

Architectural Survey of Annamnikai Temples in Thailand: Focusing on the Eclectic Forms of Architectural Expression in Buddhist Temples in Thailand and Vietnam

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Introduction

From 2023 to 2025, architectural surveys were conducted on six Vietnamese Buddhist temples, an An Nam sect (Annamnikaya) in Thailand, and five other temples. This survey report provides an overview and architectural drawings of the five temples. Wat Samananam Borihan Temple (Chùa Cảnh Phước, 景福寺) will be covered in another survey report.

This survey aimed to examine the historical development and transformation of the Vietnamese Buddhist temples (Annamnikaya) in Thailand, which have a history spanning nearly 300 years, through an analysis of changes in their architectural forms. I selected five sites among more than twenty Annamnikaya temples as following (see Table 1).

Table 1

No	Romanized Thai name	Thai official name	Chinese name (Han characters)	Vietnamese name
4	Wat Thawornwararam	วัดถาวราราม	慶壽寺	CHÙA KHÁNH THỌ
6	Wat Khet Na Bunyaram	วัดเขตรักษาบุญาราม	福田寺	CHÙA PHƯỚC ĐIỀN
10	Uphaipatikaram Temple	วัดอุทัยภาติการาม	三寶公佛寺	CHÙA TAM BẢO CÔNG
15	Wat Sratthayimphanichwararam	วัดศรีททัยมพานิชวราราม	普照寺	CHÙA PHỔ CHIỂU
24	Wat Nopparat Wanaram	วัดนพรัตน์วนาราม	福壽寺	CHÙA PHƯỚC THỌ

Note: List numbers are based on the Annamnikaya temple list in Chapter 1-1.

These five temples include historically significant temples established by the early twentieth century and newly founded temples constructed after the 2000s¹. The architectural surveys were conducted at these sites, together with interviews with temple related personnels.

Among the five temples selected for this survey, two historic temples—Wat Thawornwararam, Wat Khet Na Bunyaram—were established between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both of two were located at key nodes of water transportation networks and were founded by immigrant communities from Vietnam (and China). However, owing to the rise and decline of these immigrant communities, which constituted their principal body of devotees, as well as the effects of recent urbanization, these temples have undergone repeated renovations. As a result, it has become difficult to identify traces of their original architectural styles.

The remaining two temples—Wat Sratthayimphanichwararam and Wat Nopparat Wanaram—are newly established temples founded in the 2000s. The circumstances surrounding their establishment reflect recent changes in the composition and characteristics of their devotee communities.

The following section outlines the histories and architectural features of these five temples.

1 Annamnikaya association in Thailand. <https://www.anamnikayathai.com/anamzzzzsect-temple-house>

4. Wat Thavorn Wararam (วัดถาวราราม, 敕賜慶壽寺)

Address: Ban Nuea, Mueang Kanchanaburi, Kanchanaburi 71000

History

During the reign of King Rama III, many Vietnamese families migrated to Thailand seeking refuge. In 1834, the government relocated some of them to Kanchanaburi Province, where they established an Anam Nikaya sect temple.

The construction of the ordination hall was completed in 1895. Later that year, the abbot requested a royal name from King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). On February 24, 1896, the temple was royally granted the name "Wat Thawon Wararam."

Overview

The temple was established in the late nineteenth century on the basis of an undifferentiated community of Vietnamese and Chinese migrant laborers who had settled in Kanchanaburi and formed its lay supporter base. The temple grounds, which once extended to the banks of the River Kwai, have gradually diminished in size as urbanization has progressed. In front of the main gate lies a cemetery area densely populated with Chinese-style tombstones, while approximately half of the inner precincts are now occupied by a Chinese temple. No trace remains of the original main hall; only a new reinforced-concrete ordination hall stands on the site, following renovation and reconstruction works that began in 1968.

