulted in widespread replication of the Sandalwood Buddha

Image, particularly from the reign of Gupta Dynasty (320 - 600) to China's North Wei Dynasty (386 - 534) (pl.2). All Buddha images are made as a replication of the Sandalwood Buddha image sharing similar characteristics: robed image in the standing position raising the right hand in the position of forgiving, left hand carrying robe. (Krairiksh 2001, p. 63)

Replication Theory

Replication theory is therefore proposed to be used as guidelines for art historians in the study of the making of Buddha images. The theory is based on philosophy and perception which directly relate to conception of Buddhists. It can as well be applied to the study of Buddha images in other arts. This theory is developed from the concepts of Alexander B. Griswold who observed that Sukhothai Buddha images could have been made as a replication of a few revered Buddha images. He raised a question as to the source of making of these Buddha images. (Coedés 1964, p. 37 - 40) Unfortunately, Griswold did not elaborate on such observation and question. Instead, he referred back to the western classification of Buddha images. Piriya Krairiksh proved and elaborated Griswold's hypothesis using as an example U-Thong school of art's Buddha images categorised as type B by Luang Boribhan Buriphan and Griswold. Buddha images from U-Thong B have the following characteristics: seated with folded legs with the hands in the gesture of overcoming temptations, wearing the robe in the open mode with the shawl folded over the left shoulder, the face is square with flame-shaped radiant, and the shin is executed in sharp ridge.

According to Piriya's assumption, these characteristics are the replication of those of an important Buddha image of Lop Buri 'Phra Lavao Patima' as evidenced in Jinakalamali which says King Tilokkarat of Lan Na Kingdom ordered the making of one Buddha image in 1481 to have the same Buddha characteristics with Phra Lavao Patima (pl.3). This Buddha image is 'Phra Jao Khaeng Khom' in Wat Si Kerd, Muang District, Chiang Mai. (Krairiksh 1990, p.41 - 43)

Concept of Replication Theory and Considerations

This theory proposes that a Buddha image of great reverence or importance will be widely replicated (Patima). In Buddhist perception, Phra Patima means a replica of the Buddha. The making of a Buddha image is the replication of Buddha image that is of great reverence or importance by anonymous craftsmen. Buddhists try to make the best replica of the original Buddha image to retain the reverence or

importance of such Buddha image for worshippers. Sandalwood Buddha image is an example.

Interesting example of Buddha images made in Thailand include Sukhothai Buddha images categorised by Luang Boribarn Buriphan and Griswold as Buddha images in miscellaneous category or 'Wat Ta Kuan Category'. Buddha characteristics of these Buddha images are: seated with folded legs showing both soles of the feet, the end of the robe ends above the nipples, the finial is in the shape of the lotus bud. These Buddha characteristics are the same with those of one category of Buddha images commonly found in the northern region of Thailand which was categorised by H.R.H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1926, p.100) as 'Early Chiang Saen Type'. In addition, Buddha images having these characteristics were also found in the central and southern regions of Thailand, commonly referred to as 'Phra Khanom Tom' (pl.4). These Buddha images share same Buddha characteristics despite their different place of making and cultural background. This is because all of them are the replica of the same important Buddha image of Lan Na Kingdom, that is, 'Phra Phuttha Sihinga' referred to in Jinakalamali and the Story of Phra Phuttha Sihinga as having profound reverence.

Replication theory proposes that by observing common characteristics among Buddha images the name of which is known, we will know based on which Buddha image these images are made as a replica. By using traditional approach of classification, we will have different names of Buddha images depending on places of making although these Buddha images share common characteristics.

There is a consideration for this replication theory: the replication of Buddha images is not subject to space and time.

1. The replication of Buddha images is not subject to 'space', but it is ubiquitous. This theory denies the approach adopted by art historians in grouping Buddha images according to locations where they are found or schools of art. The replication of Buddha images that belong to one school of art can be made possible in the other school of art by respectful Buddhist worshippers. This theory supports the concept that the difference among Buddha images depends on each original Buddha image and not on characteristics or school of art. Example is Phra Lavao Patima (pl.3) and Phra Phuttha Sihinga (pl.4).

