

Thai Kingship during the Ayutthaya Period : A Note on Its Divine Aspects Concerning Indra*

Woraporn Pooongpan

Abstract

This article is an initial attempt to highlight the divine aspects of Thai kingship during the Ayutthaya period, the interesting characteristic of which was an association of the king's divinity with the Buddhist and Brahman god, Indra. Thai concept of the king's divinity was identified closely with many Brahman gods such as Narayana, Rama or Siva (Isuan) but the divine aspects concerning Indra had a special place in Thai intellectual thinking as attested by ceremonies associated with the kingship recorded in Palatine Law and other sources.

Thai kingship associated with Indra was reflected in the following elements:

1. The Royal ceremonies
2. The names of Indra's residences
3. The number of the king's consorts

The article concludes that the emphasis on the king's divine being as Indra derived not only from the influence of Brahmanism on the Thai society but more importantly from the high status of Indra in Buddhist belief. This can be easily understood since Buddhism is the main religion of Thai society. While some aspects

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of kingship are derived from Brahmanic Indra because Thailand adopted several conceptions of state and kingship from India, it was the Thai Buddhist understanding of Indra as a supporter of the Buddha that had a more significant impact.

Key Words: Thai Kingship; Indra.

Introduction

The year 2006 was a great year for Thai people as it was the 60th anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's accession to the throne. Thai Government held great celebrations, especially on June 9th, the date when His Majesty King Bhumibol began his reign over the country 60 years ago. On June 9th, a million Thai people wearing yellow clothes (His Majesty the King's birthday colour) participated in the celebrations by attending His Majesty the King and the royal family in front of the Anantasamakom Throne Hall. This phenomenon reflected the significance of the king as the centre and the source of social power in every way and showed the Thai people's veneration for their king throughout Thai history. The veneration stems from faith and tradition. The Brahman-Hindu beliefs and Buddhists' beliefs defined that the king is not an ordinary person but a divine being. The belief still exists even now.

In the Ayutthaya period (or even nowadays), the divine kingship could be seen from the king's proclamation that he was both a Brahman god and the Lord Buddha. It could be seen from the royal ceremonies and the names of the kings e.g. "*Narai*", "*Ramathibodi*", "*Ramesuan*", "*Ekathotsarot*" and "*Phra Phutthachao*" (Buddha) as appeared in the Palatine Law. The following was the name designated to King Borommatrailokkanath:

"*Somdet Phrachao Ramathibodiborommatrailokkanath Mahamongkut Tepmanutwisutsuriyawong Ongphutthangkun Borombophit Phraphutthachaoyuhua*" (Winai Phongsiphian, ed. 2548 a : 63, 65)

It appears that the king (*Borommatrailokkanath* (A.D. 1448-1488)) proclaimed himself as the Lord Buddha “*Ongphutthangkun Borombophit Phraphutthachaoyuhua*” and as “*Tepmanut*” or “*sommuttidevata*” (divine being).¹ The status of divine being in the name is denoted by the name Rama. However, apart from being Rama, the king was also an incarnation of other gods such as Siva or Indra.

This article aims to focus on the king being “*Indraraja*”, which is the role rarely described in any sources, though Indra in Thai and Buddhist conception is an important god who is well known among people, even more than Narai or Siva. The study on the king being Indra in this article derives from three key elements, the royal ceremonies, the name of Indra’s residences and the number of the king’s consorts.

The Thai King as Indra in the Ayutthaya Period

Most of this study concerns the imitation of Indra in Buddhism, the main religion in Thai society. Nevertheless; some aspects of kingship are derived from Indra in Brahmanism because Thailand adopted several conceptions of state and kingship from India. However; the importance of Indra in Indian society has changed since the age of the Vedas. Indra was a greater god than others in that age. He was the god of rain and brought fertility to the earth. (King Vajiravudh 2547 : 86, 90) He brought leadership to the war between the gods and the Asura² as in *Taitiriya Brahmana*. (Spellman 1964 : 1-2) The importance of Indra’s role was reduced (Winai Phongsiphian 2548 b: 14) when Brahman Philosophy influenced Indian society. He was put in a lower rank than the three main gods (King Vajiravudh 2547 : 86-87) i.e. Brahma, Siva and Narayana (Vishnu)³ On the contrary, in Buddhist societies like Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin (Bangkok), Indra⁴ was a god with significant roles e.g. *Ongkanchaengnam* (the oath of allegiance) mentioned that Siva dwelled on Mount Kailasa⁵ but Mount Kailasa was only a lower

peak of Mount Meru⁶ where Indra dwelled. For this reason, the role of Siva was lower than that of Indra. In “*phisut dam nam phisut lui phloeng* (the ordeals by fire and water)”, Indra was named before Siva and Narayana. (Sisak Wanliphodom 2535 : 97-101) The reason behind this was that Indra was considered a supporter of Buddhism and Buddhist literature accepted Indra as the supernatural power that helped the Lord Buddha to attain enlightenment. (Winai Phongsiphian 2548 b : 19) When this characteristic is added to the old belief from the Vedas and from Brahmanic Treatises that Indra was the leader of gods and humans and gave the earth its fertility, it is enough to make Indra as the model of the kings. The Thai kingship associated with Indra⁷ could be seen from the following :

Royal ceremonies

Rajaphisek⁸ (Coronation)

Rajaphisek is an important royal ceremony to show the king's right to be the king, or to consecrate a new king.

