

# The Paradigm of the Sacred Mountain Designs in Southeast Asian Culture

กระบวนการทัศน์การออกแบบภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์  
ในวัฒนธรรมเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้

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## บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษา “กระบวนการทัศน์การออกแบบภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ในวัฒนธรรมเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้” ใช้กระบวนการศึกษาด้วยระเบียบวิธีวิจัยทางประวัติศาสตร์สถาปัตยกรรม (History of Architecture Research Methodology) โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์การศึกษาเพื่อเข้าใจกระบวนการทัศน์การออกแบบภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ในวัฒนธรรมเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ และสร้างองค์ความรู้ดังกล่าวในฐานะมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมที่จับต้องไม่ได้ (Intangible Cultural Heritage) ด้วยสมมติฐานการศึกษา (Hypothesis) ที่ว่า คติความคิดความเชื่อเกี่ยวกับภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์มีปรากฏอยู่อย่างชัดเจนในวัฒนธรรมเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ทั้งในแง่ของภูเขที่เกิดขึ้นเองตามธรรมชาติ และภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์อันเกิดจากรูปแบบสถาปัตยกรรมที่มนุษย์ออกแบบและสร้างสรรค์ขึ้น

ผลการศึกษาองค์ความรู้กระบวนการทัศน์การออกแบบภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ที่ปรากฏในวัฒนธรรมเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้สามารถแสดงได้ดังนี้

- 1) เขาพระสุเมรุ ศูนย์กลางจักรวาลทัศน์ในศาสนาฮินดูและพุทธศาสนา
- 2) เขาไกรลาส ที่ประทับของพระศิวะ



Mount Merapi,  
Central Java  
**Source:** Google Map,  
*Mount Merapi*,  
accessed September  
2018, available from  
<https://www.google.co.th/maps/place/Mount+Merapi/>

- 3) การบูชาเทพเจ้าท้องถิ่นหรือผีแห่งภูเขา และพลังอำนาจเหนือธรรมชาติ
- 4) การบูชาภูเขาไฟ พลังอันยิ่งใหญ่แห่งธรรมชาติ
- 5) ภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ ณ ตำแหน่งศูนย์กลางเมือง
- 6) ลิงคบรรพต
- 7) ภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ในวรรณกรรม
- 8) ภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ในพิธีกรรม
- 9) รูปจำลองของภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ในความเชื่อสู่การสร้างรูปจำลองขนาดเล็ก
- 10) ภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ที่ประทับของกษัตริย์บนภูเขาในฐานะเทพเจ้าองค์ความรู้ทั้งหมดนี้ถือเป็นการกอบประรวมองค์ความรู้จิตวิญญาณเชิงนิเวศ (Ecological Spirituality) ของสภาพแวดล้อมทางภูมิศาสตร์หรือเชิงนิเวศ (Ecology) ของภูเขา และการออกแบบสถาปัตยกรรมในฐานะภูเขาจำลองอันศักดิ์สิทธิ์ในวัฒนธรรมเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ที่ส่งผ่านจากปรีชา

อินเดียโบราณ มหาเทพยารามายณะ มหาเทพยัมหารตะ จักรวาลทัศน์ใน ศาสนาฮินดูและพุทธศาสนา คัมภีร์วิทยาศาสตร์ ร่วมกับอัตลักษณ์ความเชื่อท้องถิ่น โดยเฉพาะความเชื่อเรื่องผีหรืออารักษ์แห่งภูเขา เพื่อสร้างภูมิทัศน์อันศักดิ์สิทธิ์ (Sacredness of Landscape) หรือพื้นที่ศักดิ์สิทธิ์ (Sacred Space) ให้เกิดขึ้นในพื้นที่อันเป็นถิ่นฐานอาศัยของมนุษย์ในวัฒนธรรมเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้

**คำสำคัญ:** ภูเขาศักดิ์สิทธิ์, กระบวนทัศน์, มรดกทางสถาปัตยกรรม, วัฒนธรรมเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้

## Abstract

A study on the paradigm of sacred mountain designs in Southeast Asian culture by using history of architecture research methodology aims to provide further understanding in a paradigm of designing sacred mountains in Southeast Asian culture and creating that knowledge as intangible cultural heritage. The hypothesis is that the belief of sacred mountains clearly appeared in Southeast Asia culture in terms of natural mountains and architectural mountains.

The result of studying on the paradigm of sacred mountain designs in Southeast Asian culture can be presented in

- 1) Mount Meru, the centre of Hindu and Buddhist cosmology
- 2) Mount Kailasa, the resident of God Shiva
- 3) God worship, Animism of Mountain and the Great Nature Power
- 4) Volcanoes; The Great Natural Power
- 5) The City Centre Sacred Mountain, according to Vastusastra belief in Hindu and Mahathat Chedi in Buddhism
- 6) Lingabhavarta
- 7) Sacred Mountain in Literature

- 8) Sacred Mountain in Ceremony
- 9) From Mythical Sacred Mountain to its Replica
- 10) Sacred Mountain, The Resident of the King on the

Mountain

All of this knowledge is considered to be a collection of ecological spirituality knowledge of the geographical environment or ecology of the mountains and architectural designs as sacred mountains in Southeast Asia culture through Indian literature; Ramayana and Mahabharata Epics, Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, Vastusastra, together with local belief, especially gods or spirits of the mountain, in order to create the sacredness of landscape or the sacred space in Southeast Asia culture.

**Keywords:** Sacred mountain, Paradigm, Architectural heritage, Southeast Asian culture

The paradigm of sacred mountain designs in Southeast Asian culture represents an accumulation of knowledge and ecological spirituality, including sacred natural landscapes and architectural designs such as the form of sacred mountain architectural creations and the architecture of structures built on sacred natural mountain tops. This knowledge derived from Indian religious concepts, philosophies and architectonics which merged with indigenous cultural beliefs and practices. From this developed the various architectural styles of form and space management which prevail throughout the region.

Social science disciplines which are relevant to this study include historical research, archaeology, art history and history of architecture. Each of these employs somewhat different research methodology for analyzing, critiquing and cataloguing collected evidence and other data.

In this studying on the paradigm of the sacred mountain designs in Southeast Asian culture, the researcher chose a research methodology commonly used in the *history of architecture*, which investigates architectural creativity within the framework of the design and crafting processes. This includes an understanding of the thought process and belief systems which influence architectural design and the art of creating spaces and forms which meet human needs. Understanding these things necessarily leads to an understanding of the beliefs and ideologies of landscapes and architectural designs.

