



The philosophical meaning of the reliefs of heaven and hell at the Pancabala temple for Buddhists at the Vipassana Graha monastery in Bandung

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the philosophical meaning of heaven and hell in Pancabala Temple, Bandung, by explaining the issues of cosmological symbolism in the temple architecture. Data were obtained from the limitations of historical documentation and the damage of some reliefs that require a deeper philosophical interpretation. The background of the five-pointed star temple that functions as a connecting space between culture and cosmological teachings, spirituality, and morality; However, this integration element is still not coherent. The method used is a qualitative descriptive approach, combining hermeneutic analysis with symbolic interpretation to reveal the philosophical messages embedded in the temple reliefs. The results of primary data were obtained from the observation that heaven and hell function as a moral framework that guides human behavior. Secondary data were obtained from the drafts of illiterate humans, which sparked debate about the reality of life after death, and can be interpreted as a state of consciousness that arises from human actions. The results of the philosophical analysis concluded that the construction of the analyzed temple is a Buddhist legacy that contributes to a new understanding of the values of moral and cosmological education inherited from ancestors and highlights its relevance regarding old cultural education adopted in modern times.

Keywords: Temple, Philosophical, Hell, Heaven.

1. Introduction

Pancabala, located in the Vipassana Graha Temple complex in Bandung, holds deep meaning in Buddhist teachings, especially related to life, karma, and reincarnation (Apple, 2014). One of the most interesting elements of this temple is the relief depicting heaven and hell, which is a key symbol in the process of understanding Buddhists about good and bad deeds (Wiratno & Sudibyo, 2025). In this problem study, how the philosophical meaning contained in these reliefs provides spiritual and moral understanding to Buddhists at the Vipassana Graha Temple in Bandung (Medh, 2024). The philosophy contained in the reliefs at Pancabala Temple is important to study because of the interconnectedness of the existence of two important illustrative concepts in Buddhist teachings, namely Heaven (happiness) and Hell (Apaya) (Adinugroho & Nurannisa, 2021). The reason is because this second draft represents the ultimate goal and consequences of one's behavior in this world (Almujaddidy, n.d.). In the Buddhist tradition, human life is seen as an effort, a long journey, accepting heaven as a place to achieve happiness, and karma (action) (Dharma, 2023). In-depth research also provides meaning that can be determined by someone about good and bad life (Manurung et al., 2024).

Reliefs depicting the consequences of conditions in nature, heaven is visualized as a state of peace, tranquility, and happiness (Laurent et al., 2024). On the other hand, the philosophy of hell reliefs depicts conditions of suffering and cruelty (Laurent et al., 2024), from consequences, representations of the results of bad actions or negative karma that cause rebirth and are needed by the Buddhist community (Silverman & Patterson, 2014). The goal is to build reliefs on the walls of the Vipassana Graha monastery in Bandung,

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because to provide the philosophical meaning of the reliefs, not only as mythological illustrations, but also as formal education (Subkiman, 2025) . Furthermore, it is important to understand the importance of practicing a holistic life, wisdom (panna), ethics (sila), and meditation (samadhi) (Waraporn & Samukkeethum, 2025) .

This understanding is important because it will further enhance efforts to guide people on their spiritual journey (RY Adam & Tohari, 2023) . Furthermore, formal education is essential so that more people can follow the path of truth, as there is no wrong path. One of the main principles of Buddhism is karma, where every good or bad action has its own consequences (Schwarzenbach et al., 2016) . The reliefs of hell at the Pancabala Temple serve as a reminder of the importance of good deeds and self-awareness in every action. Meanwhile, the reliefs of heaven invite people to focus more on increasing their achievements in the heavenly realm with God for doing good, rather than just worldly pleasures (Stöcker et al., 2017) . Although the conditions of symbolism depict suffering, such as the satire of the heads of pigs, buffaloes, and cows from trivial matters and the peak conditioning of anger. In Buddhism, suffering (dukkha) is one of the four noble truths. The hell reliefs depict suffering as a consequence of attachment to the material world and ignorance. For Buddhists, this teaches the importance of letting go of attachments and pursuing wisdom to avoid being trapped in the cycle of ignorance of society (Hameed et al., 2018) . Education on ethics and morality, such as: these two reliefs serve as a means of moral education for Buddhists. The goal is not only the pleasure that occurs in achieving heaven, but also about behavior full of love and understanding, the reason for suffering while depicting bad ethics and resulting in conditions of rebirth in hell. Moral education of society is enhanced by common sense that reminds people to avoid bad actions that harm themselves and others (Rongcai et al., n.d.) . Local contextual approaches, such as; This study attempts to explore how the heaven and hell reliefs at the Pancabala Temple? Accepted and interpreted by Buddhists in the local context, especially in the context of the practice of Vipassana meditation, which has unique practices and cultural diversity (Supandi, FP, Mudra, IW, & Suharto, 2023) .