The Thai *Rajaphisek* was influenced by Indian models. The Mahabharata (*santipabba*) stated that the coronation was the first ceremony of people because it appeared in the Vedas (Aitareya Brahmana) that the gods held this ceremony when they assumed Indra as *Thao Thewaratchomsawan*. (King Vajiravudh 2484 : 44 - 45) This conception shows that *Rajaphisek* imitated the ceremony that the gods had for Indra and it meant that this ceremony helped bolster the king's position as Indra. *Rajaphisek* also strengthened the king's right or legitimacy to reign over the country. This conception was passed on to Thai society which adopted the *Rajaphisek* as its royal ceremony as well.

The importance of *Rajaphisek* was that it signified the moment when the new king assumed complete power as the ruler of the kingdom since the new king would still only be a regent until *Rajaphisek* is performed. Some of his insignia would be reduced, for example, the royal umbrella would have only seven

not nine tiers, and his command would not be called Ongkan (royal decree). (Prince Dhani Nivat 2489 : 20)⁹ When the ceremony completed, the king would become a divine king whose command would be an Ongkan which was as sacred as the gods' command, and no one could disobey.

The details of *Rajaphisek* have been described in some other texts e.g. *Ruam rueang rajaphisek thamniam rajatrakun nai krung sayam phra rajanukit lae athibai wa duai yot chao* [Rajaphisek the tradition of Siam's royal family, including an explanation of duties and ranks] or a book titled *Phrarajaphithi Borommarajaphisek* written by Natthaphat Chanthawit and, therefore; need not be described here. However; one point that needs to be mentioned was the one regarding Indra in the *Rajaphisek* in the old *Tamra Pancharajaphisek* (five types of Rajaphisek) of the Ayutthaya period. It was said that in the *Rajaphisek* the king declared that "I am Mount Meru located as the earth pole". (Ruam rueang rajaphisek thamniam rajatrakun nai krung sayam phra rajanukit lae athibai wa duai yot chao 2546 : 3) This meant that the king had stability and firmness like Mount Meru, where Indra dwelled. Having made his declaration in the *Rajaphisek* that he was Mount Meru meant that the king was the centre of everything because Mount Meru was the core of the *chakkrawan* (the universe), and even the four great island continents¹⁰ were located around Mount Meru. Besides, it was found that even the regalia used in *Rajaphisek* were related to Indra, for example *Phra maha mongkut* (the top of Indra's paradise) signified the symbol of the highest power, *Khrueang pradap pha rattakamphon* (one kind of clothing) signified *Khao Khanthamat* (Mount Gandhamadana)¹¹, one of Mount Meru's components. *Kueak kaeo* (slippers) signified the earth underneath Mount Meru and it was where people lived. (Ruam rueang rajaphisek thamniam rajatrakun nai krung sayam phra rajanukit lae athibai wa duai yot chao 2546 : 3-4)

It can be seen that all of the king's *Borommarajaphisek* mentioned in the *Pancharajaphisek* were related to Indra. It is possible that the conception in *Pancharajaphisek* is to raise the king's position as high as Indra like in ancient India, and the Thais adopted this idea.

Indraphisek¹²

This ceremony helped emphasize the importance of Indra and demonstrated the effort to elevate the king's status as high as Indra. *Indraphisek* was one of the *Pancha rajaphisek* (Ruam rueang rajaphisek thamniam rajatrakun nai krung sayam phra rajanukit lae athibai wa duai yot chao 2546 : 1-2) which consisted of:

1. *Indraphisek*. There are three types of *Indraphisek* i.e., a) having Indra present the king with the regalia before he was the king, b) having the royal carriage stop in front of him and c) the vehicle coming from heaven.

2. *Phokhaphisek*. This ceremony is for the member of the Brahmin family which is wealthy and deserves to be king and reigns over the country and helps relieve people's suffering.

3. *Prapdaphisek*. This ceremony is for the member of the royal family who has got power to obtain victory over the enemy, who could not hurt him.

4. *Rajaphisek*. This ceremony is when the king and the queen grow old, they see their children as having the same status and could become the king with the agreement from the cousins of the four royal families (likely the family of the parents of the king and of the parents of the queen).

5. *Uphisek*. This ceremony is when the king and the queen arrange the wedding for the royal couple and reign over the country, and when a king from another country married a member of the royal family.

From these five ceremonies, it can be seen that *Indraphisek* was more special than others because the person who was consecrated by *Indraphisek* became more prestigious than the others. In the Ayutthaya period, *Indraphisek* was used on special

occasions. Prince Dhani Nivat explained that *Indraphisek* was the ceremony to enhance the status of the king as *Rajathirat* (King of the kings). (Prince Dhani Nivat n.d. : 2) There is no evidence whether it was done for all kings or not. The *Phrarajaphongsawadan chabap Luang Prasoet* (The Luang Prasoet Chronicle of Ayutthaya) mentioned the *Indraphisek* Consecration of King Mahachakkraphat that:

“C.E. 919 (B.E. 2100/ A.D. 1558) on Sunday, the first day of the waxing moon of the fourth month in the year of Snake, there was a fire in the royal palace. The *Acharyaphisek* and the *Indraphisek* were consecrated in the third month at the new palace”. (Phrarajaphongsawadan chabap Luang Prasoet 2542 : 224)

Having considered the year of his accession to the throne i.e. A.D. 1548 and the year of *Indraphisek* consecration i.e. A.D. 1558, there was a ten year gap which means that this *Indraphisek* consecration was the second coronation in his reign and was done to increase his prestige. Apart from King Mahachakkraphat, King Prasatthong was also consecrated by *Indraphisek*. He staged it together with the ceremony to delete the last year of C.E. 1000. The evidence of this consecration appeared in the poem eulogising King Prasatthong. (Kham chan sansoen phra kiatt Somdet Phraphutthachaoluang Prasatthong 2543 : 100)

It was stated that the ceremony called “churning the ocean” was held in King Ramathibodi II’s reign in B.E. 2039/A.D 1496. This may refer to the *Indraphisek* (Prince Dhani Nivat n.d. : 2) because the *Indraphisek* in the Palatine Law also mentioned *Kanchaknak duekdamban* (churning the ocean). Thus, apparently, there are the evidences of a few Ayutthayan Kings who performed this ceremony.