The importance of the sacred mountain can be seen clearly in both natural mountains deemed sacred in their architectural representation. The paradigm of sacred mountain designs in Southeast Asian culture, therefore, can only be understood in the context of knowledge of beliefs and ideologies which form the cultural landscape and architectural forms, which is then reflected in the forms of sacred mountain creations and a paradigm of design.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Process and Scope of the Study

This study is limited by the cultural dimensions of Southeast Asia. Its temporal limits extend from the early period of urban and state development in the region until the present day.

Following is the process of study:

- 1) Documentary Research: historical research conducted by investigation of both primary and secondary data. This process also extends to an examination of data reliability before becoming part of the analysis.

- 2) Field Study: requires a knowledge of the history of architecture research (e.g., site photography, site plans and floor plans, architecture and architectural ornaments) to better

understand the ecological landscape and history of the architecture.

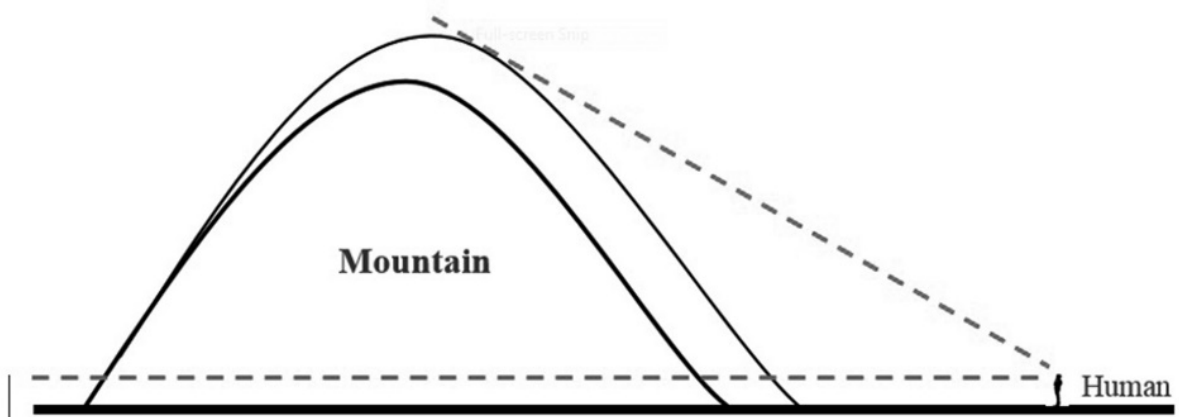
3) Analysis and Knowledge Construction: analysis of documentary research, incorporating the architectural historical data, so as to precisely understand the constructed knowledge of sacred mountain design in Southeast Asian culture

4) Conclusion: the inclusion of learning-data processing and research for analysis.

## 2. Geography and values of the Mountain

The physical geography of mountain or mountain ranges is characterized as a natural construct 600 meters high and in which the peak is smaller than the base.<sup>2</sup> The formation of mountains is primarily associated with plate tectonic movement. Forces acting on the earth's crust cause tectonic plates to move. When they collide, in a process known as plate convergence, the surface is lifted, folded and deformed.<sup>3</sup> Both continental collision and subduction (a process in which one plate dives under the other) have created mountains with distinctive landscapes, which can be clearly distinguished from the flat surrounding plains. (Figure 1)

Fig.1 Physical geography of mountain & photo of Mountain Range



In addition to its physical landscape, the mountain is the central element of a mountain ecosystem, in which it provides water for people living near or below. Mountains, which are sources of forest and water resources<sup>4</sup>, are fundamental to the growth of fixed settlements and, eventually, the development of larger communities, towns or cities. These towns and cities are uniquely associated with the terrain and habitat, as well as relationships between human beings and the environment. The mountain, therefore, sets out a knowledge of the cultural landscape, both physical and abstract, which people in the group take together to create prosperity and social development.<sup>5</sup>

The important physical and ecological features of the mountains make them important geophysical settings of many cultural values of human societies. A mountain can reflect the cultural identity of an area. The local population may worship the mountain as a god, take the mountain in place, worshipping spirits on the mountain and the mountain's ordination. This is classified as ecological spirituality knowledge, which signifies the importance of the ethical, moral and religious approach to multi-dimensional ecological issues.<sup>6</sup> This applies especially to the issue of sacred space with the mountain as its key element.

In the paradigm of faith in the holy mountain, the cultural influence of Indian ideas and beliefs was first exported to Southeast Asia where it incorporated the local beliefs of indigenous peoples, who had a traditional religious approach to the sacredness of mountains. That led subsequently to the creation and emergence of specific knowledge and a paradigm in the design of sacred mountains in Southeast Asia culture.

### 3. Sacred mountain beliefs in Asian cultures and the transmission of those beliefs to Southeast Asia

The influence of Indian civilization led to the creation of a range of knowledge, views and worldviews that provided the philosophical and consequential bases for the major belief systems that prevail in Southeast Asian culture today. Indian civilization also applied concepts of political science to kingship which influenced the ancient kingdoms of Southeast Asia. These views also reflected the beliefs of indigenous cultures (which themselves had been influenced by India) in which sacred mountains in the form of natural mountains and man-made representational architectural styles took form, and range from philosophy, epics (Ramayana & Mahabharata), cosmology and the Vastu Shastra, which is the principal treatise guiding the creation of the architecture.

All this knowledge was fundamental to the concept of the sacred mountain paradigm in Southeast Asian culture. From this research study, we can summarize the sacred mountain paradigm in Asian culture in a series of concepts as follows:

<b>Indian Philosophy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The mountain is a part of nature, meaning the mountain is made sacred by the power of nature. (<i>excerpt from The Vedas</i>)</li><li>- There is a belief in the god of the mountain or the personification of the great god. (<i>excerpt from The Vedas</i>)</li><li>- The sanctity of the mountain demands worship. (<i>excerpt from The Vedas</i>)</li><li>- The mountain is part of Brahma, which is the world's origin, the beginning and the ending of the world (<i>excerpt from the Upanisad</i>)</li></ul>
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<b>Ramayana and Mahabharata Epics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The true nature of the mountains in regard to the geographical areas of India and Sri Lanka.</li> <li>- Spirit of the Mountain Spirit</li> <li>- Mount Meru, the centre of the universe</li> <li>- Mount Kailash, the residence of the gods.</li> <li>- The residence or location of the city of the gods.</li> <li>- The Metaphor for mountain god</li> <li>- Mountain as the weapon of the gods.</li> <li>- Mountain as a place of Buddhist practice.</li> <li>- The mountain as a source of water and sacred rivers.</li> </ul>
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<b>Cosmology</b> <i>(Buddhist, Hindu and Jain Cosmology)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mount Meru is the centre of the universe.</li> <li>- Mount Meru is the location of the city and the residence of the great god Indra.</li> <li>- Mount Meru and other mountains in the universe have different physical characteristics in terms of size, shape and colour.</li> <li>- Mountain in the universe is the location of the city of the gods and also the residence of angels and demons.</li> <li>- Sacred mountains are often associated with rivers or oceans.</li> </ul>
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Vastusastra	<p><b>Principles of City Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Built on the mountain and close to the sea.</li> <li>- Defending the city for the mountains.</li> <li>- In Kruga Yuga, humans live with natural gods, mountains, rivers, lakes and forests. Beautiful and complete lands make the gods come to live.</li> <li>- The area for building the city is flat and surrounded by mountains and water.</li> </ul> <p><b>Principles of Prasada Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prasada refers to a multi-storey building and a place of worship. The top of the Prasada has a peak, which is called “Sikhara” meaning mountain or hill</li> </ul> <p><b>Principles of Fortress Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The fortress is protected by Daivata Durga, the god of the fortress. The mountain is considered to be a fortress known as “Giri Durga”.</li> </ul> <p><b>Principles of House Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The multi-storey house is as tall as Mount Kailash.</li> </ul>
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Finally, the concept is a template for the transmission of views of the sacred mountain paradigm to the creation of a continuum in Southeast Asian culture.

## 4. The Belief of sacred Mountain in Southeast Asian Culture

### 4.1 Sacred Mountains in Southeast Asian Hindu and Buddhist Beliefs

The unity of reality is a fundamental belief of Southeast Asian religions, which intertwines with ecology, demonstrating the fundamental belief of ecological spirituality that everything is connected to everything else, and the sanctity of nature. In India, all the features of the natural world, including rivers, mountains, wind, fire and earth became great deities, especially in Brahman-Hinduism. Buddhism adds sanctity to a non-human condition as well, called Buddha Nature.<sup>7</sup>

Hindu and Buddhist culture first arose in India and then spread to Southeast Asia. The concept of the sacred mountain is described in religious literature as a necessary feature of the cosmological plan and a major element of all religions,<sup>8</sup> which, in turn, define the sacred mountain in every detail, both abstract and concrete.

**Abstract:** Sacred mountains often appeared in the literature describing religious cosmology in the two belief systems. Each has an all-inclusive concept of the role of certain mountains as centres of the cosmological universe, and perimeter mountains of the same or different cosmology. Mount Meru and Mount Kailash are described as cosmological centres, and the residence of the mountain god; in some cases, these mountains have roles in stories about a certain prophet. In Buddhist belief, Mount Meru is the residence of Indra the king of the gods and guardian deity of Buddhism; the Chulamani Chedi which is believed to enshrine the ashes of the Buddha is located here. Mount Kailash, in contrast, is, in Hindu belief, the abode of Shiva, one of the principal deities

of Hinduism and one of the three gods of the Hindu trinity (the other two being Vishnu and Brahma).

**Concrete;** Actual or real mountains. There are three types of a sacred mountain that derive from the ideal concept as it appears in religious literature: actual sacred mountains, buildings which symbolize sacred mountains, and similar representational structures located on or near actual sacred mountains.

## 4.2 Sacred Mountains and Local Beliefs in Southeast Asia

The determination that a mountain and the surrounding area is a sacred place is actually a social process associated with magic or other supernatural power and is a cultural invention full of code space which has a symbolic role for people in a society.<sup>9</sup>

Although sacred mountains in Southeast Asia are mainly related to Buddhist or Hindu belief, their sanctity was actually established from a mixture of those religions and animist belief, known in sociology as syncretism,<sup>10</sup> a combining of different beliefs while blending practices of various schools of thought. It involves merging several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion, and in this case, involves animist beliefs in the spirits of ancestors and the natural spirits of mountains, rivers and trees.<sup>11</sup> These ancient beliefs became an inheritance sent to Southeast Asia.<sup>12</sup> Originally derived from human fears and anger they led to the notion that all natural phenomena are caused by supernatural power, first called spirits (ผี), and then later gods.<sup>13</sup>

This merger of belief systems received from outside with local belief is the major factor that encourages the cooperation for survival. In this way, belief becomes the foundation for the creation and evolution of culture and tradition, which in turn provides societal guidance.<sup>14</sup> The cultural landscape is littered

with much physical evidence of this process, as are oral traditions of legends and folktales. And each environment is one of the factors that led to the establishment of the city and the concept of the sacred mountain.

In reviewing much of the Southeast Asian literature that relates to sacred mountains, which in turn led to the creation of a cultural landscape, it becomes clear that the structural perspective of one is similar to the other. Ancestor spirits,<sup>15</sup> local gods,<sup>16</sup> guardian spirits, hermits, sacred animals including nagas, white elephants, white crows, etc., and legendary or historical heroes worshiped by the local population all feature in this perspective and are believed to have power to protect or bless the town and its people as sacred Hindu or Buddhist objects.

After the Indian religions spread to Southeast Asia, they integrated with local belief, as reflected in stories such as that of the Buddha travelling to earth (ตำนานพระเจ้าเลียบโลก). In this legend, the Buddha travelled over many mountains, frequently leaving his footprint or constructing Dhatu-chedi for the enshrinement of his relics.<sup>17</sup> Constructions on the mountains for the Buddha or the Hindu gods to rest was made according to the cosmology as well as beliefs in sacred objects coming from local religious legends.

The concept of the sacred mountain that spread to Southeast Asia is represented in the landscape by an actual mountain, symbolically in architecture, and combines with buildings which themselves symbolized the mountain.

## **5. The Paradigm of the Sacred Mountain Designs in Southeast Asian Culture**

Beliefs in sacred mountains in Southeast Asia can be expressed both in natural mountains and in representational architecture.

The design of such man-made structures combines the ecological spirituality of geographic landscapes and mountain ecology with certain architectural design principles that imitate real or mythological mountains deemed sacred. The knowledge underlying these techniques first arose in ancient India, where it became part of Indian philosophy and literature, particularly in the two great epic prose-poems, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and incorporated in Hindu and, later, Buddhist cosmology. These concepts and those in the Vastu Sastra architectonic spread to Southeast Asia where they combined with indigenous beliefs in mountain spirits or guardians, preserving in unique Southeast Asian culture notions of the sanctity of landscape or space.

