

The Reclining Buddha of Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan: The Idea behind the creation of a Reclining Buddha Statue

Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan stands facing north towards Soi Samsen 5 which was formally a canal. Locals used the canal for commuting before it was filled and made a small road as can be seen today. The temple is located in Wat Sam Phraya sub-district, Phra Nakhon district, Bangkok. It is a Thai royal temple of the third class in the common category. Originally a temple for commoners, it was built during the reign of King Phutthayotfa Chulalok or King Rama I. Its former name was Wat Bang Khun Phrom.

Khun Phrom (Sat) used to serve as the foreman in charge of the construction of a mandapa in Saraburi. It was intended to house the statue of Lord Buddha's footprint according to the wish of King Rama I. Around two years after Khun Phrom died of jungle fever, Luang Wisut Yothamart (Troot), the older brother of Khun Phrom, who was of Mon descent and himself a court officer, along with relatives, donated Khun Phrom's house and the land attached to it to build a temple on behalf and in memory of Khun Phrom. The temple was named Wat Bang Khun Phrom. The location of the house was called Ban Lan (palm leaf house) because this family had been a sole trader of palm leaf in this area. The name was later changed to Bang Khun Phrom.

During the reign of King Rama III, three nieces of Luang Wisut Yothamart (Troot) and Khun Phrom, including Phraya Raja Supawadee (Khun Thong), Phraya Rachniikul (Thong Kam) and Phraya Thep Worachun (Thong Hor) came to the agreement that Wat Bang Bang Khun Phrom which was a large temple, was deteriorating. Hence, they sponsored the renovation and offered the temple to King Rama III. In the year 1823 CE, the King then granted it the status of a royal temple and bestowed to the temple the name "Sam Phraya Temple" in order to honor the good will of the three Phrayas.



Picture 1 Chinese-style Uposot

Source: <http://www.resource.lib.su.ac.th>

Significant Sights at Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan

Uposot: The building is built with bricks and concrete, facing the road in the north. It has two-tiered roof covered with Chinese-style glazed tiles. The pediment is embossed with ceramics tiles, creating a beautiful design. The center of the pediment is a design of a flower vase and a fruit tray. Supporting post is painted according to Chinese art. The upper end of the post is decorated with decorative pieces made of concrete and ceramic cups. The rain gutter along the roof is alternately decorated with Thai-style five color porcelain and porcelain bowls painted with blue color. This style was popular during the reign of King Rama III. Inside the Uposot is the main Buddha statue in subduing Mara posture called Phra Buddha Gesorn. The face of the statue is of an oval shape. The hair is coiled into pointy curls. There are double halos over the head of the Buddha. The statue sits on a throne adorned with precious stones. People like to visit to pay respect to the Buddha hoping for success in reputation and love. There is a Buddha statue in the subduing ocean position on each side of the main statue. There is five-tiered umbrella placed over the two minor Buddha figures.

Vihara: The building is built with bricks and concrete, facing the road in the north. It has two-tiered roof covered with ceramic tiles. The pediment is designed in a Chinese style of art. It was decorated with the designs of botanical vines and birds made with concrete as

well as ceramic plates. Supporting posts are made in the design of an upright lotus flower pattern. The space between the lotus pattern and the eaves are decorated alternately with Benjarong or five-colored Thai porcelain and chinaware. The ceiling is divided into five blocks.

The background is painted in red and decorated with the images of gold stars. The crossbeams are also painted with gold pattern. The window panels and the doors are painted red. The floor is tiled. The main Buddha statue sits on two layers of pedestals, one with Benja style of decoration and the other with Singha style of decoration. Both are painted in colours according to Chinese style of art. Behind the main Buddha statue there is another standing Buddha on a pedestal. The statue wears a patterned silk cloth. Overhead is a five-tiered umbrella.

Chedis: The Chedis of the temples are built with bricks and concrete. They consist of 2 grand Chedis built in Sri Lanka style in the Ubosot mall, 25 smaller Chedis with a square plan and twelve indented corners within the temple area and west of the Vihara outside the temple wall, 5 Khmer style Chedis (Prang), with a square plan and twenty indented corners, surrounding Vihara building, and a bell tower which is a two-story brick and concrete building. It has tetrahedron roofs decorated with a finial. There is a flight of stairs up the Chedi on the left of the Ubosot.