There are many details of the *Indraphisek* in The Palatine Law. Therefore, we may assume that the *Indraphisek* was an important ceremony.¹³ The brief details of the ceremony were as follows.

(Winai Phongsiphian, ed. 2548 a : 168-177) For the ceremony, a Mount Meru of 1 *Sen* 5 *Wa* height was erected in the middle of an open space. There Indra sits on Mount Meru, surrounded by *Mount Isindhara*¹⁴ and *Mount Yugandhara*¹⁵ of 1 *Sen* high; and there stand *Mount Karavika*¹⁶ of 15 *Wa* high and *Mount Kailasa* of 10 *Wa* high. Figures of *yaksha*¹⁷, *gandharva*¹⁸, *rakshasa*¹⁹ stand at the foot of Mount Meru. Figures of *gajasiha*²⁰, *rajasiha*²¹, lions, kylins²², chamois, elephants, cows, buffaloes, tigers, bears and gods stand on all of the mountains. On Kailasa sits a figure of Siva and *Umabhagavati*.²³ On the top of Mount Meru is a figure of Indra. Figures of *Asura* are in the middle of Mount Meru; Narayana sleeps on the water at the foot of Mount Meru, and a seven-headed *naga* encircles Mount Meru. Outside in the open space stand *asuras*. Lictors are dressed as 100 *asuras* and royal pages represent 100 *devata*²⁴. There are *Bali*²⁵, *Sukhreep/Sugriva*²⁶, *Mahajambhu*²⁷, and a row of 103 monkeys. They pull the ancient *naga*: *Asura* pull the head, the *devata* pull the tail, and the monkeys are at the end of the tail. The Palatine Law gives the details that the ceremony lasted twenty-one days, and different ceremonies were conducted on each day e.g. pulling the ancient *naga* on the fifth day, making three pools of sacred water, a three-headed elephant, a white horse, and a king of oxen on the sixth day. Also Siva, Narayana, Indra and *Visvakarma* bear utensils for following the custom of offering a blessing. On the tenth day, they offer the twelve treasuries; on the eleventh day they offer the taxes; on the twelfth day they offer the city. On the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first days, gold and silver flowers are strewn. The king gave alms all around the city after the ceremony.

The details of the *Indraphisek* reflected two important meanings which are related to each other. They are the importance of Indra and the importance of the *Indraphisek* in conferring divinity on the king as the highest ruler in the kingdom. (Winai Phongsiphian 2548 b: 20)

The importance of Indra: From the details of the ceremony, it is found that Mount Meru, Indra's residence, was higher than Mount Kailasa, Siva's residence and Vishnu's residence was at the foot of Mount Meru. This means that Indra was the most important god above others in Brahmanism. (Sisak Wanliphodom 2535 : 97, 104) Churning the ocean was a Brahman legend related to Indra. It was told that *Durvasa*²⁸ put a curse on Indra that made the gods lose to asura in a war, so the gods went for help from Vishnu. Vishnu suggested that the gods negotiate with asura for a truce and that they churn the ocean for the amarita water²⁹ which made the drinker immortal. They used *Mount Mandara*³⁰ as a tool for churning the ocean. *Mandara* was tied by *Vasuki*³¹ as a rope. While they were churning, *Mandara* had sunk to the ocean so Vishnu incarnated as a giant turtle to support *Mandara*.³² Churning the ocean caused the appearance of several magical things such as *surbhi*, *ucchaisarvas*, *airavata*, *kaustubha*, *parijata* and *apsara*. (Manee-pin Phromsutthirak 2546 : 110)³³ Imitation of churning the ocean in the form of pulling the ancient *naga* used as the main ceremony of *Indraphisek* (even magical things occurred from churning the ocean e.g. a three-headed elephant, an albino horse, *tara (dara)* were also mentioned) may aim to show the power of Indra (the king) to conquer the asura (enemies and bad things). (Suphaphan na Bangchang 2535 : 81) It may be a symbol of the king's consecration to rule over the world like Indra, who drank *amrta* and regained his power, conquered the asura, expelled them from heaven and reigned over the gods on Mount Meru again. (Sisak Wanliphodom 2535 : 97, 103) It may also aim to show that the king had divine power. (Suchit Wongthet 2535 : 154) However, no matter whether there is a hidden meaning in the churning the ocean or not, the important thing is that it imitated the activities of Indra who was a role model for this world's kings.

Indraphisek and divine kingship: *Indraphisek* helped confer divinity on the king in the following manners, 1) supporting the status of the king as Indra through churning the ocean, 2)

confirming the king's status as an incarnation of Vishnu through *Bali* and *Sugriva*'s churning of the ocean (a row of monkeys helped Rama fight *Ravana*) and 3) the ceremony in which Siva, Vishnu, Indra and *Visvakarma* bore food to offer a blessing (Sisak Wanliphodom 2535 : 104), the same objective as the nobles offering popped rice and flowers to the king. For the Brahmanic blessing, *Thao Phaya*'s (high-ranked noble) blessing, offering the twelve treasuries, offering taxes, offering the city and making three pools of sacred water, the objective was close to that of *Borommarajaphisek* which meant an offer of objects and the city to the king (making three pools of sacred water may be an imitation of the oath of allegiance) (Suphaphan na Bangchang 2535 : 81) 4) giving alms, and allowing for a month of theatricals demonstrated the king's kindness (Sisak Wanliphodom 2535 : 104) and they also confirmed the king's prosperity. Going around the city by royal carriage has the same meaning as *Liapphranakon* (the State Progress) in *Borommarajaphisek* (Prince Dhani Nivat n.d. : 6) 5) the period of time to hold *Indraphisek* which lasted twenty-one days, excluding one month of theatricals, showed that much was expended on it, so the king who held *Indraphisek* had to have a lot of power and prestige. It could therefore be assumed from the above that *Indraphisek* helped confer divine status on the king.

