

COMPLETION REPORT

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Subject of Research Project: **Comparative Study of the Sacred Mountains of Mt. Yoshino - Omine in Nara Prefecture and Mt. Doi Suthep -Pui in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand**

The research team found the similar contexts of Sacred Mountains of Doi Suthep-Pui and Yoshino-Omine that communities and religious organizations in both places conduct rituals representing gods of nature coexisting with Buddhist ceremonies. Both places provide pilgrimage route representing 4 stages of Buddhist Enlightenment. The local Buddhist legends are the narrative of Buddhist power subduing local untamed spirits. Both local legend and folktales provide hierarchical structure of indigenous deities. These two syncretic Buddhist belief systems also suffered the government intervention for modernizing the countries in the late 19th Century with the historical context of political conflict to the central powers.

The different contexts between the Sacred Mountains of Doi Suthep-Pui and Yoshino-Omine are the profound different interpretation of Buddhist principles between Theravada and Mahayana practices. One of the key differences is the worship of Bodhisattva gods that reinterpreted local deities as Buddhist gods. This allowed the more harmonious syncretism between Buddhism and animism in Japan while in the northern Thailand, Theravada Buddhists worship only Sakkayamuni Buddha and local deities are worshiped but subordinated as protectors of Buddhist icons and Dharma. The difference of the Meiji restoration in Japan and Chakri Modernization in Thailand is animistic Shinto became the national religion while Buddhism was suffered greatly, and religious syncretism was banned. In contrast, Buddhism was promoted to be national religion in Thailand, but it became purified by royal elites, and any form of syncretism and animism was also publicly condemned. After WWII, the Cold War political contexts were different in Thailand and Japan although they both were on the same side during the war. Freedom of religious right was rectified in Japan by the Allies force while, in Thailand, Buddhism became more associated with nationalistic campaign against the rise of Communists in Southeast Asia with the strong support of the USA. The central Buddhist government continued to appoint the chief priests of all temples in Thailand. The decentralization in the government system gave the local authorities more power to support cultural and historic conservation of the old towns in Japan but the centralized system continues in Thailand until the late-1990s that municipalities were created to handle minor parts of public facilities and allowed to collect local taxes. The local NPOs are the key in conservation of historic landscape in Japan collecting data and volunteering works with cultural affairs of municipalities with strong support of local businesses. In contrast, in Thailand, the branches of the central government still control most of state public facilities. Another key difference is the management principle of National Park system that Japan's National Park is open system allowing multiple ownerships of forest land while the National Park in Thailand is close system owned by the government. The government agencies occasionally control thus intervene in local cultural events and communities are fragmented. The pilgrimage route and historic sites in the sacred mountain of Yoshino-Omine once were banned and deteriorated but were restored and promoted to the world heritage today by the initiation of the local communities and Shugendo Buddhist practitioners and collaborated across the prefecture line. In contrast, the local communities and agencies in Chiang Mai do not own facilities. With the inspiration

from the success of Yoshino-Omine, alliances of local communities, municipalities, universities and businesses of Chiang Mai have to be fortified to conduct volunteer work for providing knowledge of local history, protecting indigenous tradition, planning and managing facilities for historic sites and cultural events associating with sacred mountain. With the small success of local historic sites and events, the network of communities and local agencies could grow and would gain momentum to negotiate and work with support from the national authority.

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