The significance of the visual culture of three foreign temples at Bodhgaya (India)

A Sri Lankan, Burmese and Thai Temple

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Content

Chapter 1. Introduction

Bodhgaya is situated in the state of Bihar in India and is known as the place where the Buddha became awakened while sitting under a Bodhi tree, which is marked by the diamond seat (Sanskrit: *vajrasana*). Buddhists regard this as the center of the universe where all Buddhas became awakened (Guy 1991: 356). In the third century BCE Ashoka placed a stone platform in front of the Bodhi tree. The Mahabodhi Temple was built next to it, and restored in the following millennia (Trevithick 2006: 19). In the nineteenth century, the colonial period, a Buddhist revival took place and, simultaneously, the British government started to excavate and rebuild the main temple. Due to the British effort and the Sri Lankan *anagarika*[1] Dharmapala to make it a primary Buddhist site, Bodhgaya became a *lieu de mémoire* (place of memory) for Buddhists all around the world.

The holy site developed in recent times from a small village to one of the most important places of Buddhist pilgrimage on an international scale. Foreign Asian Buddhist communities desired to have their own spot near the Mahabodhi Temple and in this manner to be included in its history. From the 1950's onward the construction of different Asian monasteries and temples at Bodhgaya increased. Since the site became part of the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2002, it has also received more attention from outside of Asia. Thirteen years later, in July 2015, on a fieldtrip to Bodhgaya I witnessed that new temples were still being constructed by foreign Buddhists (Figs 1-2), which shows that this development continues up to the present day and becomes more and more a global village.

Figure 2. Laborers working in a new Thai Temple.

Figure 1. The exterior of a new Thai Temple at Bodhgaya.

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[1] *Anagarika* is a Pali term used for a wandering monk in the early years of Buddhism. Orson 1992 : 52.

The site's long connection with Buddhism continues to be the focus of its World Heritage universal value, but it is actually a multi-religious place. It is controlled by Buddhists and Hindus who both claim it to be their heritage. Moreover, before the British interfered with the site the Hindus governed Bodhgaya and worshipped the Buddha there as an incarnation of Vishnu. For this research I focus on how Bodhgaya, as a *lieu de mémoire*, became a global village, and show how the visual culture of three foreign temples from Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand visually express on the one hand their relationship with the site as a place of memory, and on the other hand their relationship with their home country. In this paper the term visual culture refers to visual elements of the exterior and interior of a temple with a distinctive cultural meaning and or values.

Concerning the selection of the temples

In this research paper I cover two different areas in Asia. As a South Asia specialist I chose the Sri Lankan temple for this region, and for the second area I chose two Southeast Asian temples of Burma and Thailand. Furthermore, I attempt to show visual and cultural similarities and differences between the selected temples of Theravada origin. It provides the opportunity to analyze similarities and differences between the selected temples, that all have a Theravada background, in the way in which they connect both the site and to their home country.

1.1 Brief background information and description of three foreign temples

The three temples are part of the sacred geography at Bodhgaya, but there are many more structures in the village. A map of Bodhgaya (Fig. 3) shows not only temples and monasteries, but also hotels and other commercial structures. However, I will only focus on the three foreign temples which I have chosen for this thesis. In this section I will present background information on the three temples, which includes when and by whom they were built and short descriptions of the temples' layouts, including the location of the altar, the identification of the main statues and, if relevant, murals. All three temples are part of a monastic complex that houses education services, meditation centers, dormitories, and other facilities for monks and other individuals who want to spend a period in retreat.

The Sri Lankan Temple

The Sri Lankan Temple (Fig. 4) is part of the Mahabodhi Society complex Jaya Sri Mahabodhi vihara. Although the complex was founded in 1891, the shrine was not built until 2006. When entering the temple, a large altar is situated at the back of the chamber (Fig. 5). On an elevated shrine a Buddha

statue is flanked by two disciples. In front of the altar are two *bodhisattvas* are sitting on a throne. Thirteen mural paintings depicting the life story of the Buddha cover the walls.

Figure 3. A map of Bodhgaya acquired at the hotel where I stayed during my fieldtrip in July 2016.

Figure 4. The exterior of the Sri Lankan Temple.

Figure 5. The interior of the Sri Lankan Temple.

Burmese Temple

The Burmese Vihar Buddha Gaya (Fig. 6) was built between 1934 and 1991 led by the senior monks from Burma (Burmese: *Sayadaw*).[2] On the ground floor of the temple a large rectangular space contains three altars with Buddha statues (Fig. 7). The first floor altar is enclosed by glass and contains a white Buddha statue (Fig. 8). The surrounding walls show nine paintings behind glass depicting events from the life of the Buddha.

Thai Temple

The Thai Temple (Fig. 9) was built in 1956 by the king of Thailand at the request of the contemporary Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru.[3] The plan of the ordination (or preaching) hall is cross shaped, with a niche in the back containing a large golden Buddha flanked by two statues of disciples (Fig. 10). On both sides of the altar are murals related to the Buddha.

[2] http://bodhgaya.myanmarvihara.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=1.
[3] http://www.explorebihar.in/thai-temple-and-monastery-at-bodh-gaya.html.

Figure 6. The roof of the Burmese Temple.

Figure 7. The altars of the Burmese Temple on the ground floor.

Figure 8. The altar of the Burmese Temple at the first floor.

Figure 9. The exterior of the Thai Temple.

Figure 10. The altar with the large golden Buddha statue at the Thai Temple.

1.2 Theravada Buddhism

This section provides a short introduction to Theravada Buddhism. Beginning in India, Buddhism was spread to other countries, such as Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, by missionaries from the third century BCE onwards (Trainor 2004: 127).

Theravada School

The Theravada School, also known as the 'Doctrine of the Elders', prevails in the aforementioned countries. Theravada is the only early school of Buddhism which still exists. A defining characteristic of Theravada is that attaining *nirvana* and becoming awakened are opportunities that are exclusively available to initiated monks at monasteries. Furthermore, an emphasis is placed on the *sangha* (monastic community) and the centrality of the Buddha (Trainor 2004: 120). An important commonality between the three countries Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand is that Buddhism is part of daily life, and that is noticeable in various daily practices and rituals. Although Theravada Buddhism is the dominant school in these three countries, there are important differences between their Buddhist visual cultures. These are discussed in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 4.

1.3 Previous literature on the subject

The academic interest in Bodhgaya has its origin in the colonial period, and is still a subject that interests historians, art historians and anthropologists. A period-focused approach can be seen in the writings of Trevithick and Banerjee who focus on the history of the place, and especially that of the colonial period (Trevithick 2006; Banerjee 2000). Banerjee also discusses local developments of the town until the 1990s. Ahir did notice the foreign temples, yet he kept his notes concise and general, dedicated mostly to Bodhgaya's history (Ahir 1994). Other historians are concerned with the religious origin of the place, discussing the Buddhist-Hindu feud. Most historians do not pay much attention to the foreign temples around the main temple.

Art historians have contributed to the history of the site on the basis of art-historical analyses (Leoshko 1988), and they have focused on how Bodhgaya's artistic legacy was transferred to other places in Asia (Guy 1991). However, these studies are all highly focused on the Mahabodhi Temple, leaving out the foreign Asian temples.

More recently, the site is approached by social scientists. They are looking at the social dimension of the site, researching present day activities. These examinations created a new academic topic on the site: heritage tourism and the association of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations with the site. The activities and experience of visitors, including groups from outside of Asia, were investigated by Platvoet and Toorn, who called them tourist-pilgrims because they associate themselves with Buddhism and come for a retreat or to experience the site (Platvoet and Toorn 1995). Doyle also investigated tourist experiences. However, she focused more on developments, such as how the Buddhist revival related to the ways by which the Pan-Asian activities at the site becoming dominantly Buddhist or how improvement of infrastructure changed the experience of the site (Doyle 1998). Geary discusses the phenomenon of international pilgrimage and tourism at Bodhgaya as a source of economic livelihood for local inhabitants, and the role of tourism development and urban planning (Geary 2009). Although, he mentions the foreign temples in that context, he and other social scientists, do not discuss the visual culture of these temples, not being art historians. This leaves a gap between the academic studies and the visual culture of the site. Geary does brings up the socio-political implications of the globalization of the site and he argues that it transformed Bodhgaya into a commercial tourist landscape, and catalyzed a complex multi-vocality of stakeholders that underlies competing social, economic and political aspects (Geary 2009). Searcy discusses how pilgrim-tourism and local developments affected communal lives by socio-political transformations at Bodhgaya as a result of the UNESCO listing (Searcy 2012). This led to a complex network of interest groups, including NGOs and the local and national governments. These recent developments in academic approaches show how qualitative research, referring to a

particular case study and including a flexible use of different approaches, became an important method to investigate experiences and tourism on a global level. Because of the nature of these studies their aim is to collect social data that focus on the internationality of the site in terms of a socio-political level, and all these national and international groups of interests is bound to create competitive tensions of power struggles at the site. These are the academic perspectives which are investigated at Bodhgaya. I instead examine how the three selected foreign temples are positioned in this global village.

To include the foreign temples in recent academic debates on Bodhgaya, the challenge for me lies in connecting historic and art historic studies on Bodhgaya to the visual cultures of the foreign temples and secondly link the visual cultural approach to present day debates on globalism, by comparing the three foreign temples to the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de memoire* and to their domestic visual cultures.

1.4 Relevance of paper and research questions

Relevance of paper

This paper complement social sciences debates from the last decade on globalism, yet approaches these from a different perspective. My research is very specifically based on Bodhgaya and will help to understand the visual culture of the three foreign temples whose importance has been deemed secondary to that of the main temple. Previous studies made by historians and art historians have especially focused on the Mahabodhi Temple and its history and architecture. Historical and art historical debates about a more global perspective are still focused on the Mahabodhi Temple and how the structure influenced architecture outside India. However, most ones who visit Bodhgaya or an (art) historic is doing fieldwork at the site, will notice the striking 'village of foreign temples'[4] surrounding the Mahabodhi complex. Therefore the foreign temples at Bodhgaya should be more included in recent historic and art historic studies, because they are part of recent developments at Bodhgaya.