However; it should be noted that the Thai *Indraphisek* was quite different from *Indraphisek* in Aitareya Brahmana because in the Brahman conception, the king had to take the oath before the consecrating priest that "from the night of my birth, to that of my death, for the space between these two, my sacrifice and my gifts, my palace, my good deeds, my life and my offspring, mayest thou take if I play thee false" (Sarva Daman Singh 1985 : 90) but there was no such practice in the Thai *Indraphisek*. It was assumed that Ayutthaya adopted only the name (which related to Indra) but retained little of the practice. (Wales 1931 : 122) There was not much difference between them in terms of the objective. The Thai

king consecrated *Indraphisek* in order to bolster his position as *Rajathirat* while in the Brahman conception, if the king was consecrated by *Indraphisek*, he would win all battles, attain distinction and so on. (Gonda 1957 : 36)

Phra Meru Ceremony (Cremation)

This is another ceremony to present the king as Indra because most of the utensils and the construction in which was placed the king's corpse imitated Mount Meru. It could imply the corpse was Indra. It is true that Mount Meru was the axis of the *chakkrawan* in both Brahmanic and Buddhist conceptions and Mount Kailasa, Siva's residence, was located nearby Mount Meru so the imitation of the use of Mount Meru in this ceremony may mean that the dead king was just a Brahman god. This cannot be denied. However, the Buddhist conception that Mount Meru was Indra's residence is more reasonable.

Objects and construction imitating Mount Meru are as follows:

Phra Kot (Urn) – When the king died, his body would be cleaned and put in the urn. *Khamhaikan khunluang wat pradusongtham* (the testimony of *khunluang wat pradusongtham*) agrees with *Khamhaikan khunluang ha wat* (the testimony of *khunluang ha wat*). It was stated that the urn was decorated beautifully i.e. with *Lai thep phanom* (Thep phanom pattern), *Phrom phak* (the four faces of Brahma) with *garuda* and *singha* (animals that live at the foot of Mount Meru) at its base. (Khamhaikan Khun Luang Wat Pradoosongtham 2534 : 27; Khamhaikan chao Krung Kao Khamhaikan Khun Luang Ha Wat Phrarajaphongsawadan Krung Kao chabap Luang Prasoet 2502 : 402-403) It was to show that the body in the urn was not that of an ordinary person but a person who had a divine status. In other words, the king was a god, most likely Indra.

Phra Meru (the funeral pyre) – It may be clearly seen that the funeral pyre was modeled on Mount Meru, for example the one built for King Borommakot had the following characteristics: “a big and high Meru covered with gold leaves

with glass decorative designs and three step tiers. It was about 45 *Wa* high.³⁴ Its lid was decorated with red paper painted as steps (tiers) of *naga*, *garuda*, *asura*, gods, Indra and Brahma, like on Mount Meru. The inside of its lid was painted as silver and gold *Sumontha* (a kind of flowers). The funeral pyre had eleven steps of *Naban* (pediments) and *Muk*. Its upper part was covered with gold leaves with glass decorative designs. There were *kinnara* and *asura* at its four doors. The central Meru was covered with gold leaves. The columns of the catafalque where the urn was put were also covered with gold leaves with glass decorative designs. There were main Merus at the four corners which were also covered with gold leaves. There were figures of gods, *vidyadhara*³⁵, *gandharva* (angel musician), *garuda*, *kinnara*³⁶, *gajasiha*, *rajashiha*, lions, dragons, *heras*, *naga*, elephants, horses, chamois and other animals placed around Meru, enclosed by a lattice *rajavat* fence....” (Khamhaikan chao Krung Kao Kamhaikan Khun Luang Ha Wat Phrarajaphongsawadan chabap Luang Prasoet 2502 : 404-405)

From the characteristics of this Meru, we can see that it was an imitation of Mount Meru, the centre of the chakkrawan both in terms of the height of Meru (the earth was also heaped up in order to build up Meru’s height as though it was a mountain)³⁷ and the area around it e.g. *Mount Satta Paribhanda*³⁸, the territory of the gods, *asura*, *garuda* and *naga* or *Himavanta*, the residence of *Vidyadhara*, *Gandharva*, *Kinnara* and animals from the forest *Himavanta*. Even the four Merus were likely to represent the four great island continents (Sumet Chumsai na Ayutthaya 2528 : 62) around Mount Meru.

The imitation of Mount Meru in the construction of *Phra Meru* has a meaning behind it, which it was related to the divine being of the king. This is because Mount Meru was the residence of Indra in the Buddhist conception. Therefore the king’s corpse in the *Phra Meru* was a reference to Indra. Meanwhile the cremation at *Phra Meru* can also mean that the king went to heaven at

Mount Meru. (Somphop Phirom 2539 : 40; Khrueng prakop phra raja-itsariyayot rajayan rajarot lae Phra Merumat 2539 : 216)

Rajarot or Phra maha pichai rajarot (The Great Funeral Car)³⁹ also imitated Mount Meru. (Khrueng prakop phra raja-itsariyayot rajayan rajarot lae Phra Merumat 2539 : 195)⁴⁰ It was used to move the urn from the Grand Palace to *Phra Meru* at the Royal Cremation Ground. The use of the great funeral car which imitated Mount Meru to move the corpse was to announce that the king had the status of a god who dwelled on Mount Meru and was going to go back to the heaven on Mount Meru.