The Sitting Buddha Vihara and the Reclining Buddha Vihara: These two concrete buildings are located in the vicinity to each other. The sitting Buddha Vihara faces to the south. Kept here is the Buddha statue in forest retreat (Palilai) posture. The Buddha is in a seated on a rock, with two feet placed on a lotus flower. However, there are some key elements of this posture that are missing from this statue. There is neither a statue of an elephant offering water nor of a monkey offering a honeycomb to accompany the Buddha statue. Furthermore, the statue of Buddha does not place hands on the knee with the right palm up which normally signifies the acceptance of the offer. Instead, both hands are holding an alm's bowl, resting on the thighs. For this reason, most people called the sitting statue 'Phra Nung Um Bat' or the Buddha who holds alm's bowl sitting down. In contrast, the Reclining Buddha Vihara faces to the north and away from the Sitting Buddha Vihara. Here lies 'Luang Phor Non' or the statue of the reclining Buddha.

Locals believe that it was due to these two Buddha statues, Luang Phor Nung and Luang Phor Non, that this area evaded being bombed during the Second World War. Also in 1951 CE, during the Manhattan Rebellion, there was an order for Royal Thai Air Force to bomb Sri Ayutthaya Warship which was docking in front of the temple. Despite the fact that the bombs missed and landed close to the temple, not one bomb went off. Therefore, locals believed that this was due to the holiness and the marvels of the two Buddha statues.

The Reclining Buddha of Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan: the Buddha Statue in Saiyas posture

If we examine the features of the Buddha statue in a reclining posture (Saiyas) that is located in the Reclining Buddha Vihara of Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan temple, we will find that it resembles most statues in Saiyas posture. The posture usually represents Lord Buddha's nirvana scene or relaxed posture and had been popular since the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya period. Additionally, the characteristics of the statue here also resemble the Reclining Buddha of Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkhalaram. They are of the same period, same style of art. They have same layout in surroundings, namely the setting of the main Chedis and smaller Chedis accompanying the Vihara. However, a question is raised as to why reclining Buddha statues from the early Rattanakosin period are said to have been made according to another posture called preaching to Asurinda Rahu posture. The latter is a new tradition of creating Buddha statues, as a result of a belief that did not emerge until 1957 CE. It is important to consider different ideas behind the creation of Buddha statues along with other surrounding factor in order to determine a posture of a statue. This applies also to the reclining Buddha statues from the early Rattanakosin period.



Picture 2 The Reclining Buddha of Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan
Source: Temporary Exhibition: “Bang Lamphu: Looking through the Old Photos”
Displaying in Bang Lamphu Museum

Beliefs Regarding Tradition of Creating a Buddha Statue

During Lord Buddha's lifetime, symbols were used to represent the person of the Buddha. They can be seen on as engravements on the pediment of Sanchi stupa, for example, an empty throne under the Bodhi representing the enlightenment of Lord Buddha. Until 43 BCE to 3 CE, during the reign of King Milinda or King Menander I, a Greek king who ruled over Gandhara, statues were created in the image of Lord Buddha. Because the statues were modeled after Greek gods, the face of the statues naturally resembled that of a Greek person. This style of Buddha statues is called Gandhara style. The creation of

Buddha statues emerged as a tradition. It gained popularity as well as underwent stages of development in many historical periods that followed. In the beginning the statues were made only in four postures, namely sitting, standing, walking, and reclining. The postures were used to represent each period in Lord Buddha's lifetime. Afterwards, the styles were expanded to cover the postures of Buddha when performing the Twin Miracle, namely standing, meditative walking, full lotus position, and Siha Saiyas or the king of lion's sleeping posture where the Buddha is portrayed to be sleeping on the right side. The development continued resulting in Buddha statues in several new style of posture in the early Rattanakosin period.