More recent studies on Bodhgaya are focused on international aspects of tourism and power structures amongst different interest groups, including local communities, the national government, and international companies or NGOs. These studies are dominated by social scientists who leave out a great part of the cultural and art historical context of the site. This causes a gap between on the one hand the social, political and economic perspectives, and on the other hand the cultural and art

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[4] I refer to Bodhgaya as the 'village of foreign temples'.

historical perspectives on the debate. Research on the visual culture of the temples could reveal more about why a particular temple was built and could unravel the cultural significance of the foreign buildings. The building of temples outside one's own country goes hand in hand with political motives, which could be found in this cultural study making it even more interesting for the debate.

Both the earlier and recent studies from different disciplines lack a study on the foreign temples, especially in relation to their visual cultures. This is probably due to the traditional focus on the Mahabodhi Temple. Cultural and art historical research should be included because this could bring another important perspective to the international layer. In this paper, I look at the interaction between the arts and architecture of the three temples in relation to the domestic cultures and in relation to Bodhgaya. Studying the visual culture can contribute to a deeper understanding of the recent developments of globalism, because it can reveal a deeper layer of socio-political and religious aspects of the foreign cultures. In this way I am reintroducing art historical and cultural methods into the existing studies on Bodhgaya, introducing a fresh set of eyes to this discipline.

Research questions

For this paper, I established the following research questions. The core of my study is reflected in the main question: How are the three foreign temples positioned at the global village that Bodhgaya has become? The main question will be supported by three sub-questions, which the first two are related to *lieu de mémoire*, an idea which I will elaborate on in Chapter 2.

1. How did Bodhgaya, as a *lieu de mémoire*, become a global village?

2. How do the foreign temples visually express their relationship to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*?

3. How do the foreign temples visually relate to their domestic cultures?

1.5 Methodology and approach

For this paper I make use of a cultural approach, wherein the three foreign temples, the Sri Lankan, Burmese and Thai, are the objects of study searching for distinctive cultural characteristics related to the art and architecture inside and outside the temples. For primary data I rely on material from my fieldtrip to Bodhgaya in July 2015. This data comprises photographs and notes on the foreign temples. These notes include observed details and personal reflections regarding the altars, the ornamentation of pillars, the beams and ceilings, and the mural paintings.

In my study I describe and analyze the exterior and interior of the three foreign temples. Before and after my fieldwork I used articles and books from the Leiden University Library and the internet

about Bodhgaya. To get more information about the other temples at Bodhgaya, I searched the internet for webpages, such as tourist sites and other official and non-official information about the temples at Bodhgaya. A main source was Tripadvisor, where tourists share their experiences and pictures of Bodhgaya. Another source was YouTube, where I found amateur film-footage of tourists inside the temples. These sources are less verifiable but they complement the primary source of this study which is my own photographs. Together the sources create an impression of the visual culture of the temples and provide background information. However, most photographs and videos were unclear or showed only parts of the temple. This is an important reason why my fieldwork has been essential to my research.

Although there were over twenty temples, I limit myself to three temples for a number of reasons. Not all temples were as accessible as others. More importantly, not all the buildings were on the map or on the internet. I had to find most of the temples myself because the map was incomplete, and marked locations were not totally reliable. I chose one South Asian temple: a Sri Lankan Theravada temple and to acquire more varied data I also chose two Southeast Asian ones: a Burmese and a Thai temple which are both of Theravada origins. I will examine how three different Theravada temples adapted their religious and cultural characteristics into the temples' visual culture. I chose three temples of a Theravada background because temples of Mahayana origin would have too many differences that could be reduced to religion an aspect that I would not focus on as much. My reasoning is that choosing three temples of the same origin, are personally more interesting for my thesis, and would make a more varied interdisciplinary comparison instead of simply differentiating between religious characteristics.

1.6 Short note on terminology

In this paper I will maintain the old name Burma instead of the modern-day Myanmar, because the use of the adjective 'Myanmarese' is inconvenient; secondly I want to distance myself on political grounds from the name invented by the *junta*. The word 'Burmese' refers to all people in Burma, in contrast to 'Burman' which refers to people of a specific ethnic background (Brees 2008: 5). Another problematic term is 'enlightenment', which is widely used by European scholars. The German Orientalist or Indologist Max Müller (1823-1900) came up with the term enlightenment of the Buddha, which could be seen as linked to romantic, European ideas of that time (Stone 2002: 83-5). In Sanskrit the word '*bodhi*' refers to a high state of mind wherein supreme knowledge is acquired (Huntington and Wangchen 1994: 19) and which is, in my opinion, more comparable to the English word 'awakening' than to the word 'enlightenment'. For this reason I will use the word 'awaken' in this paper.

Chapter 2. Bodhgaya, from a *lieu de mémoire* into a global village

In the following sections I will elaborate on the idea of a place of memory and answer the first sub-question: How did Bodhgaya, as a *lieu de mémoire*, become a global village? I will discuss Bodhgaya on basis of Nora's study on the idea of a place of memory.

2.1 History and memory

Almost three decades ago the French historicist Pierre Nora (1931-present) discussed how history and memory are not similar, yet they are both an important element in the idea of a *lieu de mémoire*.

According to Nora, a memory is something formed and constantly changing, in a way that is always related to the present. A memory continues transforming until it fits in the mind (Nora 1989: 8). The past can be reflected in history, which can become a product of the intellect and a subject of intellectual analysis (Nora 1989: 8-9). At Bodhgaya memory and history also play a central role: individual and collective memories overlap with Bodhgaya's history, each related to the awakening of the Buddha underneath the Bodhi tree. One difference between the two is that these memories, being individual or collective are often entangled to experience and emotions. Memories on Bodhgaya are receptive to change the history of the awakening because of these experiences and emotions. History is more formal, and seen as a fact outside the area of emotions and experience. Nora's essential claim is that sites are *lieux de mémoires* because of the intangible aspect of the site it escapes to be history (Nora 1989: 24). For Bodhgaya, the memory of individuals is the intangible aspect because of the experience and emotions involved in the site. In this manner memories could be seen as being more relatable to the present than history, which is drawn upon a reference of an earlier period frozen in time (Nora 1989: 19). At Bodhgaya the story of the awakening and the facets belonging to this narrative the Buddha, the Bodhi tree, and the *vajrasana* are the invariable aspects related to the idea of history. The experience and emotions of Buddhists are variably related to the idea of memory. Another interesting process of memory of Bodhgaya is that Buddhists relate not only to the Bodhi tree but also to the Mahabodhi Temple in their memory of Bodhgaya. Already in the eleventh century this temple was seen as an icon, whereby the structure was used as a point of reference by large groups of Buddhists. In art the importance of the temple outside India is noticeable by the making of miniatures and replicas of the Mahabodhi Temple, which I will explain further in Chapter 4.

2.2. The idea of conscious remembering

A *lieu de mémoire* comes into existence when a significant memory dissolves and leaves no remains

but a reconstructed object of history. Such a conscious feeling of losing grip on memories and the fear of loss itself frequently results in the documentation in archives and in media (Nora 1989: 11-2). For example we can see how the process by which the Mahabodhi complex was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list is connected to documenting and archiving, which allows all steps to be traced back preventing the loss of memories.[5] Another idea of Nora on *lieu de mémoire* is that there is a human need to search for validation in origins and identity (Nora 1989: 13). For Bodhgaya this could be found in the quest for Buddhist origins or in the Hindu quest to define a Hindu connection to the site and their rights to be part of its heritage Amongst Buddhists during the colonial period was felt the need to connect the site's origin to the origin of the Buddhists which is known as the Buddhist revival a process catalyzed by *anagarik*a Dharmapala, who was a Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalist and writer, and by the British *raj*. Dharmapala reached out to the theosophical sympathizers inside and outside Asia, of which Arnold was one, and implemented the idea of Buddhist *communitas*, a deep feeling of communion, using different kinds of media to enhance a communal feeling and trigger the reinvention of pilgrimage at Bodhgaya (Trevithick 2001: 13-6). Already in this period the English in the colonial and back in Britain took part in the conveying of Bodhgaya being Buddhist, yet it was especially in 2002, with the listing of Bodhgaya as a UNESCO World Heritage site, that Bodhgaya became officially a Buddhist site in the mind of people on a global scale. Visiting Bodhgaya, was no longer exclusive for Buddhists and pilgrims, because tourists and 'pilgrim-tourists' (Searcy 2012) began to flood the site, a phenomenon which relates to the enormous popularity of Buddhism in other parts of the world than Asia in recent time. The reason for such a trip is because one has the desire to see and experience for themselves the powerful spiritual place where the Buddha became awakened. To visit the site became easier because of improved infrastructure and better transport, and more international media attention was drawn to the site because of the UNESCO listing. Investments at the site became attractive to national and international companies, which resulted in the building of commercial structures such as hotels, restaurants, ATM's and other facilities for visitors (Fig. 3).

Nora emphasizes the need for a will of an individual or a certain group of people to remember, or otherwise people have to be convinced that they have a kind of memory of a place. Without the will to remember it is just a 'site of history' (Nora 1989: 8). A site of memory is artificial and acquires this status of memory when it becomes meaningful in people's minds (Nora 1989: 19). 'Great events' in a particular place are not instantaneously a reason to acquire the status of *lieu de mémoire*, rather it must be given a weight by time, science and men (Nora 1989: 21-2). For Bodhgaya this process of convincing the site to be an important Buddhist place started from the nineteenth century onwards

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[5] http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1056/documents.

whereby the theosophical sympathizers played an important role outside Asia, and although European schooled academics discussed the Hindu identity of the place, it was the Buddhist identity that stick with the non-Asian audience. This can be explained by the romantic and mysterious aura of the story that Bodhgaya was the place where the Buddha became awakened, which was probably more attractive than the idea of Buddha being one of the incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu.