From this study, certain paradigms and conceptual frameworks of sacred mountain design, both natural and representational, can be identified; these are as follows:

- 1) The existence of Mount Meru, the universal centre of both Hindu and Buddhist cosmology
- 2) The existence of Mount Kailash, the residence of Shiva, the principal mountain deity
- 3) Animistic beliefs in the mountains, worship of gods and of great natural power
- 4) Awe and respect regarding volcanoes as representing great natural power
- 5) Representations of sacred mountains in the city centre, the Prasada according to Vastusastra Hindu beliefs and the Mahathat Chedi in Buddhist
- 6) Lingabhavarta
- 7) The sacred mountain in literature
- 8) The sacred mountain in a ceremony
- 9) From the mythical sacred mountain to its replica
- 10) Sacred mountain, the residence of the king

## 5.1 The existence of Mount Meru, the universal centre of both Hindu and Buddhist cosmology

The sacred mountain design paradigm in Southeast Asian culture is related to Hindu and Buddhist cosmology. In the beliefs of local peoples, Mount Meru is the centre of the universe and is depicted as such in the arts, including painting, sculpture, architecture, literature and the performing arts. The relationship of the earth to the universe, as represented in sacred nature all around them, has become an integral part of the Southeast Asian belief system.

A model of the universe, however, is essential for people to understand the various realms and those which they inhabit. Mankind normally exists on Kama Bhumi, which is one of three worlds, the other two being Rupa Bhumi and Arupa Bhumi. Kings of this world were expected to be so along the lines of the Cakravartin cult or the great emperor and considered the king to be a human incarnation of a god, who would rule his kingdom according to the principles of the Devaraja cult and the good king or Dhamma Raja cult. These were the virtues of the god-kings.

Their human subjects, however, live in Karma Bhumi and revere the sacred mountain as an avatar of the king. Mountains, of course, are raised above the land, which led to the Khmer concept of the *Devaraja* and, as a substitute, the *linga*. Examples of this are the Golden Linga on Mount Kulen, set in the reign of Jayavarman II or Prasat Phnom Bakang on the peak of Mount Bakang. The ritual practices surrounding these things led to the construction of Prasat Giri as a model of the sacred mountain and the symbolic location of the king. (Figure 2)

As we have noted, the paradigm of sacred mountain design was to follow the form of Mount Meru, as the symbol of the universal centre. Physical features can be found on natural mountains and in various Hindu and Buddhist architecture, most



Fig. 2 Mount Phnom Kulen and Prasat Phnom Bakang, Siem Reap Province  
**Source:** (Left) Google Map, *Phnom Kulen*, accessed September 2018, available from <https://www.google.co.th/maps/place/Phnum+Kulen/> (Right) Claude Jacques and Michael Freeman, *Angkor Cities and Temple* (Bangkok: River books, 1997), 80.

particularly in the construction of Prasada which Hinduism recognizes as the icons of Mount Meru. Stupa design served the same purpose in Buddhism, generally taking on of two forms: that of the Dhatu Chedi (ธัตตุเจดีย์) which enshrined both royal relics and relics of the Buddha, and the Utesika Chedi (อุเทสิกะเจดีย์), which contains no relics. Forms of art and architecture in Southeast Asian cultures vary somewhat according to individual tastes and traditions, but the symbology of Mount Meru in the Hindu Prasada and Buddhist stupa and chedi remains constant.

In addition to Mount Meru, other elements in the cosmology model are often incorporated into architectural plans. Buildings which symbolize Mount Meru, for example, are often surrounded by figures representing the four cosmic continents, the complex boundaries of ocean and mountain as well as the universal wall. This can be clearly seen in the architectural plan of Cambodia's Angkor Wat and the central prang of Wat Arun Ratchawaram, located on the banks of the Chao Phraya River on the Thonburi side of Bangkok. (Figure 3)



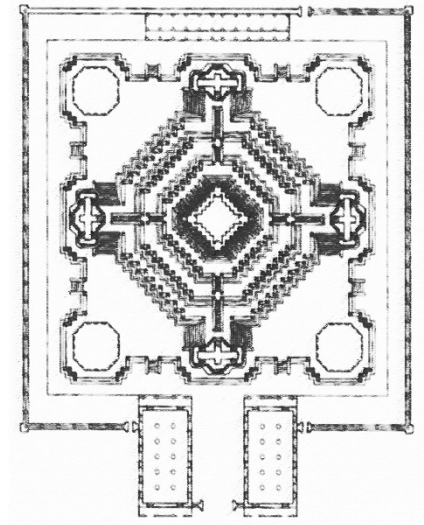
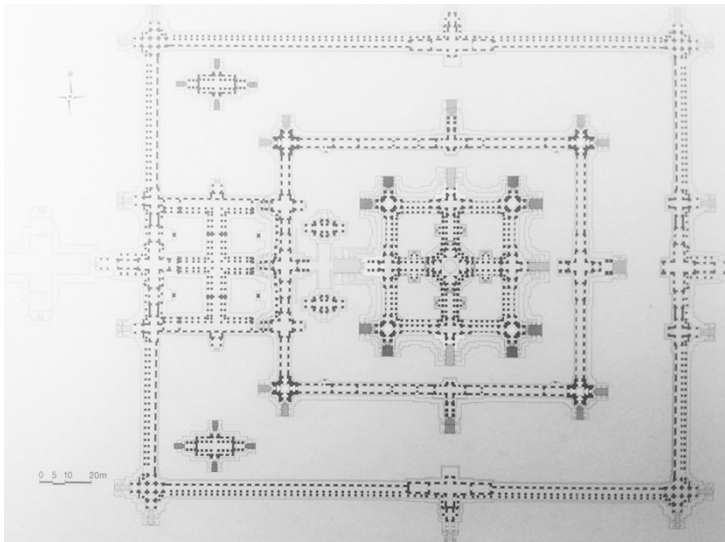


Fig.3 Angkor Wat and Wat Arun Ratchawaram Architectural Plans

**Source:** (Left) Claude Jacques and Michael Freeman, *Angkor Cities and Temple* (Bangkok: River books, 1997), 157. (Right) Stone of History, *Plan of Wat Arun*, accessed September 2018, available from <http://www.stonesofhistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Wat-Arun-Plan-Rev.jpg>

In the ancient kingdoms of Java, it was natural mountains that were more often chosen to represent Mount Meru. Mount Penangkungan served this purpose as it was the tallest mountain and surrounded by smaller mountains to represent the four cosmic continents. (Figure 4)

In addition to incorporating architectural designs which represent Mount Meru and other sacred mountains, Southeast Asian cultures frequently added the word “mount” to temple names to stress the vital importance of the sacred mountain concept such as Mount Sumeru and the Golden Mount, for example.

