Engendering the Sukhothai beliefs: coexistent beliefs between the indigenous masculine mountain worship and the exotic masculine Buddhism during the 14th C.E.

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Abstract

This article evaluates the gender of Sukhothai art through the scrutiny of the literature of King Ram Khamhaeng and King Lidhaiya as well as the Buddhist art of Sukhothai during the mid-13th to 14th C.E.

Significantly, by integrating interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks and methods from art history in the traditional realms and the post-modern perspectives of gender, epigraphy, and landscape archaeology, this study discloses that the gender of art can be represented and seen in the coexistent beliefs between the indigenous Sukhothai masculine mountain worship and the exotic Singhalese masculine Buddhism, in which the significance of great masculinity had been embodied, in Sukhothai during the 14th C.E. Additionally, this study further evaluates that the power of the Buddhist art was exploited to support the righteousness of King Lidhaiya, and archaeologically evaluates that the indigenous sacred landscape of Khao Luang was the best sacred space for establishing the new exotic Buddha's footprint (Buddhapāda) cult. Finally, the scrutiny of these two-distinctive beliefs allows us to see the continuous landscape use and the link of the different beliefs' locus, in which the masculinity was embodied and made them exist contemporarily as a gendered representation through beliefs and art.

Key Words: Sukhothai art | Buddhist art | Buddha's footprint | mountain worship | gender of art

1. Introduction

There were several times of Buddhist movements between Sukhothai and Sri Lanka during the 14th C.E. A number of monks from Sukhothai went to Sri Lanka for Buddhist training and re-ordination into the orthodoxy of the Sinhalese Maha Vihara at Anuradhapura; for example, Mahathera Sri Sattha had ordained at the school of Maha Vihara approximately 10 years in the first half of the 14th C.E., and venerated this doctrine since then. Significantly, they brought back with Buddha's relics, the Bodhi tree, laymen, and the drawings of Singhalese Buddhist art –the footprint on the Adam's peak and Buddha images – to Sukhothai (Griswold and Na Nagara, 1972: 125-126; Listopad, 2012: 39). These exotic ingredients arguably coexisted with the indigenous animism.

This article will evaluate that the gender of Sukhothai art can be represented and seen in the coexistent beliefs between the indigenous masculine mountain worship and the exotic masculine Buddhism in Sukhothai, and the indigenous sacred place was the best space for establishing the new exotic Buddha's footprint (Buddhapāda) cult.

This article aims to evaluate the gender of Sukhothai art through the scrutiny of the literature of King Ram Khamhaeng and King Lidhaiya as well as the Buddhist art of Sukhothai during the mid-13th to 14th C.E.

2. Beliefs in Sukhothai

It is evident that Sukhothai during the mid-13th C.E. to the late 16th C.E. was multi-religious society; animism, Brahmanism, and Buddhism. The local mountain worship and the exotic Buddhism will be examined as follows.

1) The indigenous masculine spirit of a mountain in Sukhothai

Pra Kapung (means 'exalted' in Khmer) was the greatest tutelary spirit of the entire Sukhothai Kingdom as mentioned in the literature of King Ram Khamhaeng in 1292 (the Sukhothai inscription no.1, III/6) that Pra Kapung is a guardian of mountain on a hill, Khao Luang range (figure 1), southwest of the capital, dominating all spirits in Sukhothai, and every ruler must worship him for the city's abundance (Krom Silapakon, 1983: 16). This ascertains that while the Buddhism was fully prosperous, the animism of sacred mountain worship had still overwhelmingly influenced to the perspective of Sukhothai's people in the past.

Also, in the pact of rulers between Sukhothai and Nan (the Khun Chit Khun Chot inscription no.45, I/16) in 1392, many male tutelary spirits were primarily addressed, just after the spirits of royal ancestors, to be the sacred witnesses for the pact e.g. male tutelary spirits of Khao Pha Dan, Khao Pha Daeng, and Khao Phra Sri (in Sri Satchanalai). Apparently, Pra Kapung was also

mentioned as ‘Pu Chao Pra Kapung’ – ‘Pu Chao’ means the royal grandfather, originally marking the masculinity – in this inscription, which affirms the same male guardian of the mountain as the previous one (Pra Kapung in the Sukhothai inscription no.1).