2.3 Conclusion

The question for this chapter answered the question 'How did Bodhgaya, as a *lieu de mémoire*, become a global village?' This section shows how Bodhgaya fits into Nora's idea of a place of memory by looking at 'memory' and 'history', and how this site became known as the place of the Buddha's awakening on a global level in a period of time. The memory of Bodhgaya as the place of awakening sets itself apart from history in terms of 'experience' and 'emotions', which are the variables, while the history of Bodhgaya is a more formal and invariable entity. The main reason that Bodhgaya became a global village was, because of the listing of the place as a UNESCO World Heritage site, it gained more global attention. A phenomenon which is examined by several social scientists (Geary 2009; Searcy 2012). Chapter 2 provides a background for Chapter 3 where I will investigate visual elements related to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoires*.

Chapter 3. The visual elements of the foreign temples expressing Bodhgaya as a lieu de mémoire

In this chapter I will answer the second sub-question How do the foreign temples visually express their relationship to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*? First, I will analyze particular visual elements of each of the three foreign temples related to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*, working from the outside of the temple to the inside. In a second paragraph I will trace historical relationships, which I try to relate to the visual cultures of the temples, between each of the domestic cultures and Bodhgaya itself.

3.1 The Sri Lankan Temple and Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*

Entering the Sri Lankan compound, one immediately notice a Bodhi tree behind a fence (Fig. 11), which is a sapling of the original Bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*) located in Sri Lanka (De Thabrew 2013: 57). In both cases, in Sri Lanka and inside the compound at Bodhgaya, the Bodhi tree is planted by the Sri Lankan Buddhists to commemorate the Buddha's awakening (Dehejia 1988: 92). Most ancient Sri Lankan monasteries possessed a Bodhi shrine and recent temples are built at the locations of these tree shrines. Special laws were made in Sri Lanka to protect the Bodhi trees from being harmed (Dehejia 1988: 92-4).

Figure 11. Behind the Buddha statue stands a sapling of the Bodhi tree from Sri Lanka.

These examples show the Sri Lankan emphasis on the memory of the Buddha's awakening that is represented by the tree. Other evidence for this can be traced in the name of the temple at Bodhgaya: Jaya Sri Mahabodhi Vihar, wherein 'Mahabodhi' refers to the awakening and 'Jaya Sri Mahabodhi' is the name of the Sri Lankan Bodhi tree located at Anurudhapura in Sri Lanka (De Thabrew 2013: 57).

A second element reflecting the Sri Lankan Buddhist focus on the tree, which relates this temple to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*, is further visible in two architectural features that display the Bodhi leaf as a motif: the wooden doors (Fig. 12) and the iron windows (Fig. 13). Although the motifs are not strictly similar, the use of the Bodhi leaf as a motif could be interpreted as a reference of the awakening under the Bodhi tree. The fact that the Bodhi leaf is an appealing ornament should also be taken in account. In this way the Bodhi leaf could be seen in the context of the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* and in the context of aesthetical value.

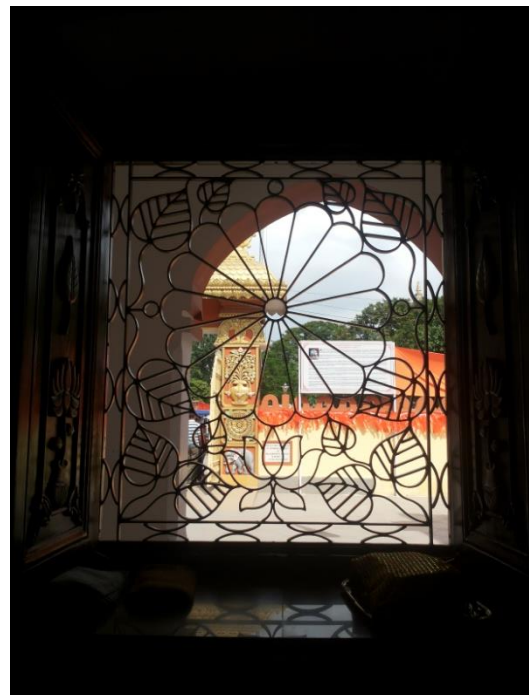Figure 12 A Bodhi leaf motif on the door of the entrance.

Figure 13. Several Bodhi leafs as a motif in an iron window of the SrI Lankan Temple.

Another visual element that relates this temple to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* is visible in the Buddha statue underneath the Bodhi tree outside the temple (Fig. 11). The Buddha performs the earth-touching gesture, making a direct visual connection to the event of awakening that took place at Bodhgaya. The Sri Lankan Buddhists almost never make use of images of the Buddha in the earth-touching gesture (Dehejia 1988: 95), but instead depict the Buddha in the meditation posture to

refer to the awakening. This, could explain why the main Buddha statue inside the temple is in the meditation posture. I suggest that the statue outside aims to create an easy recognition of the Buddha's awakening for people who are not aware of the Sri Lankan visualization of the event and to make a direct connection with Bodhgaya where the main image does have this hand gesture. I understand the choice of the Sri Lankan artists, because the meditation posture reflects his inner tranquility expressed in his exterior visage at the moment of awakening (De Thabrew 2013: 57). However, without the Bodhi tree it could also refer to different occasions of meditation, which could be confusing. A fourth visual connection to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* is one of the thirteen mural inside the temple, showing Buddha in the earth-touching gesture, calling the earth to witness all his good deeds performed in the past in order to defeat Mara and his army (Fig. 14).
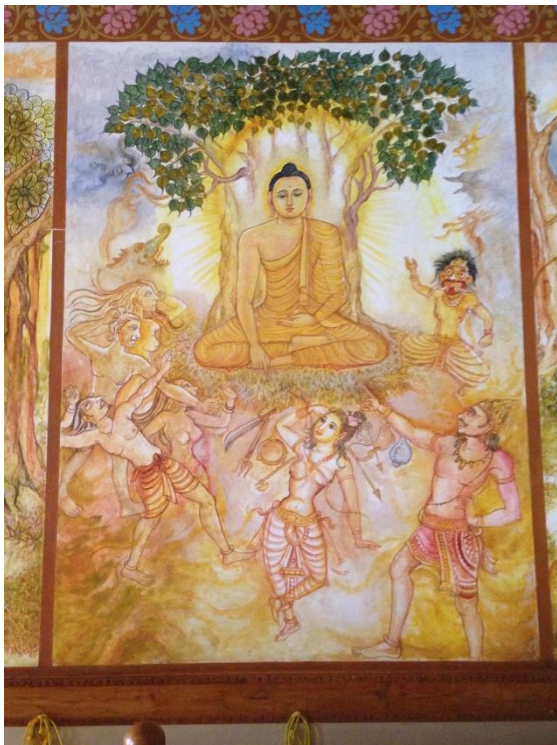

Figure 14. The Buddha with the earth-touching gesture.

3.2 Sri Lanka and its relation to Bodhgaya

The Bodhi saplings at the Sri Lankan compound and in their home country not only relate to the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*, but also to the distinctive historical relationship between Sri Lankan Buddhists and Bodhgaya and especially with the Bodhi tree. A sapling of the original tree was brought to Sri Lanka by Ashoka in the third century BCE. For the Sri Lankan Buddhists the saplings in their own country are almost as important as the one in Bodhgaya, although this does not diminish

the importance of Bodhgaya. In historiographical terms, the Sri Lankan Buddhists played an important role in the protection of the original Bodhi tree. Their role in Bodhgaya's past could be seen as being diverse and continuous. The Sri Lankan Buddhists were present at Bodhgaya from the Ashokan period onwards, performing devotional acts and, more importantly, maintaining the compound, making donations and restoring the main temple (Guy 1991: 359).

In the colonial period the Sri Lankan *anagarika* Dharmapala was one of the driving forces behind the Buddhist revival that took place at Bodhgaya. He was the founder of the Mahabodhi Society Compound, in which the Sri Lankan Temple was established in 2006 (Fig. 4). Although the structure is mainly built in a European style under directions of the British, the origins of the Mahabodhi Society reminds the Sri Lankan community of their substantial place in the history of the Buddhist revival at Bodhgaya. This memory is important because it ensures the Sri Lankans a high status of identity amongst the Buddhist communities at Bodhgaya.

One mural inside the temple relates Sri Lanka to Bodhgaya depicting the story of the girl Sujata, who is shown offering a bowl of rice milk to the Buddha before his awakening (Fig. 15). In each different life of the Buddha, a bowl of rice milk will be offered to the Buddha under the Bodhi tree. In the case of the historical Buddha it was the girl Sujata who did this deed. When she desired a son she went to the forest and, mistaking the Buddha for a tree spirit, she offered him the bowl rice milk. In return, Sujata acquired karmic merit (Penner 2009: 202). This event is indirectly related to the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* because this occurrence found place at Bodhgaya and marks the event of awakening (Penner 2009: 203). It is noteworthy that Sujata thought the Buddha was a tree spirit, which makes the theme of the Bodhi tree recurring.
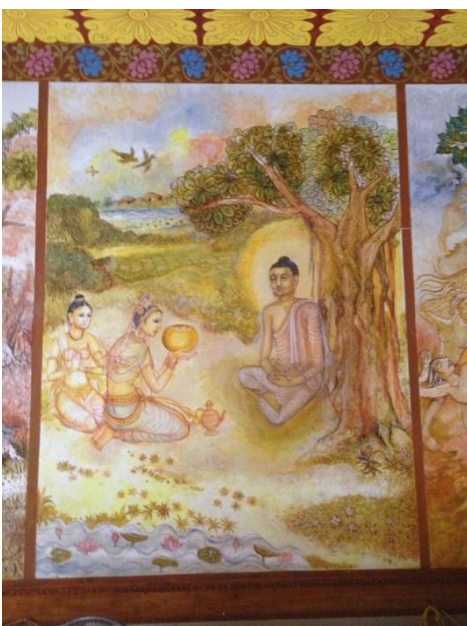

Figure 15. A mural of Buddha receiving a bowl of rice milk of Sujata.