At the beginning of the Rattanakosin period, i.e., the reign of King Rama I to King Rama II, it was not common to build new statues of Buddha because it was still considered the rebuilding period. Only the palaces and temples were being build. Buddha statues were retrieved from the old capitals especially from Sukhothai province and placed in temples according to the Kings' command. Newly created statues that were built were built with brick and concrete, according to Ayutthaya style. The statues featured a square, solemn face, small hair coils, a topknot resembling a flame, and a wide additional robe over the shoulder. A new style of Buddha statue emerged during the reign of King Rama III. It shared the same characteristics as Luang Phor Non or the Reclining Buddha of Wat Sam Phraya's, featuring a marionette-like, youthful, and a smiling face.

A more realistic style of Buddha statues was seen during the reign of King Rama IV. The statue built did not featured a topknot made in the shape of a flame, and creases were added to the attire of the Buddha for realistic element. However, in the period of King Rama V, the makers went back to the old tradition of creating Buddha statues with a flame-like topknot. Later, in the period of contemporary art, old styles are remade or modified according to more recent beliefs. Styles that became popular in modern times are Sukhothai style. An example of this is the main Buddha statue at Phutthamonthon park which was made in walking (Lila) posture.

The Beliefs behind the Creation of Reclining Buddha Statues in Thailand.

Originally, the tradition of building a Buddha statue in a reclining position would always have to be supported with context. It would have to represent a specific posture as a specific time. A reclining Buddha statue mostly refers to the biographical scene of Lord Buddha entering Nirvana or Parinirvana. The placement of the statue was also a factor to be considered. According to Dvaravati art, the reclining Buddha statues were usually built in a cave on a cliff in order to comply with the story in the Tiptaka which states that Lord Buddha entered Nirvana in the forest. In contrast, according to Sukhothai style of art, in which buddha statues were normally made in four poses, large reclining Buddha statues are likely to represent Lord Buddha resting. Such description is found in the Atthakata of Kasi Sutra. It differs significantly from the previous interpretation which derived from Sri Lanka.

The tradition of building reclining Buddha status on mountaintops were widespread in Northeastern Thailand. The earliest evidence was found at Phu Por in Sahatsakhan district, Kalasin province. It is assumed that the reclining Buddha statues on the mountain represented the pose where Lord Buddha entering Nirvana. The reason why high mountains became a popular choice of location might be due to the belief that nirvana was believed to be the highest achievement in Trailokya. A statue was found to have been engraved with pallava characters in Mon language, indicating that this statue's time of production could be as early as 8 Century CE. Alternatively, the reclining Buddha statue could be intended as a representation of the pilgrimage site at Kushinagar or Kasia or Kasaya. It might have been a way of using art to convey the meaning of attaining nirvana or to present the no-self doctrine of Anatta.

However, from the late Ayuttaya to the early Rattanakosin periods, the creation of grand Buddha statues in reclining posture were intended to represent Parinirvana scene. This can be seen in the direction to which the Buddha's head is placed. According to the Maha Parinirvana Sutra, the Buddha's head is placed to the south. In some exceptional case, such as Phra Buddha Saiyas of Wat Phra Chetuphon, although the Buddha's head is pointed to the west, it can still be said to be Parinirvana posture because the west was traditionally the direction of death. Moreover, there are minor chedis built in the area surrounding Vihara. These chedis might represent past Buddhas. This pattern is seen often in the site

constructed during the period of King Rama III. In some cases, 28 chedis were built, which was the same the number as the number of historical Buddhas who have preceded Gautama Buddha. (In the Chronicle of Buddhas, 28 Buddhas was mentioned, including 3 who preceded the chronicle and 25 who were elaborated in the chronicle.)



Picture 3 The reclining Buddha statues on the mountain at Phu Por in Kalasin province
Source: oknation.nationtv.tv/blog/voranai/gallery/52168

The Change in the Belief regarding the Creation the Reclining Buddha.