2. The replication of Buddha images is not subject to 'time' because Buddha images are timeless. Respectful Buddhists will continue replicating any Buddha images that are deemed to be highly revered or

important. This theory also denies the chronological approach adopted by art historians in grouping Buddha images that share similar characteristics and timeline as is practised in the study of western art. The Replication Theory proposes that this chronological approach is not always reliable because as long as the original Buddha images can maintain sanctity, then they will be replicated for hundreds of years and not only for some specific period of time.

For example(pl.5), Made in 1470, Phra Phuttha Sihinga of Lanna Kingdom is titled 'Phra Phuttha Sihinga' and is the oldest Buddha image. Today, the image is located in Wat Pra Chao Mengrai, Muang District, Chiang Mai. The youngest Phra Phuttha Sihinga was made in 1689. Now, it is located in Wat Khok Kham, Muang District, Samutsakhon. The time difference of 219 years shows that although Phra Phuttha Sihinga's popularity has declined since the late 15th Century, when its importance was restored in Ayutthaya, there has always been replication of Phra Phuttha Sihinga. (Soomjinda 2005, p. 14 - 15, 90 - 92)

Conclusion

Replication theory is the study of the making of Buddha images mainly based on Buddhist conceptions and perceptions, placing the importance on the original Buddha image and removing limitations of time and place. In this theory, when we discover a Buddha image that belongs to any time and place, we would be able to classify such Buddha image according to the Buddha characteristics of the original Buddha image based on which the replica was made. In present days, we still find the replication of Buddha images of old ages and of great importance and reverence. The example is Phra Phuttha Chinnarat believed to be made in Sukhothai period (pl.6). This Buddha image is one of the Buddha images that are most widely replicated.

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**Plate 1: Classification of Sukhothai Buddha Images
based on school of art and art evolution**



**Wat Ta Kuan Category
or Early Classic**



**Major Type
or High Classic**



**Phra Phuttha Chinarat Type
or Post Classic**

Plate 2: Two Replicas of the “Sandalwood Buddha Image”



Mathura, India (Circa 450)



North Wei Dynasty, China, Dated 470

Plates 3: Two Replicas of the “Lavao Patima Image”



U-Thong school of art's Buddha images
categorised as type B by
Luang Boriban Buriphan and Griswold



Lan Na style Buddha Image 'Pra Chao
Khaeng Khom' in Wat Si Kerd,
Chiang Mai, Dated 1484

Plate 4: These Buddha images share same Buddha characteristics: seated with folded legs showing both soles of the feet, the end of the robe ends above the nipples, the finial is in the shape of the lotus bud. This is because all of them are the replica of the same important Buddha image of Lan Na Kingdom, 'Pra Phuttha Sihinga'.



Early Chiang Sean Type,
Chiang Mai

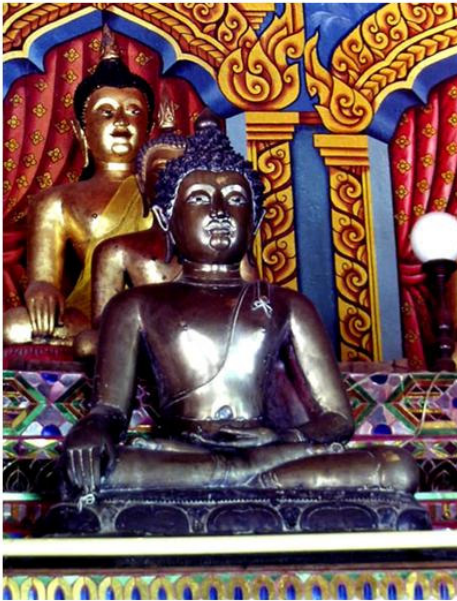


Wat Ta Kuan Category,
Sukhothai



'Pra Khanom Tom',
Samutsakhon

Plate 5: The replication of Buddha images is not subject to space and time.



The oldest Pra Phuttha Sihinga was made in 1470. Wat Pra Chao Mengrai, Muang District, Chiang Mai



The youngest Pra Phuttha Sihinga was made in 1689. Wat Khok Kham, Muang District, Samutsakhon

Plate 6: The Phra Phuttha Chinarat image at Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat, Phitsanulok, and its replica.



The original believed to be made in Sukhothai period (circa 1357).



The replica made in 1901 by King Chulalongkorn, Wat Benchamabopit, Bangkok

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