The state ceremonies for the kingdom's fertility.

The Indian Arthashastra mentioned that the king had a responsibility to take care of the fertility of his kingdom. He had to ensure there was enough water and that it rained in the rainy season. In case there were any crises, the king on the advice of Brahmins must perform worship and ceremonies in order to avert national calamities and to promote the public welfare. (Kautilya 1992 : 116, 118; Choudhary 1971 : 73; Gonda 1956 : 154; Gonda 1957 : 24) These responsibilities might have derived from the Brahman belief that the king was created from particles of eight gods and one of them was Indra, who was not only the leader of gods and humans, but also the god of fertility who created rain to help plants grow. (Olivelle 2004 : 176-177; Gonda 1956 : 64-65)

The responsibilities of the Thai king for the kingdom's fertility were mentioned in several *dharma* e.g. *Chakravartivritta* said that the cakkavartin should help the wealthy and the rural people (all citizens) by giving them rice, ploughs and cows or *Sasamedha*. The first *dharma* of *Sangahavattu* (four Buddhist virtues) mentioned that the king must have the capability to support agricultural well-being. (Mahamakut Buddhist University 2525 : 132-133; Winai Phongsiphian 2548 b: 23, Khamphi saratthasangkhaha lem sam n.d. : 671) Whether such responsibilities were from the conception of Indra's characteristics or not is not clear but some ceremonies e.g.

Dhanya-daha or Burning of the Ears of Padi for public welfare and for protection of plants (Nang Nopphamat rue Tamrap Thao Si Chulalak 2528 : 301-302; King Rama V 2542 : 96) which was the ceremony *Phraya Indra Kumara* performed on behalf of the king⁴¹ encouraged the belief (originating from India) that Indra was the god of fertility. Although the name “*Indra Kumara*” may only sound similar to *Phra Chanta Kumara* whose duty in *Khamhaikan Chao Krung Kao* was as temporary king (Khamhaikan chao Krung Kao Kamhaikan Khun Luang Ha Wat Phrarajaphongsawadan chabap Luang Prasoet 2502 : 265-266), the similarity of the name and duty is still worth thinking about.

The state ceremonies to support Buddhism

As mentioned earlier, the king had the status as Buddha, Indra, Vishnu and Siva. As Buddha and Indra, the king had to sustain Buddhism and make people believe firmly in the moral codes. I think the king had to do this duty partly because he was Indra who was the supporter of Buddhism, although it may be more because of the king’s Buddha status. The king could perform this duty in two ways.

Firstly, he could build Buddhist monasteries, support monks and maintain the religious ceremonies. To build monasteries was to make monasteries as religious places where people could make merit (although the main objective may be for his own merit). To support monks was to preserve Buddhism and give them the opportunity to study *dharma* and teach it to people. To maintain the religious ceremonies e.g. making merit during *Khao phansa* (Buddhist retreat) period, presenting the yellow robes to the monks was for the king as a Buddhist a way to make merit (to express himself that he was solicitous of Buddhism). This duty showed that the king took care of the moral codes for people so that he, or the state could lead people to Nirvana. (Nidhi Aeusrivongse 2523 : 23-65)

Secondly, the king could use the law e.g. *Phrarajakamnot Kao* (Old Royal Orders) article 65 which stated that *Chao phraya*,

Phraya maha raja khru, Phra luangmueang, Chao rajanikun, Khun Muen Phan Thanai must teach their descendants not to commit adultery with other men's wives (this is because people did not care about *Dasa Kusala-karma* or the ten principles of an honest man) or study. If they had studied it but still committed adultery with other men's wives, they would have been fined a lot more than before e.g. *Chao phraya na muen ek u (Udom)* to be fined 30 *changs*, *Chao phraya na muen mo (matthayom)* to be fined 25 *changs*, *Khun muen na* 1000, 800, 600 to be fined 6 *changs*. Another example was *Phrarajakamnot Mai* (New Royal Orders) article 33 which stated that nobles must preserve *Dasa Kusala-karma* i.e. *Kaiyakarma 3 Vacikarma 4 Manokarma 3* (good deeds by behaviour, words and thought). Whoever did not follow the *Dasa Kusala-karma* must be punished. (Phrarajakamnot Kao and Phrarajakamnot Mai 2529 : 307-310, 411-415)

To give audience halls the names of Indra's residences

The evidence from *Phrarajaphongsawadan* states that the king in the Ayutthaya period named some royal audience halls "*Phaichayon maha prasat*" or "*Chakkrawat phaichayon maha prasat*". (Phraraja phongsawadan Krung Si Ayutthaya chabap Phan Chanthanumat (Choem) 2542 : 364, 379) This suggests that the king declared himself as Indra because *Phaichayon* was the residence of Indra located on Mount Meru. The conception of naming the palace buildings in line with Indra's residence was continued until the time of King Rama I of the Chakri Dynasty. It can be seen from the throne hall built in 1784, whose name was "*Ammarindrathisek Maha Prasat*".⁴²

Apart from those of the audience halls, the name of the king e.g. King Indradhiraja (*Chao Nakhon-in*) (B.E. 1952-1967/ A.D.1409-1424) also suggested that he was an incarnation of Indra.