Meanwhile, it is intriguing to realise that other mountain’s guardians, bearing the male deity, were simultaneously venerated such as ‘Pu Kha’ -Pu Kha mountain- in Nan and ‘Mahaparavata’ -Rang Mèo mountain- nearby My Son Sanctuary in Vietnam (Griswold and Na Nagara, 1969: 83; Tran, 2008).

By employing the primary context of Sukhothai inscriptions, it is significant to note that these inscriptions reflect Sukhothai’s social context during the 13th and 14th centuries regarding people’s mindset of patriarchal society, at least through a belief in animism, since almost all of major tutelary spirits were subject to the masculine form as well as all spirits of royal ancestor were men. Considerably, it can be affirmed that Pra Kapung had still been meaningful in the mental perspective of people in Sukhothai to look after them all and punished betrayers for a century. Perhaps, the cult of masculine mountain worship in Sukhothai at that time was partially suggested by the ancient Khmer culture as seen in its terminology of ‘Kapung’, associated with the establishment of a Brahman shrine ‘Ta Pha Daeng’, means ‘the shrine of the Grandfather with the Red Cloth’, in the early Khmer Bayon style in the early 13th century.



Figure 1: Khao Luang. The view from Wat Mahathat, a central temple of the capital, Sukhothai. (photographed by the author)

2) The Buddha's footprint cult and the walking Buddha image as the exotic masculine ingredients of Buddhism from south Asia

This part will examine the veneration of the Buddha's footprint cult, visualized to the walking Buddha as the invention of Sukhothai art in the 14th C.E., from the Sukhothai epigraphy – the literature of King Lidhaiya (1347-1368) written on Sukhothai inscriptions – and the argument of Robert Brown (1990) on his article God on Earth: The Walking Buddha in the Art of South and Southeast Asia.

It is evident that King Lidhaiya founded many Buddha's footprints in Sukhothai as written in Sukhothai inscriptions. From the Nakhon Chum inscription, dated to 1357, King Mahadharmaraja I or King Lidhaiya established Pra Tat Nakhon Chum temple, planted the Bodhi tree which obtained from Sri Lanka, and installed the Buddha's footprints on the hilltops around the kingdom of Sukhothai; at Khao Pra Bat in Sri Satchanalai, at Khao Pra Bat Yai (as inscribed 'Chom Khao Sumanakuta') in Sukhothai, at Chom Khao Nang Thong in Kam Phaeng Phet, and at Khao Kob in Nakhon Sawan (Krom Silapakon, 1983: 39). As inscribed in the Nakhon Chum inscription no.3 (II/ 52-58), all these footprints were copied by impressing on the footprint (figure 2) of Adam's Peak – Mount Sumanakuta - in Sri Lanka as ordered by King Lidhaiya (Griswold and Na Nagara, 1973: 111).



Figure 2: A Buddhist monk venerates the Buddha's footprint. (https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/photo/adams-peak-sri-lanka-buddhist-monk-high-res-stock-photography/57504534 and http://sripada.org/text-2.htm)

One of the abovementioned Buddha's footprints was on Khao Pra Bat Yai in Sukhothai, or now called Wat Khao Pra Bat Yai. It was mentioned in the Khao Sumanakuta inscription no.8 that King Lidhaiya established and worshiped the Buddha's footprint in 1359 (Krom Silapakon, 1983: 80), which is now moved to Wat Tra Pang Thong (figure 3). This is a single footprint carved on a stone slab with the 108 symbols, marking the sole of a Buddha's foot, which is slightly different

from one found on the nearby hill Khao Pra Bat Noi (figure 4). The later one, dated to 1379, illustrates the four Buddha's footprint born in this world age, Kakusandha, Konagamana, Kassapa, and Gautama (Siddhartha); lacking of the fifth Buddha-to-be, Maitreya, who has yet born (Listopad, 2012: 38).