The Role of Relief in Community Spiritual Education: Often, reliefs in temples or places of worship are considered as objects of art or history. However, this study explores how reliefs in the Pancabala Temple function not only as aesthetic objects, but also as a means of moral and spiritual education for Buddhists, especially in the context of Vipassana, which prioritizes inner transformation (Kurniawan & Yahya, 2020) . The Interaction between Visualization and Meditation Practice: Another unique feature is the study of the relationship between the visualizations displayed through these reliefs and the meditation practices carried out by Buddhists at the Vipassana Graha Temple. This study will explore whether and how descriptions of heaven and hell can influence the understanding and experience of meditation of practitioners (Syahputra et al., 2025) . This study first explores the meaning of the reliefs of Heaven and Hell based on direct interpretations from Buddhist practitioners at the Vipassana Graha Temple in Bandung, not from the academic perspective of art, archeology, or history as studies in general . Innovation *in the modern world for current readings* is based on the symbolic spiritual experience of society, not just the analysis of traditional forms or iconography (Saparudin & Pabolo, 2017) . Reviewing the Function of Relief as a Strengthening Media for Vipassana Meditation Practices Innovation There has been no research connecting the reliefs of the Pancabala Temple with the strengthening of modern vipassana practices. The reason for this study is to further evaluate how the visualization of heaven and hell was used by society in the past. Likewise, its influence in the modern era is its function as an object of contemplation, as a moral reminder, as a trigger for awareness of the law of karma. This study *innovates in* finding the relationship between relief art and contemporary meditation practices. Integrating the Study of Religious Aesthetics with the Psychology of Moral Transformation. (Education, 2024) This study analyzes how reliefs influence: people's moral behavior, motivation in carrying out principles, their understanding of suffering (dukkha). The *innovation:* combining symbolic art analysis

with psychological and transformational aspects. This study introduces the design of Buddhist visual discourse, namely how reliefs are used as a means of conveying teachings non-verbally and contextually for modern urban society in Bandung. *The innovation*: a new design that reliefs function as adaptive moral teachings with modern culture and the needs of urban society (Saputro, 2024) . Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of a visual-based Buddhist moral education model that integrates Buddhist philosophy, symbolism, and sensory experience. Practically, these findings offer innovative alternatives for educators, managers of religious educational spaces, and religious institutions in designing moral learning media that are more contextual, inclusive, and relevant to an increasingly visual-oriented modern society.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a hermeneutic approach and symbolic analysis to understand the philosophical meaning of the reliefs of heaven and hell on the Pancabala at the Vipassana Graha Buddhist Temple in Bandung. This method was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual experience of Buddhists and to examine how the reliefs function within the context of existing religious practices. meaning, philosophical, relief, heaven, The selection method in this study refers to the importance of an interpretive approach in cultural studies, where meaning is not only taken from texts or symbols, but also from the direct experiences of the subjects involved. This is very relevant to this study, this is what aims to explore the meaning of life through the experiences of Buddhists. Kaplan, F., & Silverman, D. (2014). Qualitative Research Methods for Social Sciences. According to the second author, this qualitative method is more appropriate to use when wanting to understand the meaning and perception of individuals in a particular social context, which in this case is the religious experience of Buddhists. The author uses the Miles and Huberman data analysis technique, namely an analysis consisting of three streams of activity that occur simultaneously, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification.

2.2 Data Collection

The data in this study were obtained through a number of data collection techniques relevant to the chosen method, as follows: In-depth Interviews : Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with active Buddhists who worship and meditate at the Vipassana Graha Temple in Bandung. This interview aimed to explore their experiences in interpreting and giving meaning to the reliefs of heaven and hell. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: Actively participating in meditation and retreat activities. Having sufficient spiritual experience with Buddhist symbolism. Happy to provide personal reflections on Buddhist teachings and practices. The sources of this interview were selected using a purposive sampling technique, where participants were selected based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. Participant Observation : Researchers conducted direct observations at the Vipassana Graha Temple, which was involved in meditation and ritual activities, to record how people interacted with the reliefs at the Pancabala Temple. Researchers recorded people's expressions, actions, and visual and emotional relationships to the reliefs during religious activities. Documentation Study : Documentation in the form of photos, video recordings, and literature about the Pancabala Temple and its history was collected for a complete symbolic analysis and to understand more deeply the context of the reliefs.