Colours also were chosen as representational of the sacred mountain. Gold was thought to be the primary colour of Mount Meru in both Hindu and Buddhist tradition. Finally, architectural ornaments such as the gable apex on the roofs of ordination halls are also representative of Mount Meru. Excellent examples can be seen on the Vihara of temples in Lanchang, Laos, as well as at Wat Xieng Thong in Luang Prabang. (Figure 5)

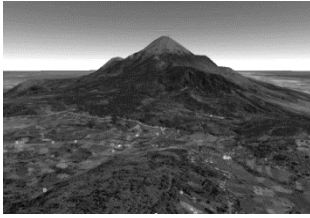


Fig.4 The Gunung Penanggungan, Eastern Java

**Source:** Google Map, *Mount Penanggungan*, accessed September 2018, available from <https://www.google.co.th/maps/place/Goenoe+ng+Penanggoengan/>

**Right:** Fig.5 Cosmological Design at Cho-Fa on the roof, Wat Xieng Thong, Luang Prabang

**Below:** Fig.6.1 Prasat Preah Vihear



Thus, we can see that the cosmological models of the universe in Southeast Asian culture emphasize the sacred mountain design of Mount Meru in both natural mountains and in architectural structures, plans and ornaments. The notion is central to the belief systems of Southeast Asia, and help inform local peoples as to their proper place in the vastness of the universe.

## 5.2 The existence of Mount Kailash, the residence of Shiva, the principal mountain deity

The paradigm of designing sacred mountains extends to Mount Kailash, the location of the Prasada which are thought to be the residences of Shiva. These structures may be situated on the mountain peak or mountainside. They frequently contain a sculpture of the Shiva Linga, the symbol of the god. They can be easily seen at Preah Vihara and the Phanom Ruang temple. (Figure 6)



Shaivism, one of the two major sects of Hinduism, is devoted to the worship of Shiva, whom devotees believe is the principal god of the mountain. The worship of Shiva transferred to a worship of the mountain's sanctity as the residence of Shiva.

The principal mountain where Shiva resides is the holy Mount Kailash. Prasada, therefore, is representational structures of that mountain, and devotees who walk to worship Shiva at a Prasada are believed, in fact, to be walking toward Mount Kailash.



**Above:** Fig.6.2 Prasat Phanom Rung

Fig. 7 (Left) Kao Luang mountain  
(Right) Doi Luang Chiang Dao

**Source:** (Left) Google Map, *Kao Luang mountain*, accessed September 2018, available from <https://www.google.co.th/maps/place/เขาหลวง/>

### 5.3 Animistic beliefs in the mountains, worship of gods and of great natural power

Prior to the arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism, Southeast Asian peoples practised traditional animistic religions. The animist believes that all of nature, and all natural things—animals, plants, rocks, rivers, weather systems and mountains—possess a distinct spiritual essence; that they are, in fact, animated and alive. In this belief system, multiple natural mountains are thought to be sacred places. There is a sense of the supernatural, evidence for which has been found in historical inscriptions, literature, legends and ritual practice. The physical features of sacred mountains represented prominent landscapes or were related to the community and village or city settings. For example, Khao Luang mountain in Thailand’s Sukhothai province is believed to be the residence of Phra Kha Poong Pee, the legendary arak of Sukhothai; Doi Luang Chiang Dao near Chiang Mai is thought of as an aspect of Chao Luang Kam Daeng, the legendary arak of the Lanna kingdoms. (Figure 7)

Although Hinduism first and then Buddhism largely supplanted the local belief systems of the indigenous populations of Southeast Asia, animism never completely disappeared but was, in many cases, simply absorbed into the new, imported faiths. Several



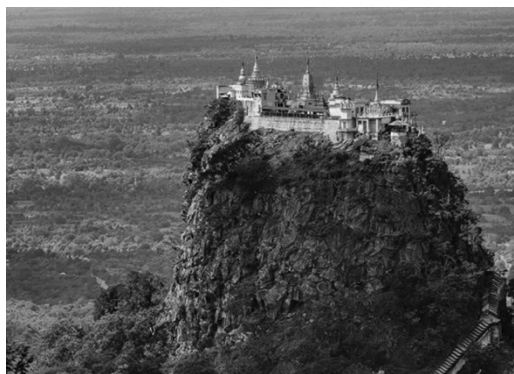


Fig. 8 Mount Popa

**Source:** Google Map, *Mount Popa*, accessed September 2018, available from <https://www.google.co.th/maps/place/Mt+Popa/>

mountains considered sacred by the old animist religions retained their sanctity under the new. Myanmar's Mount Popa is one excellent example; Buddhist stupas have been constructed on this mountain to contain important relics and, on the mountain's peak, to provide an abode for the four Nats which reside there. Doi Luang Chiang Dao in Chiang Mai retained its sanctity after the Buddha was said to have bathed on its slopes; thereafter it was called Ang Sa Lung. (Figure 8)

Hinduism also absorbed indigenous animist beliefs and mountain animism was integrated into Shaivism, which reveres Shiva as the principal, and all-powerful, mountain god. Worship of Shiva first took place only on or near the god's mountain abode, but later Prasada was constructed as representations of the sacred mountain and to house the Shiva Linga, the symbol of energy and an abstract representation of the deity. The Prasada was first constructed only on sacred mountains. Two examples of this are Prasat Bakhaeng on the peak of Mount Bakhaeng in Cambodia, and the temple of Preah Vihar, situated at the top of Mount Dangrek and which straddles the Thai-Cambodian border. This site is considered to be the "king of the mountain" or Sri Sikharasavara" (ศรีศิขเรศวร). In these and other examples we can see how the animist belief in the sanctity of mountains and other natural landscapes was transformed into the sacred

mountain concept deriving from the imported Indian religious cultures.