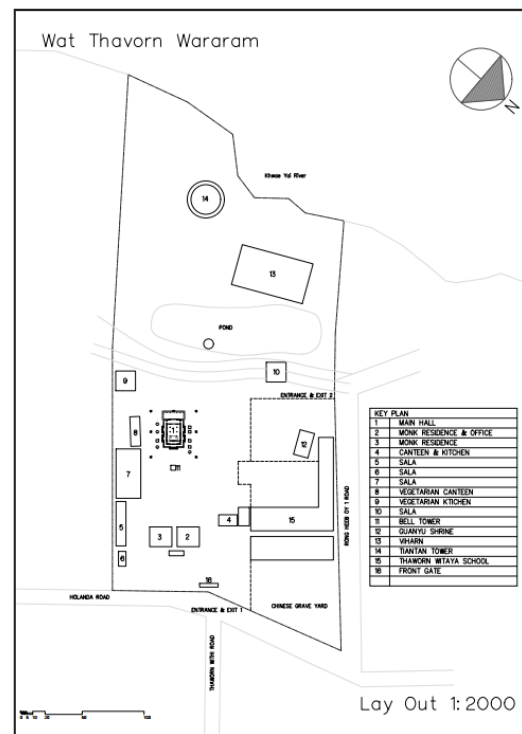


Fig. 1 Lay out of Wat Thavorn Wararam



Fig. 2 Inside the main hall



Fig. 3 In front of the main hall

6. Wat Khetnaboonyaram (วัดเขตรับบุญาราม, 福田寺)

Address: 151 Thanon Khwang, Wat Mai, Mueang Chanthaburi, Chanthaburi 22000

History

This temple was built by Vietnamese immigrants who settled in Chanthaburi Province during the reign of King Rama III.

Construction began in 1834, and the temple is now 183 years old. It is a Mahayana Buddhist temple of the Anam Nikaya sect, governed by Anam Nikaya monks. During the reign of King Rama V, His Majesty graciously bestowed a Thai name upon the Vietnamese temple, preserving the original meaning. "Phueak" (福) translates to "merit," "Dian" (田) translates to "field," and "Tue" (寺) translates to "temple." Therefore, on February 24, 1896, the temple was royally granted the name "Wat Khetna Bunyarama."

Overview

Located on the coast of the Gulf of Thailand, Chanthaburi has long served as a collection and distribution center for goods from Vietnam and Cambodia, and has historically been home to Vietnamese and Chinese communities. This temple is situated adjacent to an old market known for trading gemstones from Cambodia. During the Vietnam War, large numbers of Vietnamese refugees arrived in the area as boat people, leading to the establishment of Buddhist temples and Catholic churches that served their communities. This temple was likewise renovated and expanded in response to the increase in the local Vietnamese refugee population.

The new main hall was constructed in 1968, replacing the old, traditional-style hall, as evidenced by old photographs. The new hall, built with modern materials like concrete, is a blend of Theravada Buddhist architecture in its form and a mix of Thai and Chinese decorative styles. The connection to King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), who named the temple, is displayed through the royal emblem of King Chulalongkorn at the main entrance gate.



Fig. 4 Lay out of Wat Khetnaboonyaram



Fig. 5 Inside the main hall



Fig. 6 In front of the main hall



Fig. 7 In front of the old main hall

10. Wat Upai Patikaram (วัดอุภัยภาติการาม, 敕賜三寶公佛寺)

Address: Thanon Suphakit, Na Mueang, Mueang Chachoengsao, Chachoengsao 24000

History and Overview

Originally, this was a Chinese Mahayana temple built in 1906. King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) visited the temple in 1917 and contributed funds for its construction, also bestowing the name "Wat Uphaiphatikaram." In 1969, it was converted into a Vietnamese temple. The structures within the temple are all built with modern materials, and the current ordination hall was renovated in 2024.

A Chinese clan ancestral hall stands adjacent to the main ordination hall, and the principal deity enshrined in the hall is Sanbao Gong (三寶公), is a personal deity of Chinese origin.



