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Reimagining Tradition: The Revival of Lan Xang Buddhist Temples in Modern Thailand

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Abstract

This manuscript investigates the resurgence of Lan Xang Buddhist temples in Thailand, focusing on the complex interplay between traditional religious practices, cultural heritage, and modern architectural revival. It explores historical narratives and architectural evolution to highlight how these temples have adapted to changing socio-political contexts and technological advancements. Contemporary restoration efforts are analyzed to assess the challenges and successes in preserving the authenticity of these sacred spaces. The study emphasizes the significant role of Lan Xang temples in fostering cultural identity and spiritual continuity, serving as vital cultural repositories in a rapidly modernizing society. This review contributes to a deeper understanding of heritage conservation within Southeast Asia, showcasing the enduring importance of Lan Xang temples in Thai cultural and spiritual life.

Keywords: Architectural Revival; Cultural Heritage; Heritage Conservation; Lan Xang Buddhist Temples

1. Introduction

The historical landscape of Southeast Asia is rich with the cultural and spiritual heritage of Buddhism, a major religious tradition that has shaped the region's identity for centuries. Among the various influences on Buddhist practices and temple architecture in this area, the Lan Xang Kingdom (1353–1707) stands out for its profound contributions. The Lan Xang Kingdom, which translates to "million elephants," was a powerful state in what is now Laos and significantly influenced neighboring regions, including Thailand. This kingdom was pivotal in spreading Theravada Buddhism and its architectural styles across the region, leaving a lasting legacy that is evident in the design and spiritual practices of many Buddhist temples in Thailand today.

The architectural and spiritual heritage of Lan Xang is especially embodied in the Buddhist temples that have survived or been revived in modern Thailand. These temples are not just places of worship but are also custodians of the region's rich history, culture, and artistry. The architectural designs of Lan Xang temples are distinguished by their intricate carvings, stupas, and sculptures, which narrate the teachings of Buddhism and the kingdom's historical narratives. This unique blend of spirituality and artistry underscores the significant role these temples have played in the cultural and religious life of the region.

The purpose of this review is to explore the revival of Lan Xang Buddhist temples in modern Thailand, tracing their historical roots, examining their architectural and spiritual significance, and understanding the contemporary movements aimed at preserving these sacred spaces. By doing so, this manuscript aims to provide insights into how the revival efforts are not only about preserving ancient architecture but also about reinvigorating the spiritual and cultural practices that these temples have traditionally supported. The scope of

this review encompasses the historical evolution of Lan Xang Buddhist temples, their architectural features and symbolism, contemporary revival efforts, and the challenges and prospects facing these historical monuments in the modern era.

The revival of Lan Xang temples in modern Thailand is a testament to the enduring influence of the kingdom's Buddhist traditions and architectural heritage. As noted by Suksawasdi (2019), the architectural design of Thai and Mon Buddhist temples in Sam-Khok district, though slightly transformed from the royal temples, retains the essence of Lan Xang's spiritual and architectural legacy. This ongoing revival, therefore, not only preserves the physical structures but also perpetuates the spiritual practices, artistic expressions, and community engagements that these temples have fostered for centuries [Suksawasdi, 2019].

2. Historical Context

- Origins of Lan Xang Buddhism and its spread to Thailand.
- Evolution of temple architecture from the Lan Xang period to the present.
- The role of temples in the socio-political landscape of Lan Xang and early Thai kingdoms.

3. The Revival of Lan Xang Temples in Modern Thailand

- Contemporary movements and initiatives aimed at reviving Lan Xang temples.
- The role of the Thai government, religious institutions, and local communities.
- Case studies of recently restored or reconstructed Lan Xang temples.

4. Architectural Elements and Symbolism

- Detailed examination of Lan Xang architectural features, including stupas, viharns, and murals.
- Symbolism embedded in temple art and architecture, and its relevance to modern practitioners.
- Comparative analysis with other regional Buddhist architectural styles.

5. Cultural Significance

- Lan Xang temples as centers of cultural preservation and education.
- The role of temples in contemporary religious practices and community life.
- Contributions to the understanding of Southeast Asian Buddhist traditions.

6. Challenges and Controversies

- Challenges in authentic restoration practices, including material selection and artisanal skills.
- Balancing modernization with historical accuracy and spiritual significance.
- Controversies surrounding the commercialization and tourism development of sacred sites.

7. Future Perspectives

- Potential paths for the sustainable development of Lan Xang temples.
- The role of technology and digital media in preserving and promoting temple heritage.
- Prospects for strengthening cultural and religious ties between Thailand and Laos through temple revival.

8. Conclusion

- Summary of key findings and their implications for the revival of Lan Xang Buddhist temples.
- Reflection on the role of such temples in the broader context of Southeast Asian culture and spirituality.

9. References

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