#### 5.4 Awe and respect regarding volcanoes as representing great natural power

Volcanoes were believed to be sacred simply because of their extreme and therefore holy natural power. Some, like Mount Merapi in Central Java and Mount Bromo in East Java, are active; others, such as Mount Popa in Myanmar and Phanom Rung mountain in Thailand, are extinct. Both are sacred and are worshipped in Southeast Asian cultures, although active volcanoes, due to their extreme and therefore holy natural power, are the more important; extinct volcanoes are sacred in other terms. Mount Popa in Myanmar, for example, is a place of worship for all 37 principal spirits, or Nats in the Burmese Buddhist pantheon, four of which (including Minng Maha Khiri, the king of the Nats) have their abode on the mountain. The Phanom Rung temple, which enshrines the Shiva Linga, is so completely associated with the worship of Shiva, that a devotee walking to the temple is said to be walking toward sacred Mount Kailash. (Figure 9)

Fig. 9 Mount Bromo,  
Eastern Java

**Source:** Google Map,  
*Mount Bromo*,  
accessed September  
2018, available from  
<https://www.google.co.th/maps/place/Mount+Bromo/>



### **5.5 Representations of sacred mountains in the city centre, the Prasada according to Vastusastra Hindu beliefs and the Mahathat Chedi in Buddhist**

The construction of representational sacred mountains in the centre of towns and cities in Southeast Asia is strongly linked to the Vastusastra, which brings the sacred mountain concept to settled areas by incorporating the Vastu Purusha mandala in almost all Hindu architectural designs. The centre of the mandala is a Brahma based on the Vastusastra scripture and the philosophy of the Vendanta scripture, which describes the origins and the end of the universe, of the world, and of the living. In these scriptures, all things borne of Brahma are in a state of emptiness; all things come from the same source and return to that same place. The Vastu Purusha Mandala, therefore, is an architectural talisman which calls the centrepiece as Brahma. This often appears physically in large-scale religious structures with bases representing the mountain at the city centre. The mountain belongs to that part of the Brahma called the Aparabhrama, or the world's origin, which describes how living beings are born, exist and are extinguished. The concept of the mountain in the city centre is also related to the idea of kingship, especially, in the Cakravatin cult, the importance of the king as the emperor or the great king of the universe. Additionally, in the Devaraja cult, the king is elevated to the status of a god in paradise who comes to rule his kingdom, much like an angel from a higher world. This led naturally to worship of the king as an incarnation of a god from a higher place. The mountain, therefore, situated above the level of the surrounding ground, was naturally thought of as the place where the Devaraj or Golden Linga was located. (Figure 10-11)

Later, this concept led to the design of the city in Buddhist culture. The central mountain used to enshrine the Devaraj in

**Left:** Fig. 10 Vastu

Purusha Mandala

**Source:** Prabhakar V.

Begde, *Ancient and*

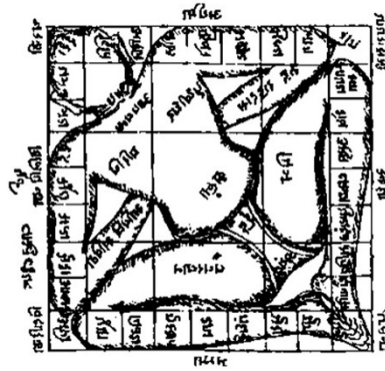
*Mediaeval Town-*

*Planning in India*

(New-Delhi: Sugar

Publications, 1978),

29, 33.



**Right:** Fig. 11 Sacred

Mountain at the city

centre

**Source:** Claude

Jacques and Michael

Freeman, *Angkor Cities*

*and Temple* (Bangkok:

River books, 1997), 38.

Hindu culture was replaced by the stupendous architecture enshrined by the Lord Buddha called Mahathat as a place where the Buddha's relics, that is, the bones of the Buddha, were entombed. Therefore, the Devaraj, the representation of a god's reincarnation, appears as the Mahathat in the centre of cities in Southeast Asia. In these cultures, a pagoda commemorating the Buddha, and containing many relics is called Dhatu Chedi, which is then enclosed in a large stupa with a high base, similar to natural mountain. This can be seen in examples in Thailand such as Wat Mahathat in Sukhothai and Wat Mahathat in Ayutthaya province. (Figure 12)

Fig.12 Sacred Mountain at the city centre

**Source:** (Left) Santi

Leksukhum, *Sukhothai*

*Art* (Bangkok: Mueang

Boran, 2006), 13.

(Right) Royal Thai

Survey Department



## 5.6 Lingabhavarta

Natural mountains with landscapes resembling the linga, or symbol of the mountain god Shiva, were determined to be sacred. Lingabhavarta is associated with the name "Bhataresavara"

(กัศเศวร) or Shiva, the lord of the mountains, and the great lord of the Shaivism branch of Hinduism. In Southeast Asia, Lingabhavarta were sacred and worshipped, so prasadas were built as residences of the god and in which to hold ceremonies worshipping the mountain. In Southeast Asian cultures, Lingabhavartas were worshipped in Phu Khao of Sedhapura in the Chenla kingdom, near present-day Champasak in Laos and in Pandudranaga of the Champa kingdom near Phan Rang, Thuan Hai, Vietnam. (Figure 13)

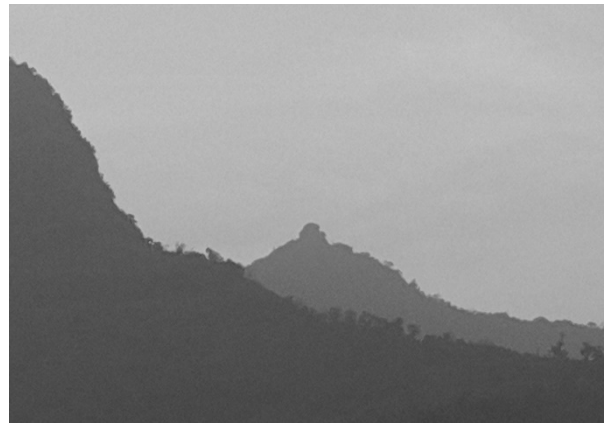


Fig. 13 (Left)  
Lingabharvata of  
Panduranga, the  
Socialist Republic  
of Vietnam  
(Right) Lingabharvata  
in Phu-Kao, Lao PDR

**Source:** Srisak  
Wallipodom

## 5.7 The sacred mountain in literature

The primary literature in the cultures of Southeast Asia can be categorized into several types. The major sorts, such as Ramayana and Mahabharata, came from India. Sacred mountain beliefs within the Ramayana demonstrate the paradigm of sacred mountain design such as can be found at Khao Samor Korn in Lopburi, Thailand. The gigantic Hanuman sculpture carries the Sapphaya mountain in the air to acquire fabulous plants, with the power to restore Lakshmana to life after being shot by Indrajit's arrow. On the way to receive treatment, a rock, called Khao Samor Korn, falls into the grassland.