Fig. 8 Lay out of Wat Upai Patikaram

15. Wat Sattha Yim Phanich Wararam (วัดศรัทธายิ้มพานิชวราราม, Chùa Phổ Chiêu từ)

Address: Mahachai, Mueang Samut Sakhon, Samut Sakhon 74000

History and Overview

Based on information from the National Office of Buddhism, the temple was established on November 17, 2003. It has not yet received a Wisungkamsima (royal grant for the land where the ordination hall is located).

According to the abbot, the site was originally established as a Vietnamese Buddhist (Annam Nikaya) temple, but was later converted into a Chinese ancestral shrine. In the 1990s, the Annam Nikaya organization sought the return of the property and subsequently reestablished the temple. As a result, architectural elements such as the altar platform (Sumeru pedestal) in the main hall were reused from other Annam Nikaya temples. The temple compound also contains a funeral service office, where photographs of Annam Nikaya monks from the 1960s are displayed. A Chinese ancestral shrine is located adjacent to the temple.

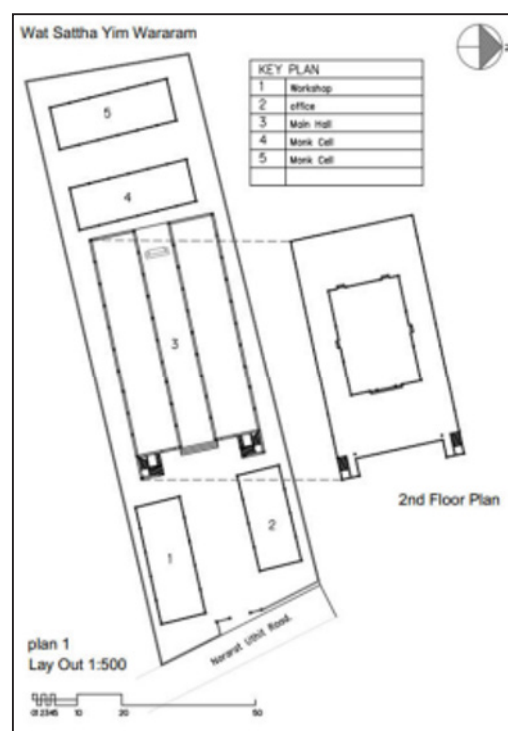


Fig. 9 Lay out of Wat Sattha Yim Phanich Wararam

24. Wat Noppharat Wanaram (วัดนพรัตน์วานาราม, Chùa Phước Thọ Từ)

Address: Phatthawi Sub-district, Makham District, Chanthaburi 22000

History & Overview

Wat Noppharat Wanaram is a branch temple of Wat Khetnaboonyaram that hosts activities related to teaching Buddhist principles and meditation practice. Construction of this temple began in 2013 and is not yet complete. Some parts of the temple are already in use, but the ordination hall is still awaiting completion.



Fig. 10 Lay out of Wat Noppharat Wanaram

Conclusion

A Buddhist temple consists fundamentally of 3 essentials as the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, together with the internal organizational structures that support them (temple administration and financial management) and the community of lay devotees outside the temple. Changes in these constituent elements are often manifested in corresponding changes to temple architecture.

From the overview of these five temples, it is evident that these Buddhist temples were significantly influenced by changes in the lay communities that supported them.

In other words, the development and decline of Vietnamese migrant communities, which formed the social base of the Annamnikaya temples, directly affected the temples' history. Established between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these temples underwent major renovation and expansion of their facilities during the 1960s in response to the increase in Vietnamese refugees during the Vietnam War. The main halls that remain today largely date from that period.

This survey was unable to clearly determine what architectural differences, if any, distinguish these Annamnikaya temples from Chinese Buddhist temples, which likewise adhere to Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore, further and continuing research will be necessary.