In the Laws of the Three Seals, there is a most important document named "*Lak Indabhasha*" which means the doctrine of Indra. This document was considered as a manual of ethics for

judges. Indeed, punishing the offenders or maintaining justice in society was the duty of the king and was also one of Indra's duties. When the king delegated Indra to teach morality to judges, so to speak, it could mean that the king was thus performing Indra's role. The king's assumption of Indra's role could be clearly seen when the throne hall was named "*Ammarinwinitchai* (Indra's judgement)". (Winai Phongsiphian 2548 b : 21)

The number of the king's consorts

The Palatine Law mentioned "the four consorts of the king" who were *Akkhra Mahesi*, *Akkhra Raja Thewi*, *Raja Thewi* and *Akkhra Chaya*. (Winai Phongsiphian, ed. 2548 a : 146) The four consorts of the king may relate to the four consorts of Indra i.e. *Sudharma* who was on the left side of Indra, *Sujada* on the right side, *Sunanda* on the back side and *Sucitra* on the front side of him. (Photchananukrom sap wannakhadi thai samai Sukhothai Traiphumikatha 2544 : 176)⁴³ Although it cannot be confirmed whether the number of the king's four consorts was related to the number of Indra's consorts or not, performing Indra's roles may make this conception impossible. Actually this conception appeared in Burma too i.e. the king of Burma had four chief and four vice consorts. This was in line with the four main directions and the four sub directions. In addition there was evidence that the residence of his consorts encircled around the palace. This helps emphasize the role of the king of Burma as the centre of *cakkavala* and representative of Indra.

In Burma, there was another tradition that emphasized Indra's role distinctively. It was that each city gate faced the directions of the provinces or vassal states of the Burmese empire. When adding 32 rulers of the provinces and vassal states to the king himself, who had the royal court in the middle of the world, it was in line with the number of 33 gods who dwelled at the summit of Mount Meru and had Indra as their king. (Heine – Geldern 1956 : 5) For Ayutthaya, it is possible to interpret the imitation of Indra's

empire as well. Ayutthaya had 35 vassal states i.e. 20 vassal states, 8 *Mueang Phraya maha nakhon*, 5 *Mueang luk luang* and 2 *Mueang lan luang*. However; Phitsanulok and Kamphaengphet were included in both *Mueang Phraya maha nakhon* and *Mueang luk luang*. Therefore; if they were taken out and the capital was added, the total would be 34, which was different from Indra's empire in the Burmese conception. Although the numbers are closely related, it is difficult to assume that this is evidence of Indra's empire on earth because vassal states or even *Mueang Phraya maha nakhon*, *Mueang luk luang* and *Mueang lan luang* changed in each reign. (Please see more examples of the list of Hua Mueang (provinces) and vassal states in the reign of King Narai in La Loub re 2510 : 364-365; Smithies and Dhiravat na Pombejra 2002 : 128-130)

Conclusion

It can be seen that the concept of Thai kingship as imitated by the Palatine Law held the king's status as Indra on earth. There are a lot of indications e.g. naming the king "Indaraja", naming the audience halls or *prasat* in line with the throne of Indra or performing some royal ceremonies e.g. *Borommarajaphisek*, *Inthraphisek* which was an effort to elevate the king's status as though he were Indra. Holding Phra Meru ceremony for the dead king helps emphasize the belief that the king was Indra as well.

The conception of the king being Indra may not be difficult even for ordinary people to understand because they recognized Indra (meaning Indra in Buddhist conception) as a benevolent god who gave help. In *Bot lakhon nok* (a dance drama performed by an all male cast) of the Ayutthaya period, it was Indra who always helped the main character in case he suffered injustice. For example when *Sang Thong*⁴⁴ did not take off the mask and consequently making *Rotchana* (*Sang Thong*'s wife) suffer for a long time because she was banished from her palace, it was Indra who challenged *Thao Samon* (*Rotchana*'s father) to a match of

Ti Khli (a sport similar to polo) in order that *Sang Thong* would slip the mask off to help his father-in-law, or in *Suwannahong*⁴⁵, Indra transformed *Ketsuriyong* to be a Brahman and gave her a weapon to protect herself, and then gave her magic water to recover *Suwannahong*'s life.

The conception of Thai kingship as Indra is from Indian culture in the Veda when Indra was the most distinctive god. An interesting thing is that Indra became less important when Brahmanism had influenced over Indian society. On the contrary, Indra became a significant god in Buddhism. It is obvious that in Buddhist society like Thai, the king considers Indra as so important that he plays "Indraraja". This clearly reflects an adoption and adaptation of Indian culture in order to harmonize with the local need and culture. However; a lot of further research should be done in order to understand the role of Indra from the Veda to the Brahman-Hindu period or in the Buddhist concept. The more deeply the studies are done, the concept of Indraraja and its adoption and adaptation will be more clearly understood.

Notes

¹ The word “sommuttidevata (divine being)” appeared in *Traiphum Phra Ruang* [The Three Worlds according to King Ruang] and the Old Royal Decrees article 50 of the Three Seals Law “Furthermore, the kingdom belonged to the king because he was the divine being...”

² Asura is a kind of non-human creature; they are the enemies of Devata. However, in Thai, the word “Asura” usually means Yaksa.

³ Brahmanism which developed after the Vedic age believed that Brahma was the leader of the gods. Hinduism, which developed from Brahmanism, believed that the 2 most important gods were Vishnu and Siva. More details can be found in (Chanchai Phak-athikhom 2532 : 192-198).

