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THAI-JAPANESE RELATIONS

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Saikaew Thipakorn and Kanokphan U-sha

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A case study of Nittaiji Temple of Japan

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and the Japanese

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Introduction

This issue of *Asian Review* focuses on Thai-Japanese relations. It is our intention to present to our readers the deeper level of this relationship. This is to emphasize that through these 600 years, the relationship shifted and changed along with the changing condition of the world. Nowadays it has expanded. Begun as state-to-state relations through rulers of each country, the relationship diffused to the people in general.

In this volume, we have two articles examining the relationship during the time of King Chulalongkorn. As Vannaporn Phongpheng shows, in his attempt to restore the tie between Japan and Thailand, the King offered Buddha relics to Japan as an extension of good will. Buddhism, since then, became the point of collaboration between Thailand and Japan. During his reign, modernization of Thailand commenced. Japanese experts were sought to assist Thailand in its development. Support from Japan came in many forms. Dollaya Tiantong studies the Japanese contribution in the development of Thai women's needlework. Hattakarn Areesilp's article on "Life during wartime and memories of World War II in the Thai novel *Chungking Sexpress*" studies the experiences of both Japanese and Thai who, suffered from the war. After the war, economic development in Thailand was stimulated by foreign direct investment. Japanese investment was one of the top contributors to Thailand's growth. Today, the concept of development has moved to include sustainable development. The article by Justin Shone examines how the sufficiency economy philosophy of King Bhumibol Adulyadej has been adopted by the Japanese and Laotian governments. Next, Mayumi Yamada and Chanathip Pharino study Japanese enterprises in Thai eco-industrial development in Amata Nakorn Industrial Estate. The article explains that now Thailand and Japan share a common value in developmental approach. Finally the article by Tippayarat Pothisitthiporn and Kiyoshi

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Introduction

Maiya on smiling facial expression may reflect the need for Japanese and Thai to deeply understand each other's culture.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to those who helped support this volume of *Asian Review*, the writers, readers, English language editor and the staff of the Publication Program. On behalf of us, producers of this *Asian Review* Vol. 29/1, we will be very pleased if knowledge and information from this book will somehow contribute to prosperous and peaceful relationship between Thailand and Japan.

Saikaew Thipakorn
Kanokphan Usha

**The cultural significance of Buddha representations
from Bangkok in a Japanese Buddhist historic
site: A case study of Nittaiji Temple of Japan¹**

Vannaporn Phongpheng

Abstract—The image of Bangkok as a “Buddhist City” in Asian countries was propagated through the cultural diplomacy of King Chulalongkorn. In the case of Japan, Nittaiji Temple in Nagoya is the representative of a Thai-Japanese relationship developed from such a Buddhist idea. Much iconic Buddhist art was created to symbolically present Thai-Japanese Buddhist relations. Today, this temple is an iconic Buddhist attraction in Nagoya City because of the enshrinement of a Buddha image and Buddha relics given by the state of Thailand as well as because of the good management by Thailand and Japan to develop this relationship. This study analyzes the outstanding features of Buddhist architecture, Buddhist artifacts and Buddhist practices in Nittaiji Temple that were created based on the concept of religious syncretism. Thailand has continuously sent Buddha representations, such as Buddha relics, Buddha images, Buddha footprints and Buddha inscriptions, to Nittaiji Temple to bind Buddhist relations between the two countries. Thailand and Japan have collaborated to create many symbols of the bilateral relationship based on the integration of contemporary Thai and Japanese Buddhist art. The concept of religious syncretism appears in the complexes of faith and practice by Buddhist visitors influenced by Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism coexisting with Shinto. This has resulted in Nittaiji Temple becoming an historic Buddhist site and is evidence of a successful international relationship bound by Buddhist cultural integration.

Keywords: Buddha representations, Thai-Japanese Buddhist relations, syncretism, Japanese Buddhist historic site

Asian Review 29(1), 2016, pp. 3–16.

Introduction

Nittaiji Temple's full title is Kakuoozannittaiji (覚王山日泰寺).² It is the only Buddhist temple in Japan that was established to strengthen the relationship between Thailand and Japan based on Buddhism in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. This temple was built through the integration of "Thai-Japanese" Buddhist features which symbolically convey the relationship between the two countries and it has also become a complex of the Thai-Japanese Buddhist faith that led to the construction of a temple that is now a famous and historic tourist site in Nagoya city. Historically, the presenting of Buddha relics from Bangkok to Japan came in the period of modernization in the 19th century after colonialism had affected the region of Asia. For Thailand it was the period of Modern Siam. Japan was in the period of the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). Siam and Japan were the only independent countries in Southeast Asia and Asia and initiated a diplomatic interaction during this time because they were confronted with the threat of colonialism by Western countries. The presentation of relics by the Buddhist state of Siam was part of King Chulalongkorn's international diplomatic policy aimed at symbolically representing the relationship between Thailand and Japan. At that time, Buddhism in Japan was declining because of the revitalization of Shinto because, as Kiyota (1966, 49) states, the "Shinto ideology was geared to inculcate nationalism." This crucial period was at the time of diplomacy, Manjiro Inagaki, who was inclined to bond "Siam-Japanese" relations for political and economic purposes based on the concept of religious syncretism so that an exception was made to receive symbols from Theravada Buddhism which was a new Buddhist sect and not popular with the Japanese.

Since that time Nittaiji Temple has been managed by nineteen Buddhist sects, not one specific sect. The monastery head is changed every three years and each sect has different mantra chanting. The construction that was initially built in the first two decades of the temple's establishment was a tower enshrining the Buddha's relics in 1918 and the Phoenix Hall or large drawing room made of cypress in 1927. After World War II, Nittaiji Temple was renovated and many temple buildings were established in a creative way, both conventional and novel creative concepts appearing in constructions such as the



Figure 1. Manjiro Inagaki (1861-1908), the Japanese minister who begged King Rama V for Buddha relics. Source: National Diet Library of Japan. Accessed October 7, 2015. <http://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/datas/16.html?c=4>



Figure 2. The urn of Buddha relics in Nittaiji Temple museum. All photos, unless otherwise indicated, are by the author, May 2014.