2.3 Study Procedures

The research procedure was carried out chronologically as follows: Initial Data Collection (Month 1): Literature and documentation study on the history of the Pancabala Temple, Buddhist teachings on karma, heaven, and hell. Preparation instruments include interviews and observations. Implementation of Observations and Interviews (February to March) Direct observation of religious activities at the Vipassana Graha Temple and community interaction with the reliefs. This was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with 10-15 selected informants using purposive sampling techniques. Data Analysis (April): Processing interview and observation data, as well as symbolic analysis of the Pancabala Temple reliefs using a hermeneutic approach to understand the layers of symbolic meaning. Using coding techniques to find the main themes that emerge in interviews and observations. Report Writing and Compilation of Findings (May to June): Writing a report on the results of the analysis of the philosophical and symbolic meaning of the reliefs of heaven and hell in the context of Buddhist teachings. Compiling conclusions about how the reliefs function in the spiritual life of Buddhists at Vipassana Graha Vihara in Bandung. The results of this study will be tested and evaluated through a number of methods: Data Validation (Triangulation) : To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation of sources and methods was carried out. Data obtained from interviews, observations and documentation were compared and confirmed to see consistency between one another. Credibility of findings : Findings from interviews and observations will be evaluated by referring to classical Buddhist literature and teachings on heaven, hell, and karma. This process ensures that the resulting interpretations are in accordance with Buddhist principles and local cultural relevance. The results of interviews and observations will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify emerging patterns of understanding related to the meaning of symbolic reliefs in the spiritual life of the community. Personal and Critical Reflection Researchers will also conduct critical reflection on the data obtained to avoid interpretation bias and to ensure that the findings are credible and depict the spiritual views of the community in an accurate manner.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The meaning of the reliefs of heaven and hell in Bandung shows how society interprets moral values through clear visual symbols that are close to their daily lives. The reliefs become more important when they are not only works of art, but also cultural reflections that teach that goodness, such as a compassionate heart, discipline, and respect lead one to heaven, namely a bright and peaceful state of mind. On the other hand, images of hell are not only used for formal education but not to scare, but rather as a reinforcement of symbolic warnings about the consequences of laziness in doing good, social indifference, and actions that harm others. In the context of modern Bandung, while still upholding traditional characteristics, these reliefs become a link between moral teachings, cultural identity, and the spiritual experience of the community, thus functioning as a medium for ethical education that remains relevant amidst changing times.

Table 1. Observation of spiritual reliefs on the five-star temple in Bandung

Observation ornaments	Conditions of assistance	Explanation of help
Direct observation	Condition architecture	Simple measuring tools
Analysis architecture	Form creation overview	Compare with other temples
Observation ornaments	Temple with carved walls	Mythology depicted in relief form.
Conservation	Erosion due to impact	Guardian of all temples

In the direct observation stage, researchers examined the condition of the temple's architecture using simple measuring tools. This observation provided an initial description of the physical structure, proportions, and building elements that were intact or damaged. Next, an architectural analysis was conducted. Learn more about the preparation of the form. This process includes reviewing style, function, and distinctive architectural characteristics. The results of the analysis were then compared with the architecture of other temples to find similarities, differences, or certain unique characteristics. The next stage was ornamental observation, namely identifying carvings on the temple walls. Ornaments are not only seen as decoration, but also as representations of cultural and religious markers. From these carvings, researchers interpreted the mythology depicted in the reliefs, thus understanding the symbolic messages and narratives intended to be conveyed during the construction period. The relief visualization of Heaven and Hell has a significant causal relationship with changes in moral awareness and ethical reflection of Vipassanā practitioners. The relief visualization serves as an initial stimulus that triggers sensory contact (*phassa*), which then activates feelings (*vedanā*) and perception of meaning (*saññā*). The visual-experiential approach is a substantial complement to text- and lecture-based Buddhist moral education. The relief visualizations of Heaven and Hell not only convey moral teachings, but also facilitate a deeper and more contextual transformation of ethical awareness, particularly for Vipassanā practitioners.

3.2 Discussion

The discussion on the philosophy of heaven and hell held in Bandung became a unique dialogue space, where primary data obtained from thinkers, artists, and academics met to interpret recurring metaphysical concepts in the context of modern life. The secondary discussion data obtained initially started from existential questions that precisely triggered the birth of various new innovations from educational approaches based on moral reflection, contemporary artworks that awaken inner awareness, to the idea of humanist technology that places the values of goodness as a foundation. From Bandung, the classic discourse on heaven and hell was given a new breath, turning into a source of creative inspiration for various areas of life, as in the table below.