⁴ *Cakkavaladipani* mentioned the birth of *Thao Sakka* (Indra) in the Buddhist conception that before the Lord Buddha was born, *Thao Sakka* was born as a human named *Makha* and behaved as a Bodhisattva all his life. When he was dead, he was born in the *Tavatinsa* (the second heaven where Indra dwells) as *Thao Sakka* (Krom Sinlapakon 2523 : 144-147) In the Veda, Indra’s parents were gods. (King Vajiravudh 2547 : 88)

⁵ The Kailasa is the silver mountain in the Himalaya mountains; believed by the Hindu to be the residence of God Isavara (Siva)

⁶ The mountain where the Tavatinsa heaven is situated. The other name is the Sineru mountain.

⁷ Indra’s role in Thai kingship is very similar to that in Burma’s kingship. More details can be found in (Heine-Geldern 1956 : 1-16)

⁸ Abhiseka means pouring the water e.g. Rajaphisek means pouring the water to confer kingship. Actually this word was not only used for the king but it was prescribed as a royal word in the Thai language (Natthaphat Chanthawit 2530 : 14 ; Gonda 1957 : 40)

⁹ Ongkan (Royal decree) means sacred word. Ongkan in sanskrit means the three gods i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva (*Photchananukrom chabap rajabandittayasathan phutthasakkarat song phan ha roi si sip song* 2546 : 1401).

¹⁰ The four continents around Mount Meru as mentioned in *Triphum Phra Ruang* (The Three Worlds according to King Ruang) were Uttarakuru, Pubbavideha, Jambudipa and Amaragoyana

¹¹ *Khao Khanthamat* (Mount Gandhamadana) was the peak of *Khao Himaphan* (Mount Himavanta). See more details in (Krom Sinlapakon 2529 : 173-174 ; Krom Sinlapakorn 2523 : 16-18)

¹² *Indraphisek* was mentioned in the Aitareya Brahmana. Ayutthaya adopted only its name but retained few practices from the Veda (Wales 1931 : 122). With this anointing of Indra a ksatriya should be consecrated, if it is desired that he be a king who wins all victories, attains distinction and so on) (Gonda 1957 :36).

¹³ The details of the *Indraphisek* in the Palatine Law can be seen from the *Chak lai rot nam* in Tusita Maha Prasada. It has been shown at the museum of Wat Phrasirattanasatsadaram, the Grand Palace. It can also be read in the work of Prince Dhani Nivat titled *Rueang chak lai rot nam nai Phrathinang Dusit Maha Prasat* [The lacquer screen in the Dusit Maha Prasat].

¹⁴ The Isindhara mountain is the second mountain of the Sattaparibhanda mountain group or the seven mountains surrounding the Mount Meru.

¹⁵ The Yugandhara mountain is the first mountain of the Sattaparibhanda mountain group or the seven mountains, surrounding the Mount Meru, just next to it.

¹⁶ The Karavika mountain is the third mountain of the Sattaparibhanda mountain group or the seven mountains surrounding the Mount Meru.

¹⁷ Yaksha is a kind of non-human creature with a huge body, frightening look, long fangs, cruel mind, and man-eating behaviour. Most of them can fly and disguise as anybody.

¹⁸ Gandhabba or gandharva is a group of heavenly residents governed by Dhataratha. Every gandhabba is skillful at music and singing.

¹⁹ Raksasa may be an evil Yaksa, marine Yaksa, or low-classed demons. According to the Lokadipakasara text, they are governed by Yamaraja or the God of death; however, according to the Lokabanyati text, they are governed by Varuna or the God of rain.

²⁰ Gajasiha is a kind of animal in legend; its body is like that of a lion but it has a trunk.

²¹ Rajashiha is a kind of animal in legend; it is similar to a lion but with much greater power and fierceness.

²² Kilen is a kind of animal in Chinese tales; it has the head of a dragon, the body of a deer, the feet of a horse, a horn and a bushy tail.

²³ Uma Bhagavati is the wife of God Isavara. She is very beautiful and powerful.

²⁴ Devata is a group of heavenly residents; they have magic eyes and ears, and they consume magic food.

²⁵ Bali is a monkey in Ramakian. He is the elder brother of Sukhreep/Sugriva. His father is God Indra and his mother is Kala-acana. He is killed by the arrow of Rama due to the breaking of his own promise.

²⁶ Sukhreep/Sugriva is a monkey in Ramakian. He is the younger brother of Bali. His father is God Sun and his mother is Kala-acana. He helps Rama to fight against Tosakan/Ravana.

²⁷ Maha-Jambu or Jambubana is a monkey in Ramakian. He is an important soldier of Rama.

²⁸ Vishnu Purana gives the details of *durvasa's* curse that while *durvasa*, an avatara of Siva was flying through the air, he saw an *apsara* carrying a garland. He asked for it from her and put it on his head. Then he met Indra surrounded by gods who was riding *airavata*. He took off the garland and threw it to Indra. Indra grabbed it and put it on the head of *airavata* who could not see anything because of intoxication. When *airavata* smelt the garland, he threw it away to the ground. This made *durvasa* so angry that he put a curse on Indra that Indra lost his power over the three worlds, so that Indra's empire was destroyed. Although Indra tried to apologise, he did not forgive Indra and left him. From then, Indra's empire became weak. The plants were dry. There were no ceremonies. Its security was gone and so asura attacked it. (Manee-pin Phromsutthirak 2546 : 112-113.)

²⁹ The Amarita water is magic water; anybody who drinks it will be immortal. The Amarita water is the output of the ceremony of stirring the Kasira Samudra or the Sea of Milk by Devata and Asura.

³⁰ The Mandara mountain is the mountain used in the ceremony of stirring the Kasira Samudra or the Sea of Milk. The Mandara mountain is used as a spindle; the body of Vasuki Naga is used as a rope tied to the spindle; while Devata and Asura pull the tail and the head of the Vasuki Naga respectively.