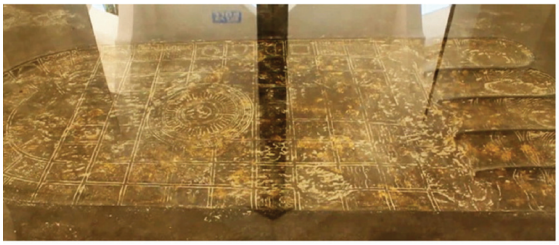


Figure 3: The Buddha's footprint from Wat Khao Pra Bat Yai, copied from the footprint on Adam's peak during the 14th C.E. Stone. Wat Tra Pang Thong, Sukhothai. (http://www.manager.co.th/asp-bin/viewgallery.aspx?newsid=9600000025691&imageid=4464894)



Figure 4: The four Buddha's footprint from Wat Khao Pra Bat Noi, Sukhothai, 1379. Stone. Ram Khamhaeng National Museum. (photographed by the author)

Considerably, it is clearly seen that the abovementioned Buddha's footprints are slightly different to one another; hence, the impression of the original footprint on Adam's peak as ordered by King Lidhaiya in 1357 could be presumed that it was not precisely executed. It seems that the impression of Buddha's footprint was for commemorating Gautama and to promote people's mental value in Sukhothai, not to exactly measure or copy.

Also, another intriguing suggestion is that due to the visible footprint on Adam's peak at present remains a plain surface, the Sukhothai Buddha's footprint with its 108 auspicious symbols, which had been copied in 1357 on Adam's peak, was possibly impressed on either the protective cover - a golden cover, which once protected the footprint on Adam's peak until 1654 at the latest (Tennant, 1860: 138) – rather than its stone footprint, or was impressed on the rock, which its engraving is not evident or no longer remains in the later time (Griswold and Na Nagara, 1973: 111). Nevertheless, by the history of art, the pattern of 108 auspicious symbols was primarily adorned on the sole of Buddha's footprint in Bagan – Stupa No.1580 – in

the first half of the 12th C.E. (figure 5) prior to India, Sri Lanka, and any other Buddhism centres in Southeast Asia (Poolsuwan, 2016: 8). Remarkably, it is essential to note that the rock footprint is normally concealed with the protective cover as seen in the living monument at Wat Phra Phutthabat in Saraburi province, Thailand, where there was the royal tradition of providing a golden protective cover decorated with gemstones and the 108 auspicious marks engraving to the Buddha's footprint since the first half of the 17th C.E. (figure 5) Hence, it is worthwhile to assume that the Buddha's footprints copied in 1357 was presumably impressed on the protective engraved cover on Adam's peak.

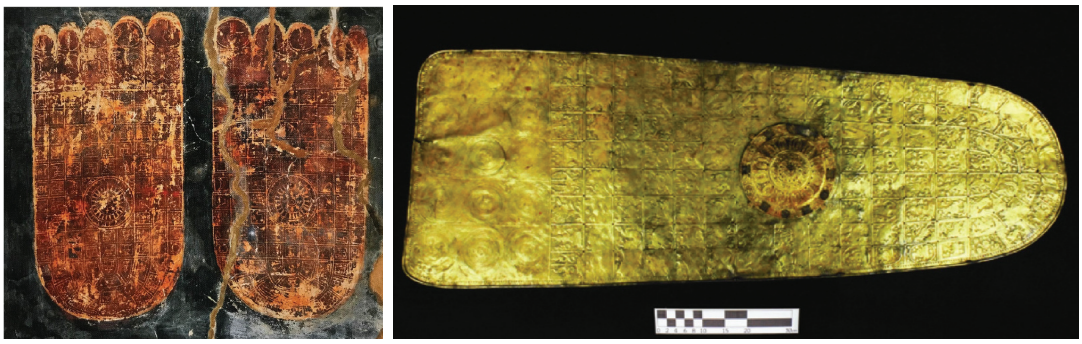


Figure 5: (Left) The Buddha's footprints, painted on the ceiling of the northern entrance of the stupa No.1580, Bagan, Myanmar. The first half of the 12th C.E. (Poolsuwan, 2016: 15); (Right) The golden protective cover of the Buddha's footprint, dated to 1748, at Wat Phra Phutthabat, Saraburi. (Monsterarchaeologist, 2014: 256)