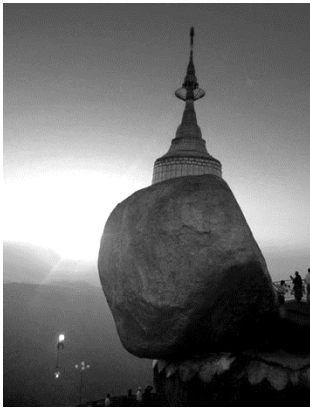


Fig. 14 Examples of the sacred mountain in literature at Khao Samor Korn and Kyaikityo pagoda

There is also a large body of Buddhist literature describing the life and arrival of the Buddha, which illustrates the legend of the Buddha travelling to the world. In this legend, the Buddha cleans himself at Ang Sa Lung, which is located on a mountaintop. Much other Buddhist folklore plays out with a backdrop of sacred mountains, for which structures such as the Kyaikityo pagoda in Kyaikityo and Pagan’s Mount Popa in Myanmar, Khao Heep in Luang Prabang, Laos and Khao Pra Bat in Chantaburi, Thailand

All represent sacred mountain designs from literature both in the major mountain model where there are significant herbs for restoring life from the Ramayana together with “Boribhoka Chedi” (บริโภคเจดีย์). These are constructions in remembrance of the Buddha’s life as well as the “Utesika Chedi” (อุเทสิกะเจดีย์), which is the Buddha’s footprint or symbol of the Buddha’s travels around the world. They depict the welcoming of Buddhist culture to the local community in the form of sacred mountains as well as creations from local mythology. (Figure 14)

## 5.8 The sacred mountain in ceremony

Ritual mountains in Southeast Asian culture are often related to royal ceremonies, due to the importance of kingship in Hindu mythology. An excellent example is the coronation ceremony. In this, the king is honoured as the devaraja, the avatar of Deva. This passed down from the ancient Indian Raja Surya ceremony and is also related to ceremonies honouring princes and princesses.

According to this belief, a representational sacred mountain must be built in order to imitate the residence of the gods in many important ceremonies, which include the coronation ceremony, the Soka ceremony, the Long Song ceremony, the Erasing of an Era ceremony and funeral ceremonies. The mountains most commonly used for this purpose are Mount Kailash, the home

of Shiva, and Mount Meru, the cosmic centre of both Hindu and Buddhist belief. Various forms of these sacred mountains are used differently in these ceremonies and other representational forms can be found in the design of the royal throne. (Figure 15-18)



Fig. 15 Pae Long Song in Long Song Ceremony

**Source:** (Left) National Archives of Thailand, Fine Arts Department  
(Right) Old Photo, Private Property

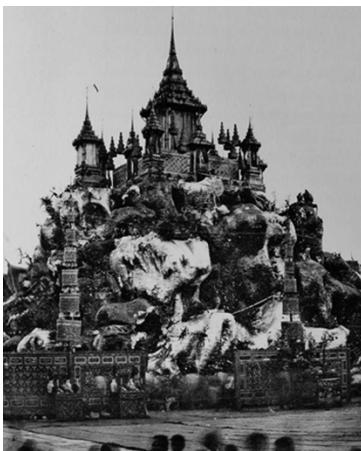


Fig. 16 The Imitation of Mount Kailash in the Soka Ceremony of Prince Chulalongkorn, 1866, The Grand Palace, Bangkok  
**Source:** Paisan Piammettawat, *Siam: Through the Lens of John Thomson 1865-66 Including Angkor and Coastal China* (Bangkok: Riverbooks, 2015).

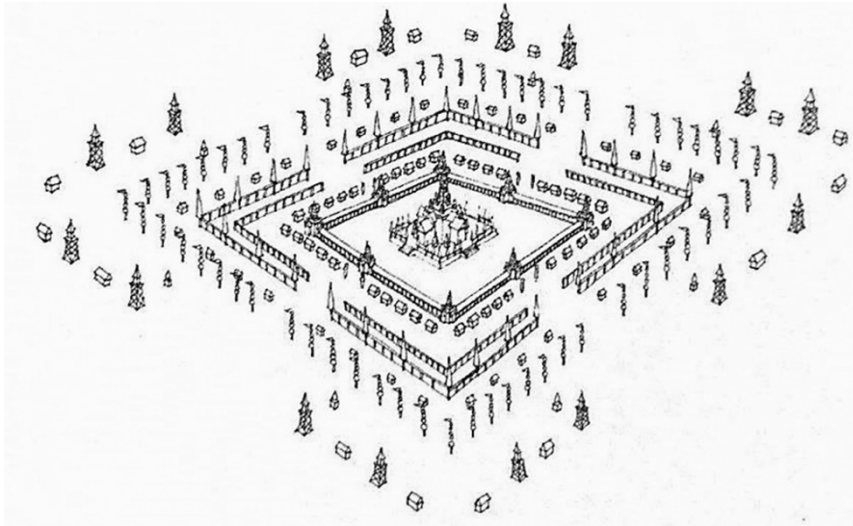


Fig. 17 An example of Phra Meru Plan that represents traditional cosmology

**Source:** Somkid Jiratassanakul, *Thai Architectural designing of the Prince Narisara Nuwattiwong* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 2013).