3.3 The Burmese Temple and Bodhgaya as a _lieu de mémoire_

Inside the Burmese Temple are large statues and smaller ones, all of them with the earth-touching hand gesture (Fig. 16-9). The amount of statues in the earth-touching posture reflects the importance and popularity of the event of awakening, evoked by the image. This image of the Buddha became popular in Burma from the Pagan period onwards, and the gesture is seen in many statues from Burma; for instance, in a group of Burmese sculptures in the British Museum examined by Richard Blurton (Blurton 2002: 55-63). Although his work is not focused on the earth-touching gesture, the amount of Buddha statues in this position reflects the popularity of the event in Burmese art (Blurton 2002: 55, 61). According to John Guy, this image of the Buddha in the earth-touching gesture was also an significant remembrance of the awakening displayed on Burmese Buddhist tablets, which were important mobile votive objects (Guy 2002: 27; Brown 1988: 113, 116). These examples of Burmese sculptures are examples of the idea of Bodhgaya as a _lieu de mémoire_ in the Burmese minds.

Figure 16. The Buddha with the earth-touching gesture on the ground floor. Although the cloth hides the body, one can see through the fabric the silhouette of the gesture.

Figure 17. The Buddha statue on the first floor.

Figure 18. A little Buddha statue.

Figure 19. A small Buddha statue with *Bhumisparsa mudra*.

A second visual element is a painting on the first floor that depicts the Buddha in the earth-touching gesture during his victory over Mara (Fig. 20). This work of art is the first one seen of the other twelve paintings all showing events in the life of the Buddha, yet this one makes a connection to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* by showing the Buddha at this site becoming awakened. Another reference to the site's history is the Bodhi leaf ornaments that form part of the altar's artefacts (Fig. 19), which refer to the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha became awakened, as is explained in section 3.1.
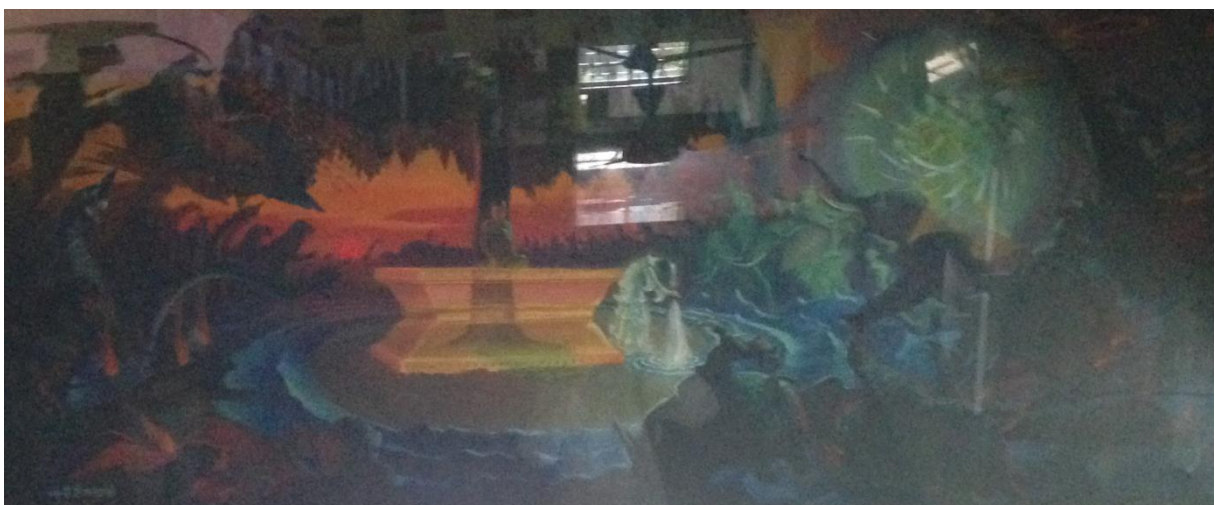

Figure 20. A painting of the Buddha's awakening.

3.4 Burma and its relation to Bodhgaya

The Burmese were the first foreign Asians to settle at Bodhgaya (Doyle 1998: 375), which gives the temple a special place in Burmese memory. The significant role of the Burmese as donors and restorers at Bodhgaya, seems to effect the visual culture of the Burmese Temple. Here, the role of donators is emphasized by the stone statues of which I assume are donors surrounding the temple, the prominent plates naming benefactors at the entrance and inside the temple, and the donation boxes on both floors (Figs 21-5). I suggest that all these elements have a visual impact and that they reflect the importance of public donations in Burmese culture, and could also refer to different attempts of restoration and donations of the Mahabodhi Temple. It was the Burmese who made the first great restoration at the Mahabodhi Temple and made their last attempt to restore the temple in 1877 (Ahir 1994: viii, 87). According to Spiro, nameplates dedicated to benefactors, as is the case in the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya, seem to help to popularize donations amongst Burmese Buddhists (Spiro 1997: 42). He further argues that the *junta* tries to promote Burma and Buddhism outside the country by sponsoring Buddhist institutes, such as the Burmese Temple in Bodhgaya. Yet Spiro doubts whether restorations of Buddhist institutions have tourism purpose related to capital, or an ideological purpose to show the power of the Burmese state (Spiro 1997: 42). In Bodhgaya both cases are optional. The fact is that at the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya are continuously in search for sponsors and try to stimulate donations by making donations public. It seems Buddhist donators find this manner of donation attractive, getting best of both worlds: gaining merit and status.

Figure 21. A sculpture of a donor outside the temple.

Figure 22. A plate of names of donors.

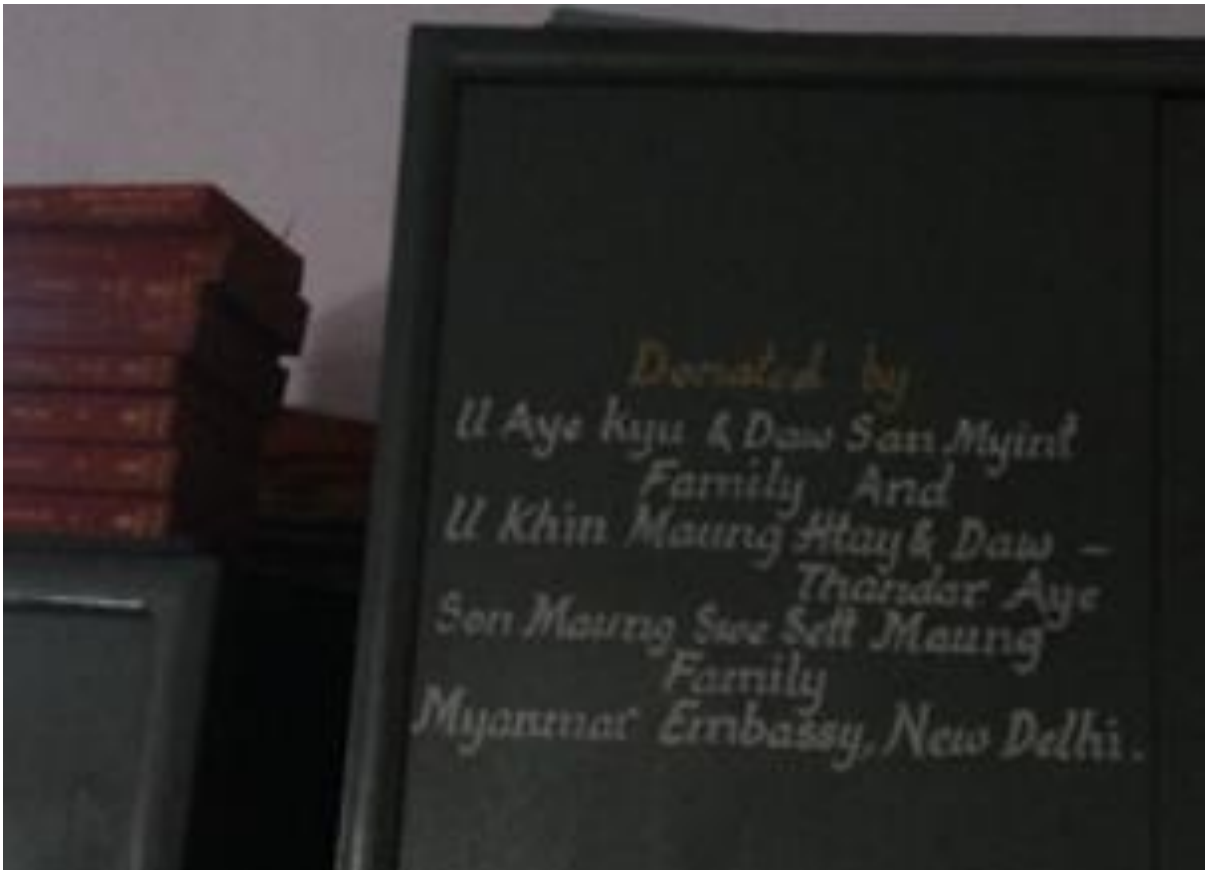Figure 23. Naming a donor at the entrance of the first floor.

Figure 24. Naming a donation on the closet with reading materials.

Inside the Burmese temple the statues not only relate to the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*, but also reflect the historical relationship between Burma and Bodhgaya. The number of statues of the Buddha in the earth-touching gesture reflects the popularity of this image. A reason for the event becoming a typical depiction in Burma could be linked to the renewed connection to Bodhgaya in the Pagan period (Guy 2002: 27). Burmese pilgrims went to Bodhgaya and brought back votive tablets or plaques as a mementos or in other cases they made the tablets themselves in Burma to reproduce Bodhgaya and the event of Buddha's awakening and acquire the merit one gained from making a pilgrimage to the actual site (Lowry 1974: 24). More evidence for the standardization of the image in Burma can be traced to the court of Anawratha (or Aniruddha), who dedicated most of his votive tablets to the Buddha in the earth-touching gesture (Galloway 2002: 47).

Figure 25. Donors are named at an altar, with at the right a donation box.