Furthermore, it is evident that the Buddha's footprint cult in Sukhothai accompanied by large number of the walking Buddha images made during the mid-14th C.E. since they were inspired from the same Sinhalese tradition in Sri Lanka (Listopad, 2012: 38). Nevertheless, the source of the Sukhothai walking Buddha has been debatable among scholars (Brown, 1990: 100; Griswold and Na Nagara, 1971: 170-171). This study would propose that addressing the Sukhothai epigraphy, referring to the connection between Sukhothai monks and the Mon Buddhist school in Ramaññadesa in 1341 (Griswold and Na Nagara, 1971) and in the Singhalese centre in Sri Lanka between 1344 and 1354 (Griswold and Na Nagara, 1972), with the concern of the stylistic reference of the Sukhothai walking Buddha images, comparing the stucco of the Buddha descending from Indra's heaven in Wat Tra Phang Thong Lang in Sukhothai (figure 6) to the Kaw-gun cave's in Myanmar (figure 6) and the Buddha's drawing at Tivanka Pilamage in Sri Lanka (figure 6) by John Listopad (2012) plausibly yield to the original source from the Sinhalese tradition in Sri Lanka.



Figure 6: (Left) the stucco of the Buddha descending from Indra's heaven, Wat Tra Phang Thong Lang, Sukhothai. 14th C.E.; (Middle) The drawing of the Buddha's drawing at Tivanka Pilamage, Sri Lanka. Late 12th or Early 13th C.E.; (Right) Descent from Indra's heaven in Kaw-gun cave's, Myanmar. 11th C.E. (Listopad, 2012)

Significantly, Robert Brown (1990) fruitfully proposed the connection between the creation of the walking Buddha and a footprint in Sukhothai that the thirty-two marks (lakṣaṇa) signified artists to create these two sacred objects by representing the Buddha as a superman. Also, it is essential to note that the Buddha always walks for his teachings and many important miraculous events happen while walking – i.e. the descent from Indra's heaven – as well as he always leaves his footprints by walking. Surprisingly, there are two substantial Buddhist artworks affirm that the Buddha left his footprints by walking, and prove the association of the walking Buddha and a footprint in Sukhothai period. Firstly, a Sukhothai bronze footprint, showing the act of depressing a footprint of past (walking) Buddhas and Sakyamuni at Sānkāsya in India after descending from Indra's heaven (figure 7). Secondly, a Lan Na bronze walking Buddha image, portraying Sakyamuni implanting his footprint on a series of bigger ones of three previous Buddhas (figure 8) (Brown, 1990: 102).

Thus, it is clearly that the veneration of the Buddha's footprint cult, visualized to the walking Buddha as the invention of the Sukhothai masculine sacred art, in Sukhothai was the exotic beliefs of Buddhism from south Asia and resulted from the religious interaction with the Singhalese school in Sri Lanka during the 14th C.E. Further gendered aspects will be evaluated in the discussion.



Figure 7: A bronze Buddha's footprint from Wat Sadet, Kamphaeng Phet, 14th C.E. National Museum, Bangkok. (Photo courtesy of Naiyana Munparn)



Figure 8: A bronze walking Buddha, dated to 1482, showing Sakyamuni depressed his footprint a series of larger ones of three previous Buddhas and affirming the association of the walking Buddha and a Buddha's footprint in Sukhothai during the 14th C.E. Lan Na. National Museum, Bangkok. (Listopad, 2012: 34)

3. Discussion

1) The coexistent beliefs between the mountain worship and the exotic Buddha's footprint cult

Linguistically, as Mahavamsa chronicle of Ceylon, this study argues that the name 'Sumanakuta' in both of Sri Lanka and Sukhothai marks the gendered and religious concerns. That is, its name represents a male deity 'Mahasumana', the god of the Sumanakuta mountain, who facilitated the Buddha for his first arrival in Sri Lanka; thereafter, the Buddha left his footprint there on his third arrival (Paranavitana, 1958:12).