The Archived of King Rama III recorded the arrangement to have a statue of the reclining Buddha erected and placed in the Reclining Buddha Vihara at Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkhalaram. It was a very important document as it showed the royal intention regarding the arrangement. In short, it was the King's intention to create a Buddha statue of an unprecedentedly great size for it to be an object of worship for angels, human beings, all animals in the world. It was also to dedicate the merit to honor the King so that his royal glory would stand until the end of time. Such royal intention clearly depicted the king's faith behind erecting the statue. It is also evidence to the King's interest in arts, designs, and craft. The archive was also a record of the idea behind the creation of the statue. It described the royal idea in detail which was unprecedented in the history of Thai craft. The Reclining Buddha shares the same characteristics with another statue in a seated position which was

also newly erected during the period of King Rama III. They have a so-called marionette-like, and a youthful face.

Reclining Buddha statues in large size usually represent Lord Buddha entering Nirvana. From Ayutthaya period to early Rattanakosin period, they were made to represent Lord Buddha in the real-life size in Parinirvana posture. From the period of King Rama IV and V, reclining Buddha statues were made in a larger size. For example, the one commissioned by Somdet Phra Buddhacarya (To Brahmaramsi) which was created to reflect the name of the commissioner. (To means grand in Thai.) Nevertheless, the statue was still created according to the old tradition of portraying Lord Buddha in Parinirvana posture. The period is also significant in the history of Thai arts. It shows a departure from Rattanakosin art and entering a period where folk arts, with no single distinct uniform style, became prominent.

Today, the idea behind a large reclining Buddha statue has changed. The inspiration is now as a result of the belief in the might of Lord Buddha when preaching to Asurinda Rahu. This belief is invented by Phra Dharma Kosajarn Anujari Thera around 1962 AD, referring to the miracle said to have been performed by Lord Buddha. When in reclining position, Lord Buddha is said to have made himself so big that it intimidated Asurinda Rahu. This is a new belief created to accompany the creation of a large-sized reclining Buddha statue without any association with Parinirvana posture.

The belief regarding Asurinda Rahu comes from Sonakanda Sutra (9th book of Atthakatha in 1st book of Sutta Pitaka, Digha Nikaya collection, Silakkhandha-vagga section on Brahman Sonadanda). According to the story, God of Rahu had wished to meet Lord Buddha. However, he thought that his physique was so big that he could swallow the sun and the moon, therefore he would not be able to pay respect to Lord Buddha in person because the Lord was only human. Lord Buddha could know this thought of Rahu, so he transformed himself by magic. Even when in reclining position, Lord Buddha became so big that he could use mountains as pillow. Asurinda Rahu in the end had to look up to see Lord Buddha, thereby lost all the pride he previously had. Furthermore, the Lord took Asurinda Rahu to a celestial world called Brahmaloaka. Having seen that even the Brahmas who came to welcome Lord Buddha were all smaller than Lord Buddha, Asurinda Rahu became so frightened he hid behind the Lord. Since then, Asurinda Rahu could no longer hold his pride. Furthermore, after having listened to Dharma preached by Lord Buddha, Asurinda Rahu

found his faith in Buddhism, and took refuge in the Three Jewels of the Buddhist religion for all his life.

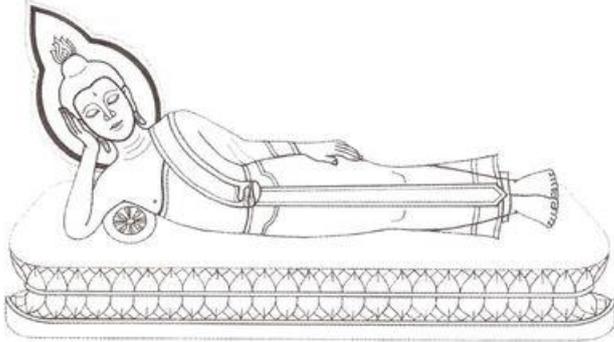
The story from Sonakanda Sutra was a commentary of the Tipitaka which was composed after the passing of Lord Buddha. The intention behind it was to glorify the Lord over God of Rahu who was according to Brahmin religion believed to have an exceptionally grand physique. Hence, it became a belief in astrology that the reclining posture is the posture to subdue Asurinda Rahu. Those whose horoscope is influenced by the God of Rahu should have a statue of Lord Buddha created for oneself or have one in possession. This is the reason why nowadays a Buddha statue in reclining posture is said to have a preaching to Asurinda Rahu posture. This is also true of the Reclining Buddha at Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkhalaram. The Reclining Buddha is in a reclining position, facing east. The head of the statue is directed toward the south, which is a common direction for sleeping, and the feet directed toward the north. Such posture follows the book of Siha Saiyas and corresponds well to the story in the Tipitaka with regard to Asurinda Rahu as previously mentioned.