In the data analysis process, philosophy is understood as a guide for humans to find meaning behind life's actions and experiences. Heaven in this context becomes an inner glue, namely a description of happiness that encourages humans to always provide benefits for many people and peace for all beings. Conversely, hell is presented as a moral comparison, but not as a threat to those who do a lot of good. At this stage of data presentation, it is seen that philosophy offers hope through teachings to maintain empathy. Tolerance and avoidance are characteristic of greed. Heaven is presented as a reminder for humans to continue to do good and care, and to maintain social balance. Hell, in its role, is not scary for those who have repented and contributed, helping to direct behavior to stay on the right track. Thus, the presentation of this innovation of moral values becomes a more important element in the form of a fluid consciousness of society. The conclusion of the process of self-withdrawal can be seen in the strengthening of human moral duality to not harm, not kill, and not commit adultery. Heaven and hell in several stages. This is understood as a concept of partnership: not just a place of reward or punishment, but as an ethical instrument that guides the mind to remain clean and unpolluted. In fact, cultural values such as music and traditions are highly valued as part of the morality of perfection.

a. A number of spiritual philosophers believe that the images of heaven and hell are not only metaphysical spaces, but also symbolic conditions of the human mind.

The idea of heaven and hell continues to evolve in line with the modern era as an innovation in spiritual philosophy. Thinkers believe that this second draft is no longer understood solely as a metaphysical space in the afterlife, but rather as a symbol of the human inner state, reflecting the peace and anxiety born of daily actions. The reason for this discovery is a shift in perspective that opens up new opportunities for the public to understand moral teachings in general, more rationally and deeply. Paradigm changes about heaven and hell, opinion from the first informant.

b. A number of modern philosophers have argued that the ideas of heaven and hell serve as a moral framework that guides human behavior in the world.

Modern philosophers also make important contributions by asserting that the idea of heaven and hell can be used as a moral framework that guides human behavior in the real world. The reason is because they see it as an ethical system, society encourages its findings to build a better humanist value system, oriented towards responsibility, integrity, and goodness simultaneously. The findings of the study from informants show that innovative thinking in modern philosophy presents new methods and views in designing heaven and hell, namely as a moral framework that can be applied in everyday life.

c. In the existentialist view, heaven and hell are understood as consequences of individual choice and freedom, not as physical places.

For a while, the existentialist view added the innovative perspective that heaven and hell are consequences of individual choice and freedom, not physical places awaiting after death. This perspective significantly contributed to strengthening my self-awareness, as it encouraged people to understand that the quality of life is determined by the decisions they make every day. The second informant's opinion indicated that this finding by the Buddhist community

d. Researchers in the philosophy of religion report that the debate about the reality of heaven and hell has been going on since ancient Greece.

Studies in the philosophy of religion show that debates about the reality of heaven and hell have been ongoing since ancient Greece. This historical fact enriches intellectual contributions to society, as it demonstrates that contemplation on morality is a long tradition of human civilization and remains relevant today. The fact that contemplation on morality has been a long tradition of civilization enriches humanity through methods and perspectives in understanding teachings.

e. A number of Eastern philosophical schools explain that heaven and hell are states of consciousness that arise from the results of human actions.

Eastern philosophical perspectives offer innovative insights, emphasizing that heaven and hell are states of consciousness that arise from human actions. Their contributions are evident in everyday life practices, where people are encouraged to interpret heaven as the attainment of inner peace through goodness and hell as the inner suffering that arises as a consequence of bad actions. Overall, these various philosophical perspectives provide moral, spiritual, and psychological innovations that enrich the way people understand life. Buddhist contributions should be seen in character formation, such as the establishment of a strong social ethic, as well as increasing human awareness that happiness and suffering originate within oneself and can be processed in a humanistic place, with heaven and hell as inner fusion.

4. Conclusions

The study of the philosophical meaning of heaven and hell in the Pancabala temple shows that the structure and symbolism of the temple not only function as elements of religious architecture, but also as a medium for conveying moral and cosmological values in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition in this archipelago. For Further Researchers: Further studies using archaeological, iconographic, and philological methods are needed for a more accurate and comprehensive interpretation of the symbolism of the Pancabala Temple. Deeper excavation of relevant classical texts can also enrich philosophical understanding. For Cultural Observers and Local Government: Documentation of these efforts is needed. Educational information about the conservation and development of the Pancabala Temple so that the public can understand the moral and cosmological values contained in the cultural heritage. For the community: This means that the ethics of heaven and hell as consequences of actions can be used as guidelines in daily life to foster moral awareness, responsibility, and appreciation of local wisdom. This research has important implications for the development of knowledge of the philosophy of religion, archaeology, and cultural studies in Indonesia. The finding that temple symbolism reflects the relationship between morality and cosmology can enrich the understanding of how past societies built ethics based on Spirituality. The most relevant strategic direction includes deepening the mechanisms of inner consciousness through a phenomenological and longitudinal approach, so that the impact of religious art can be traced from individual experience to be useful in sustainable social behavior change. Furthermore, the comparative interconnectedness of this study across traditions and cultures is crucial for formulating a more universal understanding of the role of religious art in shaping social ethics. Thus, this research is expected to not only enrich the academic treasury but also inspire the public to better appreciate, care for, and revive the noble values embedded in cultural heritage.

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