³¹ Vasuki or Anantanagaraja is a divine serpent or Naga. It involves with the ceremony of stirring the Kasira Samudra or the Sea of Milk.

³² Maneepin Phromsutthirak found in her study of the legend of the Khmer churning the ocean and from the sculpture of churning the ocean at Angkor Wat (churning the ocean here was related to the Khmer *Borommarajaphisek* and may be the source of the Thai *Indraphisek*) that Indra played this role instead of Vishnu (Narai) as told in the *Purana*. The sculpture at Angkor Wat showed that Indra was flying through the air above *Mandara* and helped seize *mandara*. However in the *Purana* it was Vishnu who performed this role (Maneepin Phromsutthirak 2546 : 116).

³³ Surbi gave the useful things for consecration e.g. milk, butter. Hermits would take the *surbi* for worshipping gods. *Uchchaisarvas* was bright as the moon taken by *bali*. *Airavata* had four big tusks like the peak of the mountain, and more beautiful than the Mount Kailasa that Indra got. Vishnu had *kaustubha* with a precious ruby as his adornment. *Parijata* created what it was asked for. *Apsara* had gold necklaces and gorgeous clothes and they lived in heaven.

³⁴ The height of Phra Meru has been widely discussed. La Loubère claimed that in Somdet Phra Akkhramahesi's funeral (Nicolas Gervaise used "Somdet Phra Borommarachininat"), the catafalque's base (should be Meru rather than catafalque) was built so high that there was a need to borrow the instruments from the Europeans in order to place the urn on the catafalque (La Loubère 2510 : 547) More details on the height of Phra Meru, see (Phra Sarot Rattanimman 1947 : 107-112) Also see the study of Dr. Sumet Chumsai na Ayutthaya who designed the grid to compare the height of Phra Meru from the reign of King Naresuan to the reign of King Rama IV. It mentioned that the highest Phra Meru (built for King Prasatthong, King Narai, King Phetracha, King Suea and King Borommakot) was 102.75 meter high or equal to a 27 storey building (Sumet Chumsai na Ayutthaya 2528 : 64)

³⁵ Vidyadhara is a kind of non-human creature. They can fly, but their status is lower than that of the Devata. They live in the Himalaya mountain and their duty is to serve the God Siva.

³⁶ Kinnara is a kind of non-human creature. There are 2 types of Kinnara : the first has the upper part like that of human and the lower like that of a bird, the other type is like a human-being but it can put on wings and a tail before flying.

³⁷ La Loubère claimed that humans who had honour and prosperity would fill up the earth to lift up the base of the catafalque before the cremation in order to show the deceased king's great prestige. This can be an evidence to confirm that the earth must be filled up before building Meru. (La Loubère 2510 : 547)

³⁸ The group of seven mountains surrounding the Sumeru mountain; consisting of the Yugandhara mountain, the Isindhara mountain, the Karavika mountain, the Sudhassana mountain, the Nemindhara mountain, the Vintaka mountain, and the Assakanna mountain, respectively from the nearest to the furthest.

³⁹ Apart from Phra Meru ceremony, *Phra maha phichai rajarot* was used as the king's carriage for *Royal Kathina* (royal bounty) in the eleventh lunar month (*Tamra baep thamnam nai rajasamnak khrang Krung Si Ayutthaya kap phra wichan khong Somdet (Phrachao Borommawongthoe) Kromphraya Damrongrachanuphap* 2539 : 55) The current *Phra maha phichai rajarot* was built in the reign of King Rama I in B.E. 2338 (A.D. 1795) to be used for his father's funeral (*Khrueang prakop phra raja-itsariyayot rajayan rajarot lae Phra Merumat* 2539 : 133).

⁴⁰ *Maha phichai rajarot* (the one built in the reign of King Rama I) was high as though it was Mount Meru. There was a *busabok* (movable throne) in the middle above the top of the throne which was the most important part of the *rajarot*. There were *Thep phanom*, *garuda* and *naga*, the symbols of sky, earth and ocean respectively, at the lower level. There was also a three-headed *naga* at the front of *rajarot* with its tail at the end (*Chotmai het krom Sanphawut thahan bok ngan phrarajaphithi thawai phra phloeng phra borommasop Somdet Phra Sinakharinthra Borommarajachonnani* 2539 : 62).

⁴¹ The Book of Nang Nopphamat mentioned that the king performed this ceremony by himself but the text of the old royal ceremonies said that Indra Kumara performed this ceremony on behalf of the king.

⁴² In B.E. 2332 (A.D. 1789) Ammarindrapihek Maha Prasat was hit by a thunderbolt and caught fire. King Rama I therefore allowed a new throne hall to be built and named it "*Dusit Maha Prasat*" (*Phraraja phongsawadan Krung Rattanakosin rajakan thi nueng khong Chaophraya Thiphakorawong (Kham Bunnak) Somdet Phrachao Borommawongthoe Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphap song truat chamra lae song niphon athibai* 2545 : 23, 59-60).

⁴³ It was said in *Cakkavaladipani* that Indra had 4 consorts who had seats around him in 4 directions i.e. *Sudharma* at his front, *Sujada* at his right, *Nanda* at his back and *Citra* at his left (Krom Sinlapakon, 2523 : 181).

⁴⁴ *Sangthong* is a drama by King Rama II. It is a well known story about a prince who hides himself in a conch shell.

⁴⁵ *Suwannahong* is a drama dating from the Ayutthaya period. It is a well known story about a prince who has a magic boat and is hit by a spear.

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