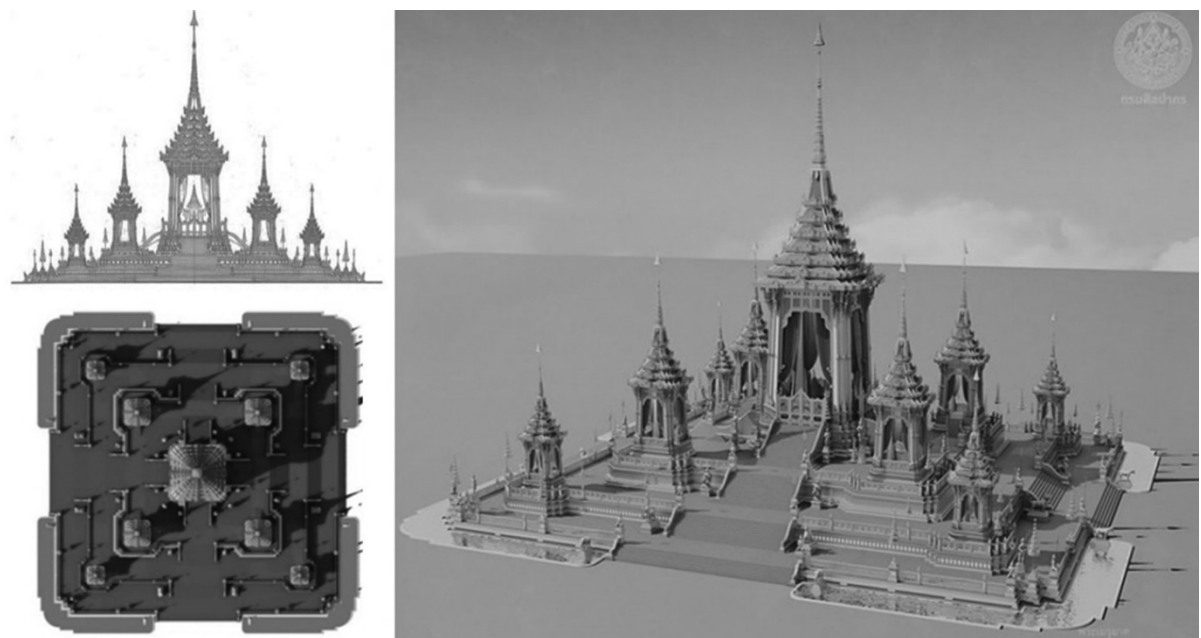


Fig. 18 Phra Merumas of H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama 9)

**Source:** Office of Architecture, Fine Arts Department.

Fig. 19 Khao Moa of  
Wat Phrayoonwong-  
sawat



### 5.9 From the mythical sacred mountain to its replica

Replicas of mythical sacred mountains in Southeast Asia can be seen in certain landscapes known as Khao Moa, or a mountain built to resemble a natural mountain. These landscapes can be found in Buddhist temples and in royal gardens. These relate to certain cosmological sacred mountains such as Mount Meru, for which their sanctity is indicated through symbols and decorations on the stupa, prasada and ubosot, and in sculptures of angels and other mythical creatures from Buddhist literature. A fine example is the Khao Moa at Bangkok's Wat Phrayoonwongsawat. (Figure 19)

### 5.10 Sacred mountain, the residence of the king

The status of the king in Southeast Asian culture has is generally accepted to be that of the god-king, based on the concepts of kingship in the Devaraja. The architectural design of royal palaces on mountains is therefore closely related to Buddhist cosmology.

The architectural forms, plans and names of buildings correspond to cosmological elements in Buddhist belief. One example is Phra Nakhon Khiri in Petchaburi, Thailand, the construction of which clearly indicates a sacred mountain in the Buddhist cosmological model, with Mount Meru as the centre of the universe. (Figure 20)

Fig. 20 Phra Nakorn Khiri, Phetchaburi

**Source:** National Archives of Thailand, Fine Arts Department



In conclusion, the paradigm of sacred mountain designs in Southeast Asia culture aims for creating knowledge in architectural history. In order to collect the knowledge of ecological spirituality of geographical environment or ecology of the mountain combines with architectural designs as a sacred mountain, local belief needs to be analyzed. The research will

provide further understanding in local belief in mountain worship in Southeast Asia and the architectures that represent the sacredness of the mountain through Indian philosophy, literature, cosmology and Vastusastra, together with local belief identity in each society in Southeast Asia.

This research aims to provide important information for further study in architectural heritage management, in terms of interpretation disciplinary, the knowledge obtains from humanity's faith that was represented in the paradigm of designs, which is one of the wisdom in architectural creation and valued as intangible cultural heritage.

- <sup>1</sup> Srisak Wallipodom, "Universal Concept of Sacerd Mountain," in *Unorthodox Attitude: Geography and City Established* (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 2000), 12-13.
- <sup>2</sup> Royal Society of Thailand, *Geography dictionary, Royal Academy version* (Bangkok: Royal Society of Thailand), 2006.
- <sup>3</sup> Potjane Sapsutti, "Cause and geographical features occurred by activator," in *Physical Geography* (Bangkok: Ramkhamhaeng University, 2000), 105.
- <sup>4</sup> Pantip Uttanavanit, *Biogeography* (Bangkok: Department of Geography, Faculty of Education, Ramkhamhaeng University, 2011), 89.
- <sup>5</sup> Ministry of culture, Office of the National Culture and Silpakorn University, Faculty of Architecture, *Cultural Landscape Management* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 2006), 15.
- <sup>6</sup> Devid Kinsly, *Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultureal Perspective*, trans. Lapaabpaan Supmantra (Bangkok: Suan Ngern Mee Ma, 2008), 37.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 134-137.
- <sup>8</sup> Wilairat Yongrot, "A study on Cosmo-Geography in the Mural Paintings of the Early Ratanakosin Period in Bangkok" (Master Thesis, Department of History of Art, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, 1997), 9.
- <sup>9</sup> Patom Hongsuwan, *Long time ago, there are story, tale, legend of life* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2013), 42.

- <sup>10</sup> The Royal Academy, *Sociology Dictionary English-Thai* (Bangkok: The Royal Academy, 1981), 319.
- <sup>11</sup> Winai Pongsripian and others, *Southeast Asia: The Melting pot of Civilizations 1* (Bangkok: Thailand research fund, 2014), 60.
- <sup>12</sup> Chuleeporn Virunha, *World of Southeast Asia: Fundamental history* (Nakornpathom: Silpakorn University Printing, 2014), 13.
- <sup>13</sup> Prani Wongthes and Sujit Wongthes, *12 months tradition in social and cultural history of human surviving* (Bangkok: Matichon, 2005), 8-9.
- <sup>14</sup> Srisak Valipodom, *12 months tradition: Changed Rituals* (Bangkok: Anthropology Centre, 2001), 9.
- <sup>15</sup> Mattana Ketkamon and Mattanee Ketkamon, trans., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia book1 from early times to c.1500* (Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund, 2009), 276.
- <sup>16</sup> Patom Hongsuwan, *Long time ago, there are story, tale, legend of life*, 50-51.
- <sup>17</sup> Tianchai Aksrondit, *Phrachao Liaplok legend: The study of social context and Lanna culture, toponym, legend, people* (Bangkok: Thailand research fund, 2009), 1-4.

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