Brown suggests that the popularity of the Buddha in the earth-touching gesture is due to the prominence of Theravada in the eleventh century and the reign of Anawratha at Pagan (Brown 1988: 111). Although not all of these examples are based on statues, they illustrate how the place (*lieu*) where the event took place was evoked in the reflection of the image in Burma

Another visual element at the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya is a painting depicting the Buddha receiving food from two Burmese merchants (Fig. 26). The Burmese historical relationship with the site is marked by the story of two Burmese merchants traveling to Bodhgaya who receive hair relics of the Buddha. According to the Shwedagon legend, a Mon myth from the fifteenth century, the seventh week after awakening two merchants, Tapussa and Bhalika, offered the Buddha food. In return he gave them eight hairs to enshrine and worship in the Shwedagon Pagoda at Yangon (Pranke and Stadtner 2015: 13). In the painting a direct link has been established between Bodhgaya and Yangon by not only showing the gift of the hairs by the Buddha but also the journey of the merchants back to Burma and the stupa that enshrines the hair relics, which resembles the present-day Shwedagon stupa in Yangon. In the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya a different visual element related to Bodhgaya could be traced on the altar in the shape of Bodhi leaf ornaments (Fig. 19), which refer not only to the awakening, but also to the memory and history of pilgrimage by referring to devotional acts around the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya by the Burmese (Saibaba 2005: 29-30). The emotional importance of the leaves can be traced back to earlier times of pilgrimage, during which a

Bodhi leaf was the highest valued memento. Nowadays, it is still a desired memento or souvenir for both pilgrims and tourists from all over the world (Guy 1991: 356; Platvoet and Toorn 1995: 158).

Another link is noticeable in the imitation of the Mahabodhi Temple in Burma. One temple was built in Pagan in the thirteenth century and one in Pegu in the fifteenth century (Brown 1988: 108). Although the Pagan Temple is proportioned similarly to the Mahabodhi Temple it differs in detail, such as the entrance that has a different facade (Brown 1988: 102, Fig. 1). King Dhammacetiya built the temple in Pegu in a different style than the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya. I suggest that these temples were built because of a desire to have the Mahabodhi Temple nearby and, because during the period of 1100–1858 travel to Bodhgaya became difficult for Buddhists due to Muslim invaders who suppressed Buddhism, ideas which Asher supported in his work (Asher 2012: 72, 75).

Figure 26. Buddha receives food from two Burmese merchants. A painting showing the Shwedagon Temple at Yangon, Burma.

There are three types of visual elements in the Thai Temple that make a clear link with Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*: one large and one small statue of Buddha with the earth-touching gesture, and leaf ornaments. The large statue is situated on the altar (Fig. 10) and a smaller one is situated in a niche in

front of a mural of a replica of the Mahabodhi Temple at Thailand (Fig. 27). I will provide examples to support the idea that the image of the Buddha with the earth-touching gesture is often used in Thailand. The study of Listopad is focused on the styles of Thai statues (Listopad 1999: 49-64). Five of the fifteen images seen in his examination are statues in this earth-touching posture, which could indicate that the posture became popular in Thai art in the fifteenth century (Brown 1988: 116-7). There are more highly respected Buddha statues in the earth-touching posture in Thailand, such as the Phra Puttha Chinnasi and the Phra Si Satsada, both from the royal Wat Bowonniwet in Bankok (built in 1826). These statues reflect that the Thai tried to reproduce Bodhgaya and the awakening. The Phra Puttha Chinnarat statue inside the Wat Phra Sri Rattana Mahatat (Phitsanulok province, 1357) bears a striking resemblance to the large Buddha statue in the Thai Temple in Bodhgaya.

Figure 27. A small Buddha statue in front of a mural of a replica of the Mahabodhi Temple.

Figure 28. Bodhi leaf ornaments on the pillars.

The throne, the paintings behind the statue, and the two statues of the monks Sariputra and Maudgalyayana in the Wat Phra Sri Rattana Mahatat are all similar to the ones seen at the Thai Temple in Bodhgaya. Because of the similarity in detail it is likely that the shrine at Bodhgaya is an imitation of the shrine in the Wat Phra Sri Rattana, substantiating the popular use of this type of

presentation of a shrine with the same statues to reproduce Bodhgaya where the event of awakening took place in Thailand.

A third visual element is the golden Bodhi leaf ornaments that cover the upper part of the pillars (Fig. 28). As in the Sri Lankan and Burmese Temples, these could refer to the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha awakened. At the same time, the delicacy of the shape and material are perfect for ornamentation just as in the Sri Lankan Temple.

3.6 Thailand and its relation to Bodhgaya

There is a specific link between Thailand and the site, which is the imitation of the Mahabodhi Temple in Thailand. First, inside the Thai Temple at Bodhgaya there is a mural of the Wat Arun from Bangkok which seems to be influenced by the Mahabodhi Temple painted in a niche. Thai Buddhists show their connection to Bodhgaya by means of this painting inside the temple. More structures inspired by the Mahabodhi Temple in Thailand are the Chiengmai Temple and the Chiengrai Temple, which were probably built around the same period in the fifteenth century (Brown 1988: 108). Both are inspired by the Mahabodhi Temple, yet the details are very different: the proportions are dissimilar and the building material and exterior decorations differ significantly (Brown 1988: 108-9). Listopad argues that the Thai king Thilokanat traveled to Bodhgaya and desired to build his own Mahabodhi Temple and reintroduce Pala art (Listopad 1999: 59). However, Meyer states there is no evidence that either the king or the architects went to Bodhgaya or that they used a visual example of the temple (Meyer 1958: 293). According to Brown, there is no evidence as to why these two temples were built in Thailand. He argues that king Thilokanat was impressed by monks who went to Sri Lanka to plant a Bodhi tree (Brown 1988: 111). I propose that the king also wanted to have a visual point of reference to the holy site inside his own realm. The act of building Buddhist monuments assures merit and at the same time strengthens and legitimizes his power, an idea that fits into the contemporary Thai monarchy and politics. John Guy suggests that a Buddhist revival took place in Thailand at that time, which supports my idea that the king wanted to create Bodhgaya nearby his realm. Building replicas of the Mahabodhi Temple made it possible for the Thai people to reproduce Bodhgaya in Thailand itself (Guy 1991: 366). Asher also states that the king desired a nearby surrogate of the Mahabodhi Temple (Asher 2012: 72, 75). The reason for this desire was probably because the position of Buddhism became threatened in India because of Islamic rule. Not only was the Buddhist religion suppressed, but also pilgrimages to sites such as Bodhgaya became difficult.

Another mural in the Thai Temple at Bodhgaya highlights this relationship between Bodhgaya and the Thai Buddhists, which is again related to the main temple at the site. A painting on the right side of the altar (when looking towards it from the front) depicts the Mahabodhi Temple (Fig. 10). This mural, just as the mural of the replica, shows that their dedication to the memory of the site relates in particularly to the Mahabodhi Temple itself. A more recent historical relationship with the site comes from three occasions between 1968 to 1977, each of which are also related to the Mahabodhi Temple. Thai pilgrims and monks at the Thai Temple in Bodhgaya offered donations to help restore the Mahabodhi Temple (UNESCO nomination dossier, 15).[6] There is an even more recent development in the vicinity of the Mahabodhi Temple. A golden spire weighing 290 kilograms was donated by Thailand in 2013. The online documentary archive on a webpage of a monk residing in Bodhgaya show the procedure of approval.[7] These documents state that Thai devotees already started the process to place the golden spire at the top of the Mahabodhi Temple in 2010.[8] According to the documents, their reason was making merit for the Thai queen, who had just turned eighty, as well as for themselves and their relatives.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I answered the question "How do the foreign temples visually express their relationship to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*?" in a twofold manner, first by investigating the relationship of the three foreign temples to the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*, and secondly by studying the relation of the three countries to Bodhgaya.

The first part of this investigation resulted in finding that the Sri Lankan, Burmese and Thai Temples all used the media of statues, paintings and Bodhi leaf ornaments to visually express their relation to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*. There are a great number of statues and paintings of the Buddha depicted with the earth-touching gesture in the three temples. The second part of my examination revealed how the desire of being in the vicinity of Bodhgaya resulted in the creation of replicas of the Mahabodhi Temple in Southeast Asia, as seen in Burma and Thailand. The Sri Lankan Buddhists did not build replicas of the main temple and focus on the tree instead.

I noticed how each of the three temples used a specific visual element related to the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*. Sri Lankan Buddhists focus on the Bodhi tree, seen at the exterior and interior of the temple, and the tree is likewise significant in the Sri Lankan historical relation with

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[6] http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1056rev.pdf.
[7] https://swamiji1.wordpress.com/tag/thai-king-donated-gold-at-mahabodhi-temple.
[8] http://www.bodhgayatemple.com/btmc/?pg=activities.

Bodhgaya. For the Burmese Temple the examination led to the emphasis on the earth-touching gesture in different media (statues and painting), and the most striking characteristic of the Burmese relation to Bodhgaya is linked to the Mahabodhi Temple because of their history restoration and the building of replicas of the Mahabodhi Temple. At the Thai Temple I noticed a pattern of the Thai emphasizing the Mahabodhi Temple in their relation to the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* and to the Thai relation with Bodhgaya the emphasis is still on the Mahabodhi Temple.

Regarding the influence of these three communities at Bodhgaya, I conclude that both the Sri Lankan and Burmese communities played a major role in the history of pilgrimage, donation and restoration of the Mahabodhi Temple. The significant difference is the relationship with the British in the colonial period. The Burmese withdrew from Bodhgaya in the Colonial Period while the Sri Lankan Dharmapala worked with the British to accomplish his goal of the Buddhist revival. This cooperation was decisive for the current Sri Lankan status at Bodhgaya: their temple is the closest one to the Mahabodhi Temple and is situated within the important Mahabodhi Society Compound. Today the Burmese emphasize public donations and contributions to the community, which is noticeable in the visual culture of the Burmese Temple in: the plates with lists of donors and the donation boxes inside the temple. There is also a donation box in the Sri Lankan and Thai Temple, but it is less prominent and these two temples have no plates with a list of donors. For Thailand it was difficult to find a direct relation to Bodhgaya in the past. Most of the relations are from the recent past. It seems as though the Thai are trying to create their own memory of the site for future generations. Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand mapped their own countries into the history of Bodhgaya, linking their visual culture to the memory of the site.