Arguably, the term of Sumanakuta embodies a sacred state of Buddha's visit on the Sumanakuta mountain or Adam's peak in Sri Lanka (figure 9). This study would argue that the embodiment of being a sacred place for Buddha's visit was brought back in a form of title 'Khao Sumanakuta' (now called 'Khao Luang' means 'the great/royal hill') to name an indigenous sacred mountain in southwest of Sukhothai, which previously merely inhabited by the male spirit of Pra Kapung, as seen that Khao Luang (figure 10) was physically exploited to be a new sacred place for the copied Buddha's footprint at Wat Khao Pra Bat Yai during the 14th C.E. (Krom Silapakon, 1983: 80).

Furthermore, as Buddhist perception, the Buddha went to Sri Lanka and imprinted his foot on Sri Padaya (Sinhalese name of Sumunakuta Mountain) to indicate that Sri Lanka would be the perpetuator of his doctrine, and also in anywhere that his teachings are acknowledged (Stratton and Scott, 2004: 301).

Thus, establishing the exotic Buddha's footprint and naming Khao Luang as Sumanakuta clearly elevate Sukhothai to be the perfect Buddhist land like Sri Lanka, and explicitly mark the continuous landscape use as well as the coexistent beliefs between the indigenous masculine mountain worship and the exotic masculine ingredients of Singhalese Buddhism in Sukhothai.



Figure 9: Adam's peak or Sri Padaya in central Sri Lanka.
(http://www.thepictureprofessional.com/2016/10/michael-s-yamashita-portfolio/)



Figure 10: A map showing the location of the Sukhothai city in a larger triple-square moats and Khao Laung in west of the city, where Wat Khao Pra Bat Yai is located in the lower red pin and Wat Khao Pra Bat Noi is in the upper one. (edited from the Google Map)

2) Engendering the coexistent beliefs and the art of Sukhothai

This part will evaluate the gendered aspects on aforementioned beliefs, the body of Sukhothai walking Buddha images, and the Buddha's footprints as follows.

As illustrated earlier, Robert Brown (1990) pointed out the connection between the walking Buddha and a footprint in Sukhothai that the thirty-two lakṣaṇa signified artists to adorn these two sacred objects, rendering the Buddha as a superman (Brown, 1990: 96). Remarkably, it is significant to evaluate arguments proposed by John Powers (2009) and Vidya Dehijia (2009) that the concept of the supremely masculine Buddha, illustrated in the Pāli canon Dīgha Nikāya or Dialogues of the Buddha since the 3th or 4th century and other Indian Buddhist literature as the 'ultimate man' (puruṣotama), reinforces the embodiment of the Buddha's masculine perfection in Sukhothai art visualized through the Sukhothai Buddha images and footprints.

In other words, 'mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa' or the 32 physical characteristics of the great man merely refer to attributions of Buddhas and universal emperors (cakravartin-'turning of the wheel') regarding his extraordinary beautiful body, physical strength, his skilful-martial arts, and his superhuman virility that he has a golden complexion; his gait like a lion; his arms are long to his knees; he has flat feet; palms and soles marked with the thousand-spoked wheels (cakra), śrīvatsa, svastika, madyāvarta, and lalita symbols; a straight torso; a torso and jaw like a lion's; legs like an antelope's; a penis hidden in a sheath (Dehijia, 2009: 60-64; Powers, 2009: 9-10). Indeed, there are 108 auspicious symbols on the Buddha's footprint, described in a Pāli poem of Jinalankara-tika or 'the adornment of the conqueror' in Sri Lanka during the 12th C.E. (Norman, 1983). This text played a major role as a guide to signify the sacred work of the Buddha's footprint in Southeast Asia, primarily executed in Bagan in the first half of the 12th C.E. and Sukhothai in the 14th C.E. (Griswold and Na Nagara, 1971: 175; Poolsuwan, 2016: 8).