The Reclining Buddha of Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan Temple: The Idea behind the Creation of a Reclining Buddha Statue

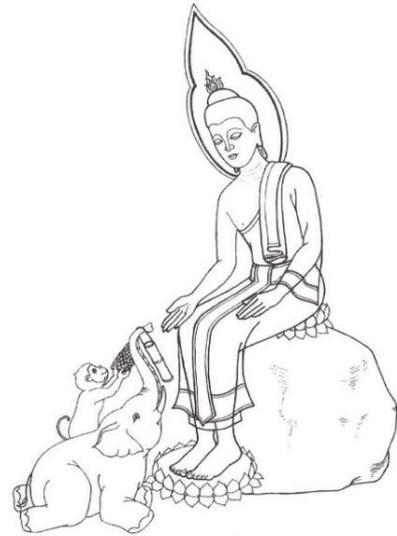
To conclude, Luang Phor Non or the Reclining Buddha which is situated in the Reclining Buddha Vihara of Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan while in a reclining (Saiyas) posture, it was intended to represent preaching to Asurinda Rahu posture. The Buddha statue is lying on the right side, with the feet stacked on top of each other, the left hand laid alongside the body while the right hand held up to support the head. A pillow was created as a part of the statue to support the head of the Buddha. The eyes of the Buddha are looking down to the front, while the mouth is slightly smiling. Like the Reclining Buddha of Wat Phra Chetuphon, the Reclining Buddha of Wat Sam Phraya was created during the reign of King Rama III. It shares the same characteristics and artistic style. This is also true of the Buddha statue in forest retreat (Palilai) posture of Wat Sam Phraya which has its counterpart in the Sitting Buddha of Wat Phra Chetuphon, as recorded in the Archives of King Rama III

Like in Wat Phra Chetuphon, despite the fact that there are smaller Chedis in the temple area, the number of which amounts to the number of the previous historical Buddhas, the reclining Buddha at Wat Sam Phraya cannot be Parinirvana posture. This is because the Vihara clearly was intended to face north. Consequently, the Buddha's head is pointed to the east, which is by no means the direction of death according to ancient beliefs. In contrast, it is the Sitting Buddha Vihara that was constructed in a way that it would face south. Hence, it should be concluded that the reclining Buddha was to represent the posture of Lord Buddha when he was alive and was only resting.

Additionally, nowadays beliefs regarding the day of birth have become associated with the postures of the Buddha. A Buddha figure in a specific posture is attributed to a particular day of the week on which a person was born. According to astrological texts, Lord Buddha lied down to rest in the reclining position and passed to nirvana on Tuesday. Hence, the reclining Buddha image became the Buddha image for people who are born on Tuesday. The reclining posture or preaching to Asurinda Rahu posture is said to represent sobering power over intemperance, which is Rahu's main trait. Therefore, in the past there were service points offering items for worship in front of both Sitting Buddha Vihara and Reclining Buddha Vihara. Believers could purchase incense in pink, which is the color of Tuesday, and in black, which is the appropriate color for worshipping the God of Rahu for those who was born on Wednesday night. The Buddha image for those who were born on Wednesday night is Luang Phor Nang or the Buddha statue in the forest retreat position. Hence, it has become a belief that if one could pay respect to Luang Phor Nang and Luang Phor Non at Wat Sam Phraya Worawihan, their life will remain peaceful, they themselves would feel joyful, peaceful, and at ease due to the grace and holiness of the Buddha, and the happy smiles on the Buddha's faces.



The reclining Buddha preaching to
Asurinda Rahu posture
for who were born on Tuesday



The Buddha in the forest
retreat position
for who were born on Wednesday night