Chapter 4. The temples and the visual expression of their domestic cultures

In this chapter I answer the third and final sub-question 'How do the foreign temples visually relate to their domestic cultures?' I will do this by looking for cultural expressions in various media, such as paintings, statues or architecture, and try to relate these to history and politics.

4.1 The Sri Lankan Temple and its domestic visual culture

In this section I mainly focus on the motifs of the lotus and the peacock. These images are common in the Sri Lankan visual culture. An additional focus is on the statues of the Buddha and on two *bodhisattvas*. Besides these visual elements, the Bodhi leaf and the *dharmacakra* wheel are also typical Sri Lankan motifs. However, there was no space to elaborate on the other elements. I chose the lotus because the motif is undeniably present inside the temple. In general, in Buddhist art the peacock is less visible than the Bodhi leaf and the *dharmacakra*, which made the choice of the bird more interesting.

Lotus motif

The interior of the Sri Lankan Temple is fully decorated with murals and has a variety of lotuses on the walls and ceiling, as well as carved in to the wood of the doorjamb and shaped on the fence's knobs (Figs 5, 12-3). The lotus is a typical motif in Sri Lankan temples and is often seen on the walls and ceilings in a great variety of designs and colors. Although the lotus is not exclusive to Sri Lankan Buddhism or even to Buddhism itself, the interior of Sri Lankan temples, such as the one at Bodhgaya, shows the common Sri Lankan representation of the motif, which is even more splendid in royal temples (Gunasinghe 1978:31; Ward 1950: 294-6).

An example of the use of this flower motif can be found in the Kandy Temple, a famous place of Sri Lankan pilgrimage because the relic it contains is the Buddha's tooth. The temple is part of the royal palace in the holy capital of Kandy, the seat of the last Sri Lankan King (UNESCO webpage).[9] Lotuses in a variety of sizes and colors are integrated in to the interior. General connotations in Theravada Buddhism refer to the lotus' spiritual purity, and its functions as the seat of Brahma and of the Buddha (Ward 1950: 292). However, the lotus also lends itself as a great way to be used to decorate and fill empty spaces in the interior of a temple. This idea of the lotus as filler of space is recognized by other scholars (Gunasinghe 1978: 31; Ward 1950: 294). Although Ward refers to the motif as a symbol, he also acknowledges the lotus as an aesthetic decorative aspect. Another important aspect of the lotus is related to the burgeoning Sri Lankan nationalism, which began in the late colonial

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[9] https://www.unesco.nl/erfgoed/heilige-stad-van-kandy#zoom=3&lat=7.29361&lon=80.6403&layers=BT.

period and accelerated after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 (Trainor 2004: 125). The lotus became the national flower of Sri Lanka, which reflects how the lotus is not only linked to spirituality, but is also integrated into worldly politics. Furthermore, the national emblem of Sri Lanka has also used the lotus as an element for the government logo.[10] In the Sri Lankan Temple at Bodhgaya the aesthetic value of the lotus could be recognized, having the function of a filler of empty space. Yet, the connotation with spiritual purity should be considered as being of additional importance because the lotus is explicitly chosen as a space filler, not another flower or another motif. The emblematic function of the lotus shows the repetition of this particular flower in political as in religious context.

Peacock

A second visual element in the Sri Lankan Temple related to its domestic culture is the peacock. On top of the wooden façade at the entrance of the temple is an image of two peacocks (Fig. 29). The peacock has two striking characteristics: it can eat poisonous plants without negative health effects and it has great aesthetic power of pride. These two elements were appropriated by ancient Sri Lankan rulers to connect their political power and status with the peacock's resilience strength and pride. This bird was used as an emblem on the banner of the Maurya Empire in the third century BCE, and later on the banner of a Sri Lankan king, as the vehicle of Skanda, a Hindu deity and the son of Shiva and Parvati (Ward 1950: 290-1). This use of the peacock shows how the bird was appropriated by Sri Lankan rulers in various religious contexts.

Figure 29. Two peacocks are carved out on the wooden entrance of the Sri lankan Temple.

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[10] The use of the lotus in Sri Lankan nationalism is in short discussed in the Sunday Observer, a Sri Lankan newspaper: http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2012/01/29/jun05.asp. Another webpage shows the logo of the government: http://proudsrilanka.blogspot.nl.

Today, the peacock is an emblem of the Sri Lankan airlines, the shape of the bird being highly stylized. 'Peacock Proud' is the title of an article in an airline magazine discussing the Sri Lankan company (Bowers-Dodson 2011: 7-8). The fact that the peacock was chosen to be an emblem of a Sri Lankan airline company could support the idea the bird continues to have an aesthetic power in Sri Lanka linked to worldly concerns, such as pride and status. With these examples I suggest how the peacock could be appropriated in Buddhist and Hindu contexts, which mostly having an emblematic function and a focus on worldly concerns. In the temple at Bodhgaya the peacocks could be related to this worldly concern of pride of Sri Lanka, especially concerning their placement: at the entrance and on a high spot.

Buddha statue in meditation posture

Inside the Sri Lankan temple at Bodhgaya, the lotuses guide the visitor to the shrine where a large Buddha statue is sitting in the meditation posture (Fig. 5). As mentioned in Section 3.1, the Buddha in the meditation posture is one of the typical images in Sri Lanka and is linked to the idea of the Buddha's awakening. However, the actual practice of meditation is also relevant to Sri Lankan Buddhism. The centrality of meditation is reciprocal in the behavior of the *sangha* and lay community, with whom meditation is a daily practice (Gombrich 1997: 237). One might think that this is an ancient practice, but according to Gombrich this 'Theravada' practice performed by the laity has only become highly practiced in the period after World War II and is regarded as a modern development. Traditionally one should spend years under the supervision of a master. A transition was already made by *anagarika* Dharmapala, the Sri Lankan leader of the Buddhist revival at Bodhgaya, who produced his own exercises and created the opportunity for the laity to learn meditation from a book, although most still learned from a master (Gombrich 1997: 237). Gombrich suggests that besides being a tool towards salvation, meditation would become intertwined with worldly affairs as meditation centers were becoming increasingly popular, a popularity that led to the centers becoming a product and becoming a profitable by practitioners (Gombrich 1997: 237). The meditation posture of the main statue at the temple at Bodhgaya could reflect this central place of meditation in Sri Lankan Buddhism.

Bodhisattva statues

Two *bodhisattva* statues are located in front of a painted wall with clouds and swans. The *bodhisattva* Maitreya has a *stupa* in his headdress (Fig. 30), and the *bodhisattva* Padmapani (lotus bearer), or Avalokitesvara (Fig. 31), has an Amitabha in his headdress and a lotus behind his left shoulder. The ensemble of the shrine evokes the idea of a heavenly paradise with Buddha as the central being and where the two *bodhisattvas* also play a role. It refers to the Mahayana School, of

which the *bodhisattva* cult in Sri Lankan Mahayana Buddhism is especially dedicated to Avalokitesvara and Maitreya (Trainor 2004: 124). Worldly concerns are appropriated in Mahayana Buddhism as a characteristic that fits the religious politics of ancient rulers. It was the kings who included or excluded influences of Mahayana Buddhism through their patronage. Some Mahayana ideas were already incorporated in Sri Lankan Buddhism in the seventh century, especially by Sri Lankan kings, such as Anuruddha (Trainor 2004: 124). The *bodhisattvas* in the Sri Lankan Temple show that Sri Lankan history of Buddhism stresses the shift in perspective from the centrality of the Buddha and the *sangha* to the inclusion of Mahayana ideas, including the Buddhist lay society, and refer to more worldly concerns, such as power and status (Gombrich 1997: 254).
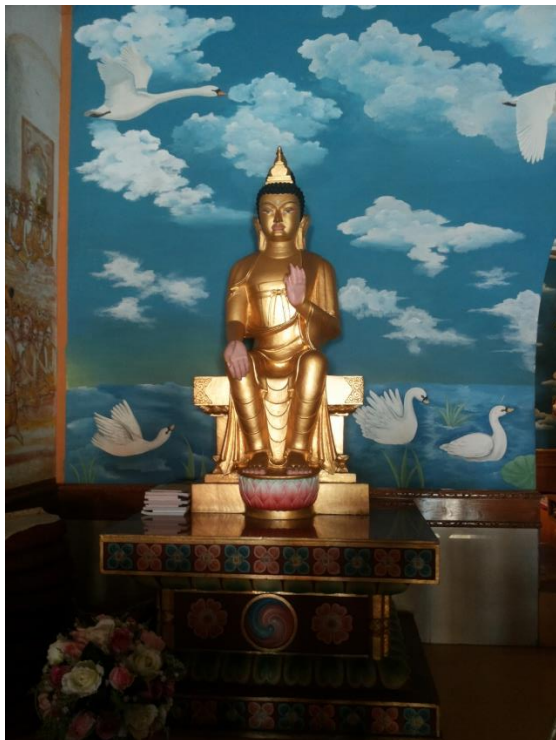
Figure 30. The *bodhisattva* Maitreya.

Figure 31. The *bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara on his throne.

4.2 The Burmese Temple and its domestic visual culture

In this section I explore the relationship between the visual culture of the Burmese Temple to Burmese domestic visual culture. Just as in Section 4.1, there are many visual elements that reflect the domestic culture. I chose three elements that I think are striking, which are the rooftop, the Buddha statues and the paintings.

The rooftop

From the main road one can see the architecture of the Burmese Temple (Fig. 6), having a straight roof, with extra layers and crowned at the top. On the outer borders of each layer are symmetrical golden flame-like motifs with tipping endings in the corners shaped like a *makara*. The style indicates the influence of domestic traditional architecture seen on rooftops of sacred buildings in Burma (Cavendish 2005: 123). For example, the tower of the Burmese Temple resembles the style of the Mahamuni Pagoda in Mandalay (Cavendish 2005: 22). This style follows the example of wooden monasteries, such as the roof structure of the Maha Aung Mye Bonzan Monastery (Cavendish 2005: 57-61). Another comparison can be made with the roof of the royal palace in Mandalay (Cavendish 2005: 74).