Nevertheless, it is worth to mention that some western scholars tried to argue that the Buddha images mark the effeminate Buddha as they have no muscle, rounded limbs and such a smooth skin. Sugata Ray (2015), an Indian scholar, argues that the western eyes, borne with the hyper-masculine male body and the colonial supremacy, were distinct from the tradition of Indian Buddhist art as the unmasculine male body of the Buddha exactly represents his characteristics of a great man (Ray, 2015).



Figure 11: The cakra as one of the seven jewels of cakravartin' s sovereignty on a plaque covering a stupa from Andhra Pradesh, India, ca.1st century A.D., stone. Musée nationale des arts asiatiques Guimet. (photographed by the author)

Furthermore, it is clearly argued that the wheel or 'cakra' represents the Buddha's first sermon, turning the wheel of his doctrine at Sārnāth, and his teaching of dharma. Also, as mentioned in the most crucial Pali version of cakravartin in the Dighanikaya, the wheel represents the dharma of the universal emperor (cakravartin-turning the wheel and indicating of the righteousness) since the king and his army are required to follow the cakra, ideally executed without battles, and people, living in where the wheel appears, accept the king's sovereignty. Thus, the cakra marks the first of the seven jewels of cakravartin's sovereignty" (Brown, 1990: 96) (figure 11). Significantly, when the Buddha turned the wheel at Sārnāth, the wheel was rolled and reinforced a conqueror of the Buddhism's world, marking a similar manner to cakravartin's mundane world, as the Buddha and his disciples rolled the wheel along their wandering in order to teach, as seen in the Gandharan relief portraying the Buddha is rolling the wheel while walking (figure 12). This shows an explicit connection between footprints and walking.



Figure 12. The Buddha rolling the Dharmacakra- the wheel of law, Pakistan, ca.2nd century A.D., stone.
Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia. (Brown, 1990: 84)

Thus, this study would argue that the 'mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa' - characteristics of the Buddha's superhuman perfection - was visualized in the Sukhothai Buddhist art, especially the invention of the unique walking Buddha, bearing the Singhalese prototype of mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa with its unique of an egg-like head and thighs like banana tree stems, and the creation of the Buddha's footprint, which clearly represented the gender of art as the exotic masculine Buddhist cult in Sukhothai that coexisted with the indigenous masculine mountain worship. Additionally, examining the Sukhothai Buddha's footprint cult enables me to propose that King Lidhaiya politically exploited the power of art, to be recalled like Plato's awareness of art power in his mimesis (Preziosi, 2009), from the exotic Singhalese Buddha's footprint cult, which he circulated the royal Buddhapāda around his kingdom, as it embodies the power of cakravartin, which enhances King Lidhaiya's righteousness of Mahadharmaraja, pious king, as mentioned in the Nakhon Chum inscription.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has evaluated that the gender of art can be represented and seen in the coexistent beliefs between the indigenous Sukhothai masculine mountain worship and the exotic Singhalese masculine Buddhism, in which the significance of great masculinity had been embodied, in Sukhothai during the 14th C.E. By examining through the perspectives of gender, the Buddhist artworks of Sukhothai can be broaden their dimensions to yield more reasonable linkage to the Buddhist canon as an authentic inspiration for Sukhothai's Buddhist art, rather than being distorted by the general art interpretation. Also, the perspectives of gender considerably evaluate socio-cultural realms of people in Sukhothai trough the art during the 14th C.E.; the patriarchal society in the realms of a belief in animism and the coexistent beliefs between the mountain worship and Buddhism.

Additionally, this study further evaluates that the power of the Buddhist art was exploited to support the righteousness of King Lidhaiya, and archaeologically evaluates that the indigenous sacred landscape of Khao Luang was the best sacred space for establishing the new exotic Buddha's footprint (Buddhapāda) cult. Finally, the scrutiny of these two-distinctive beliefs allows us to see the continuous landscape use and the link of the different beliefs' locus, in which the masculinity was embodied and made them exist contemporarily as a gendered representation through beliefs and art.

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