In relation to hierarchy, the architectural style of temples is forbidden to be applied to secular buildings. Furthermore, in ancient periods the inner shrine could only be entered by abbots and kings (Cavendish 2005: 96). These architectural rules reflect the position of religion and of kings in Burmese society and how they relate to each other. The Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon dates from the sixth century, and the various temples built around the pagoda have a similar roof as the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya: different levels of horizontal rooftops with one or more spiral towers. The tiles are green and the outer borders are golden and pointy.

What makes the Shwedagon pagoda significant is that it is linked to the story of the two Burmese merchants who acquired the relics of the Buddha, that are enshrined in this pagoda. This results in the pagoda and the area around it being seen as a sacred space: a microcosm where the divine is present (Kitiarsa and Whalen-Bridge 2013: 10). Kings would install a golden umbrella on top of the temple to legitimize their power. As Kitiarsa and Whalen-Bridge argue, the Shwedagon square is a place of power politics (Kitiarsa and Whalen-Bridge 2013: 10). The Burmese government interferes with all religious events by starting national festivities with a Buddhist ceremony held by government officials and sometimes led by the prime minister, which is often conducted at the Shwedagon square (Smith 2015: 166). For instance, the law court visits the Shwedagon Pagoda at every new session, and when a new Prime Minister is chosen the Shwedagon Pagoda will be used as a ceremonial place. Another connection between religion and politics is noticeable by the ceremony of Burmese officials being blessed by monks in the name of the Buddha, which legalizes their political position (Smith 2015: 167).

This is relevant to the Burmese Temple in Bodhgaya because it reflects the context in which a temple is built and used by the Burmese state. However, the square is also a 'platform' of contemplation by the Burmese subjects. According to Seekins, the area around the Shwedagon Pagoda has a history of

political activism (Seekins 2010: 18). This is supported by Smith who argues the Shwedagon site provides ground for anti-government rallies (Smith 2015: 273, 275). The socio-political relation to Buddhism played a role from the eleventh century onwards (Smith 2015: 3). The political aspects of Buddhism reflect how Buddhist architecture is inseparable from politics and the state in Burma. As will become clear in the following two paragraphs, this is also the case for the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya.

The Buddha statues

The altars of the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya show elements associated with the domestic visual culture. The appearance of the statues is striking, with their pale white color, red lips, golden details and oversized flat hands (Figs 7-8, 17-8). There are many examples of such Buddha statues in Burma, for instance at the Onhmin Thonze Pagoda, where the main statue resembles the ones at the Burmese Temple in Bodhgaya (Tettoni 1998: 47). A second example of similarities is a group of statues in the Shwedagon Pagoda at Yangon. Furthermore, a giant statue in the same style is located in Sagaing and there are also three such Buddhas at Monywa. However, this is not the only style in Burma. The style of Buddha sculptures vary across different periods of time and in different regions (Tettoni 1998: 127).

The elaborate wooden platform with a backside is another striking component of a certain Burmese artistic style. The Buddhas at the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya have elaborate wooden platforms with backsides. The preciseness of the carving and the vegetal motifs show the craftsmanship of the Burmese in lacquer ware. The altar resembles a royal throne, especially when the woodwork is painted in gold. It seems Burmese patrons envisioned the Buddha on a throne like a monarch, as a universal ruler. The idea of the relationship between the king and the Buddha sitting on a throne was already suggested by Lowry in the 1970s. The royal reference fits the Burmese idea that the Buddha is regarded as a king and the king regarded as divine (Lowry 1974: 2). The Burmese king presented himself as a *bodhisattva*, which had a practical function: in this manner he could achieve a divine status and thus legitimize his power. Furthermore, patronage of architecture and art was a tool for rulers to measure power and greatness as well as to stimulate Buddhism (Spiro 1997: 40). The shrines in the Burmese temple in Bodhgaya could reflect this relationship between the Buddha's throne and kingship.

Paintings

The style of the paintings and the landscapes which are depicted reflect the domestic culture of Burma. One of the scenes depicts the subduing of the raging elephant Nalagiri, which took place in Rajagriha, India and not in Burma. However, a background with Burmese architecture and traditional

clothing and headgear are depicted (Fig. 32) so as to place the scene in a Burmese setting. A typical Mandalay embroidered cloth (*kalaga*) also depicts this event (Fig. 33). Mandalay was the latest Buddhist kingdom in Burma. In another painting (Fig. 26) the Burmese culture is again signified. Although I mentioned the painting before in Chapter 3 in relation to Bodhgaya, the artist could have left out the image of the Shwedagon pagoda if he only wanted to focus on Bodhgaya. The paintings show the eminent place of Burmese culture integrated into the scenes of the life of the Buddha.

Figure 32. A painting of Buddha subduing Nalagiri in a Burmese background.

Figure 33. Embroidered cloth with a scene of Buddha and Nalagiri in Burmese style.

If the works are made by the Burmese government, this emphasis could reflect their desire for higher status in the history of the Buddha and to display their culture as a political tool to promote the country and its culture, as was done in earlier times (Spiro 1997: 40). The paintings were made in the 1960's by Burmese painter Ba Kyi (1912-2000). He mainly painted modern-style works and designed propaganda images for the Japanese occupiers. When Burma became independent, he worked in the theatre and designed covers for magazines. His work for this temple was exceptional because of its traditional character and I speculate it is somehow in connection to the state. It could support the theory the artist had to carry out this form of political expression, because he lives in a country with a totalitarian regime.

Conclusion

This section reflects how the domestic visual culture of the Burmese Temple at Bodhgaya is correlated to the politics and power of the ancient kings and of the recent Burmese regime. The need to legitimize their political power is reflected in Burmese architecture and art from an early period onwards. Outside Burma there is still a need to represent and promote Burmese culture, which is done especially through the paintings. I assume that when looking closer at the visual culture of the Burmese Temple, one will notice more political links.

4.3 The Thai Temple and its domestic visual culture

In this section I will focus on elements of the architecture, murals and statues of the Thai Temple at Bodhgaya.

The architecture

Entering the compound, the Thai Temple's exterior (Fig. 9) displays a distinctive Thai architectural style. The temple strongly resembles the royal Wat Benchamabophit in Bangkok and a brief comparison of the two structures one can conclude that it is a replica. The original one in Thailand was built by King Rama V in the late nineteenth century. The structure acquired an architectural component under the rooftop to connect the king with his divine right to rule, and thus legitimize his power. Placing the seal of the king as an architectural component is a standard royal ceremony for new temples in Thailand, as is the case at the Benchamabophit, the seal of which depicts a crown resting on a pillow (Lawrence 2012: 196, Fig. 64, 198). Lawrence explains how religious architecture is linked to the national culture of Thailand by building replicas of existing royal monasteries, because these royal types ought to be more highly acknowledged by the governance than buildings whose values consists mainly on local elements (Lawrence 2012: 171).

According to Kitiarsa, the Thai Temple at Bodhgaya is a combination of the expansion of the Thai *sangha* abroad and the start of the sponsoring overseas missionaries by the Thai government (Kitiarsa 2010: 114, 116). The motives of the government are religious and nationalistic, reflected by the promotion of Thai cultural tradition of the temple (Kitiarsa 2010: 129). This governmental interest could clarify why the Thai Temple at Bodhgaya is fashioned in the image of the Benchamabophit, because the Benchamabophit reflects the power of the state. An image of the Mahabodhi Temple on top of a Garuda is used as a seal at the Thai Temple at Bodhgaya (Figs 34-5). The Garuda is the national emblem of Thailand adopted by King Rama VI, which makes the relation to political power clearly visible. The mythical bird Garuda is the vehicle of the Hindu deity Vishnu. In ancient Thailand when a Hindu king was in power, it happened that this king integrated Vaisnava rituals into kingship and sometimes even identifies himself with Vishnu (Gutman 2013: 135). The idea of divine kingship or divine blessings ingrained in Thai history reflects how both Buddhist and Hindu beliefs were used to legitimize power (Sharma 2003: 8-9).

Figure 34. The rooftop of the Thai Temple with a seal underneath the top.

Figure 35. The seal at the Thai Temle depicting Garuda with the Mahabodhi Temple.

Murals

The murals inside the Thai Temple are hardly visible because the hall of the shrine is fenced. The internet provided most of the pictures of the scenes; however, it was difficult to make out their stories. To the right side of the shrine there is a painting of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya in a similar niche (Fig. 10). Depictions of a royal court (Fig. 36) and a city getting attacked (Fig. 37) are painted in the aisle. This is followed by scenes in a forest; however, the quality of the pictures I found on the internet is too low to see the details. Another wall on the right of the entrance shows scenes of a boat with a relic and people taking a sapling of the Bodhi tree with them (Fig. 38). On the left side of the entrance scenes show how a storm resulted in one person swimming his way to the mainland with the relic. The Thai stupa, known as the Phra Pathom Chedi, from Bangkok is painted in a niche left of the shrine seen from a visitor's perspective. Above the stupa image is a scene in the garden of an unidentified structure where people are pulling down the Bodhi tree and thereby destroying it. At the bottom people are pulling some twigs off the tree and taking it with them in a boat. Next to the stupa painting scholars are depicted inside a tower, which resembles a Christian church, with a silhouette of the Buddha above them.

If one follows the paintings from the royal court to the painting of the Thai stupa, they could be seen as a story of how a Thai king desired a Buddha relic and a sapling of the Bodhi tree to overcome adversities, such as an attack on the city. In his quest he travelled through woods and across seas to acquire relics of the Buddha to enshrine in Thailand in a stupa, yet greed destroyed the tree. However, it is difficult to relate all of the paintings. I would suggest that a great amount of the murals reflects how an effort was made in the Thai Temple to connect Thailand to the Buddha's history.

Figure 36. A scene of a royal court and of the prince or king riding on his horse.

Figure 37. A burning city, possibly getting attacked.

Figure 38. A boat with a Buddha relic and a sapling of the Bodhi tree in the fore front.

Statue and altar

The main statue at the Thai Temple in Bodhgaya is a large golden image (Fig. 10). The Buddha is sitting on a lotus throne with an ornamented backside. The walls of the niche are painted blue with golden decorations, and heavenly beings float near the statue. The shrine is filled with altars on which rest a large number of small images, ritual objects and fake flowers. I describe the shrine because the ensemble resembles the shrine at the Benchamabophit Temple in Bangkok. Another similar shrine is the Wat Ananda Metyarama Temple built in 2014.[11] The latter shrines filled with kitsch objects and materials. Although the Wat Ananda Metyarama is located in Singapore, it still is a Thai Temple. The Singapore shrine supports the idea that the Thai replicated the Benchamabophit shrine in other countries.

Another element of the shrine is the idea of a throne-like altar (Stratton 2004: 63). This probably refers to the Buddha being a universal monarch, ruler of the worldly and the divine, and linked to the ruler of Thailand. According to Stratton, the Buddhist kings used the status of a *bodhisattva* for practical reasons of legitimizing power (Stratton 2004: 57-8). According to Sharma, nowadays Thailand is a constitutional monarchy that tries to include all religions without publicly stating that they are Buddhist (Sharma 2003: 17). The king is openly Buddhist and a patron of Buddhist institutions and art (Sharma 2003: 17), such as the Thai Temple at Bodhgaya, and whether Thailand supports various religions or not, the act of building a Buddhist temple in Bodhgaya reflects the continuous importance between politics and Buddhism in Thailand.

Conclusion

The architecture, statues and altar of the Thai Temple at Bodhgaya are replicas of the Benchamabophit Temple and shrine at Bangkok. It could be said that the visual elements relate to the power structure of the government and how it wants to promote Thai culture overseas. These themes fit the paintings inside the temple, which also visually reflect the display of Thai culture. Thai art and architecture have from ancient periods onwards been related to politics and especially to the king.

Figure 39. The Buddha sitting on a throne-like altar.

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[11] http://watananda.org.sg/about-us/history.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I searched for expressions of domestic culture and visual culture in the Sri Lankan, Burmese and Thai Temples at Bodhgaya to answer the sub-question: How do the foreign temples visually relate to their domestic cultures? I examined the media of statues and paintings in the three temples because these easily lend themselves to cultural expressions. Architectural elements of the Burmese and Thai Temples reveal how they respectively made use of the exterior of temples as an expression of their domestic culture, which is unlike the Sri Lankan Temple, which was built in the European style by the British colonial government.

In most cases, there was a relation between Buddhist domestic culture and kingship or government. The domestic visual elements in the three temples are not only an expression of Buddhism, but are also related to political matters, such as power and status. This goes back to ancient periods when kings used Buddhist art and architecture to legitimize their power, a theme that remained throughout the history of Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. The image of an enthroned Buddha related to the kingship of earlier time, and is an idea which is still visible in the visual culture of all the three temples in the form of the elaborate throne-like altar. In the case of the Burmese and the Thai Temple, the exterior imitates royal architecture while inside the altar is a replica of a royal shrine from the home country. By means of using exterior and interior elements of the temple, the government of Burma and Thailand managed to refer to their highly valued visual culture of the home country, and to show their national power and pride outside its own country.

Differences in the visual elements in the three temples are due to domestic characteristics such as style and the manner in which national identity is interwoven with Buddhism. In the Sri Lankan Temple two strikingly domestic characteristics are the Buddha statue in the meditation posture to visualize the event of the awakening, and their Sri Lankan focus on the Bodhi tree that is visible in the use of the Bodhi leaf motif. Inside the Burmese Temple the appearance of the Buddha altar and the stylistics of the cloths and surroundings in the paintings provided a clear visual identity of the Burmese culture, especially of the royal Mandalay culture. For the Thai Temple, it was the building itself and the altar that reflected the Thai Buddhist culture, because it was a recreation of an existing high valued temple and altar in Thailand.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

In this section I will answer the main question: How are the three foreign temples positioned at the global village that Bodhgaya has become? For this paper I linked the visual culture of the Sri Lankan, Burmese and Thai Temple at Bodhgaya to the idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* using the study of Nora in Chapter 3 (Nora 1989), followed by an examination of the expressions of domestic visual culture in the three foreign temples Chapter 4. Features of globalism are traced in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, yet they have not been exposed together. The results of the two sub questions will be conflated by the main question in the next paragraphs.

According to Nora a place only develops into a site of memory when it becomes meaningful into the people's mind. The idea of Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* was a manmade process and part of the Buddhist revival in the 19th century under leading of the Sri Lankan *anagarika* Dharmapala and the British Edwin Arnold. At Bodhgaya the 'will' to choose to remember Bodhgaya as an important Buddhist place of pilgrimage, appeared to have less to do with Buddhism itself, as it was the 'Buddhist' fear of Hindu presence at the site and Hindu dominance in the Indian society. From an Indian perspective, it should be held in mind that in the end of the nineteenth century nationalism entered the scene of Indian society, a nationalism that was based on the Hindu identity, and that excluded smaller groups such as the Buddhists. For Buddhists this revival could be a chance to regain some power, geographically and mentally. This aforementioned religious-political situation could be seen as a pivotal reason why Bodhgaya had the opportunity to become *a lieu de mémoire* involving Buddhist inside and outside India*.* From a European perspective, the site was more attractive as a Buddhist site than having a Hindu identity. In the period from the nineteenth century onwards Bodhgaya gained an increasing international attention, especially after 2002 when the site became listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, tourists and pilgrim-tourists from around the world desired to experience the site of awakening for themselves.

To refer to the visual cultures of the Sri Lankan, Burmese and Thai Temples related to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*, I can conclude that similar kinds of visual images are used to express this idea of the site. One important visual image found in all three temples is the Buddha with the earth-touching gesture in the media of small and large statues, paintings, and murals. At all the three temples this image is represented at least twice. This could also be seen as a global phenomenon because a large amount of the same images and my literary investigation revealed the high popularity and large quantity of this type of Buddha image outside India. These images of the Buddha are at the same time part of the domestic cultures, because of their particular styles, for example the color of the

statues, or the headgear, cloths and other stylistic features in murals or paintings, and the typical backgrounds of the painted scenes. Buddha images in the earth-touching posture promote not only Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*, but they also show how the same iconography has an important place in Buddhist cultures of South and Southeast Asian countries, depicted in different aesthetics, all with the same purpose to reproduce Bodhgaya and its memory of the awakening.

Another aspect which is similar in the visual cultures of the three temples is the appearance of the altars. In all three cases, and especially in the case of the Burmese and the Thai, the altar whereupon the main Buddha statue rests is shaped like a royal throne. This visual feature could be seen as to reflect globalism because on one place, Bodhgaya, the same kind of idea of a throne-like altar is used, and at the same time these thrones also show their domestic cultures. The stylistics of the home country again promote the domestic culture in Bodhgaya, just like the images of the Buddha in the earth-touching gesture. However, in this case it also reflects the idea of the Buddha being royal and the king being divine. In this manner the visual culture of the temple makes a connection to foreign politics referring to the placement of old kings inside these Buddhist societies.

Coinciding with the cultural-political level is the use of domestic architecture by the Burmese and Thai Temples in Bodhgaya. They carry out the royal style referring to the grandeur and status of their royal visual cultures, which could be seen as a political statement by putting themselves on the map of Bodhgaya. The international attention to the site made it even more attractive to countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, to be present on the site. The mapping, by means of visual culture, is an important part of the process of globalism at the site.

Another similar visual feature in the three foreign temples in Bodhgaya is the image of the Bodhi leaf, because it has the same outline and function in the different three temples. In all three temples the use of the Bodhi leaf is a recurring motif, functioning as an ornament. However, the Bodhi leaf has also a function related to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire*, because the simple form directly reminds the visitor to the Bodhi tree where under the Buddha became awakened. Although the outline of the Bodhi leaf is the same, the stylistics are slightly different, but most important is that the function and meaning stays the same in all cases. This could be seen as a global aspect, because different Asian Buddhist cultures from two separate regions use the same visual language, and which is noticeable at the temples in Bodhgaya.

There are some striking differences between the South Asian temple and the two Southeast Asian temple's visual cultures. A first difference related to Bodhgaya as a *lieu de mémoire* is the Sri Lankan Buddhist emphasis on the Bodhi tree, while the Burmese and Thai Buddhist are more focused on the Mahabodhi Temple. This coincides with the building of replicas of the Mahabodhi Temple in the

home country, already from an early period onwards. In this paper, it reveals how the two different Asian regions could be separated in their central focus on reproducing Bodhgaya. The focus could be linked to the historical relationship of the three countries with Bodhgaya, related to the preservation of the Bodhi tree and of the Mahabodhi Temple.

Furthermore, the history of Bodhgaya already echoed internationality because of ancient pilgrimage, acts of donations, and restorations from all over Asia. A wider l impact has been made from 1956 onwards, when a number of foreign temples were allowed to build a temple in the vicinity of the Mahabodhi Temple. How this global phenomenon could be linked at the three foreign temples is that there became an increasing desire of Asian countries to be part of 'the navel of the earth'. Especially because of the recent development of the site's listing by UNESCO in 2002, reassured a large flow of tourists and investments from all parts of the world in Bodhgaya, which is discussed by social scientists as I noticed in the Introduction and in Chapter 2. From this period onward more and more Asian countries own a place on this World Heritage Site and benefit from the flow of tourism and pilgrimage, while promoting the culture of the home country.

Visual cultures, such as in the three selected temples at Bodhgaya, extend outside its disciplinary border of arts and culture and can be incorporated into the recent studies of social scientists, and become interdisciplinary studies. In this way visual cultures could be a great extension in debates about globalism.

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Figures 1-5, 7-34, 39: Shita Bakker, July 2015.

Figure 6: https://www.tripadvisor.nl/Attraction_Review-g424922-d2693605-Reviews-Burmese_Vihara_Monastary-Bodh_Gaya_Bihar.html#photos;geo=424922&detail=2693605.

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