

illus. 1. Diagram showing various parts of the *Lop Buri* type gabled window.

1. The inner gable
2. The outer gable
3. Ngao (or Nāga)
4. The inner lintel
5. The outer lintel
6. The outer pilaster
7. The inner pilaster
8. Star pendent
9. Sheaths
10. Window base

Thai Traditional Gabled Doors and Windows

Pitya Bunnag

Gabled doors and windows are one of the characteristics of Thai monastic buildings. If not carefully observed, they tend to look similar, but in fact they can be separated into at least seven different types, or more, depending on their design. The various types of gabled doors and windows were created by builder's improvements, simplification, ornamentation or distortion on the preceding design.

1. Lop Buri Type

The prototype design for all Thai gabled doors and windows occurred in Lop Buri, where King Narai (1657-1688) lived during most of his reign. Examples of this type can be seen on the Bot Phra Chao Ngao (*fig. 1 and 2*), or on the Royal Audience Hall (*fig. 3*), both of which are in Lop Buri.



Figure 1. & 2. Gabled windows, and the lintel arrangement, Bot Phra Chao Ngao, King Narai's Palace, Lop Buri.





Figure 3.
*Lop Buri type gabled windows,
behind the Audience Hall, King
Narai's Palace, Lop Buri.*

Thai gabled doors or windows are not of an original design, because a similar design was once widely used on Khmer prasāda and still can be seen on the prasāda of Wat Phra Sri Maha That (*fig. 4*) in Lop Buri itself. Though the buildings have undergone many repairs in later years, they still retain many of their original features. Thai masons adapted the structures and decorated the doors and the windows of their monastic buildings with Thai gabled motives.

The main features of the Lop Buri type of gabled doors and windows consist of (*see illus. 1*):

The inner gable (1), which has a triangular shape, is positioned on top of another gable (2) which is smaller. It is called the "inner," because it is placed nearer to the exterior wall of the building than the smaller gable below (2).

The outer gable (2) which is smaller and is positioned below, has the same design as the inner gable (1), but it is placed to protrude out more than the inner gable. (The reason that these gables are not called the "upper" and the "lower," or the "larger" and the "smaller," is to eliminate the confusion which is likely to occur when it comes to describing the lintels).

Lintels (4 and 5) are placed at the base of the gables. At each corner, there is an indented step (*fig. 2*) to indicate that there are actually two lintels, placed one in front of the other. The inner lintel (4) is supporting the inner gable (1), and the

Figure 4.
Gable portico of the prasāda, Wat
Phra Sri Maha That, Lop Buri.



outer lintel (5) is supporting the outer gable (2). As the base of the inner gable is wider, the inner lintel has to be longer. These two lintels make up a pair.

Pilasters (6 and 7). There is one pair of pilasters on each side of the window (or door). Each is built superimposed upon the other. The inner pilaster (7) is placed further away from the centre of the window (door) than the outer pilaster (6). This is to symbolise that the inner pilaster (7) is supporting the inner lintel (4), and would have to be set nearer to the wall of the building than the outer pilaster (6). Each pilaster is decorated with traditional features, such as the star pendent (8), and the base is composed of sheaths (9).

Window base (10) is in the form of a two dimensional Chinese cabriole legged *kang* table. It is only applied to windows.



Figure 5. (above left)
Lop Buri type gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Phaya Man (1692), Ayutthaya.

Figure 6. (above right)
Lop Buri type gabled window in the



Figure 7. (left)
Lop Buri type gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Po Pratap Chang, Pichit.

The Lop Buri type of gabled window (and door) came to be used from the reign of King Narai, and was mostly used for royal monastic buildings, such as the ubosatha halls of Wat Phya Man (*fig. 5*) and of Wat Barom Phuttharam (*fig. 6*), both of which are in Ayutthaya and built in 1692 by King Petraja; and the ubosatha hall of Wat Po Pratap Chang (*fig. 7*), Phichit, built in 1701 by King Sua.

2. Maheyong Type

Between 1711-1721, King Tai Sa renovated Wat Maheyong, and his brother, the uparāja, renovated Wat Kudi Dao in Ayutthaya. Due to these renovations, some changes were made to the design of the gabled tops of both the ubosatha halls' windows. Thus, a new type of gabled top was created (*fig. 8 and 9*).



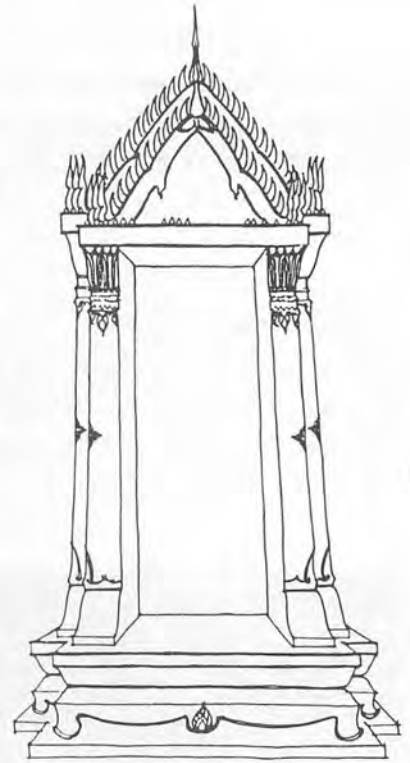
Figure 8. Gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Maheyong, (1711-1721), Ayutthaya.



Figure 9. Gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Kudi Dao (1711-1721), Ayutthaya.



Figure 10.
Detail of lintels and pilasters arrangements of the *Maheyong* type gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Kudi Dao, Ayutthaya.



illus. 2.
Maheyong type gable window.

These changes were a result of a new arrangement in the lintels (*illus. 2*). Here, the inner lintel was elevated, so that the nāga decorations at the base of both sides of the inner gable no longer remain at the same height as in the former Lop Buri type. The inner pilasters of both sides of the window, too, were made higher than the outer pilasters, in order to support the elevated inner lintel. It is always noticeable in the Maheyong type of gabled windows (or doors) that the inner pilasters are always higher than the outer pilasters. (*fig. 10*).



The Maheyong type gabled top was used for monastic buildings right up to the early Bangkok period, approximately to the reign of Rama III. It can still be seen in some monastic buildings in Thon Buri; for example, on the ubosatha hall of Wat Rakang (fig. 11), in Wat Grud and in many others.

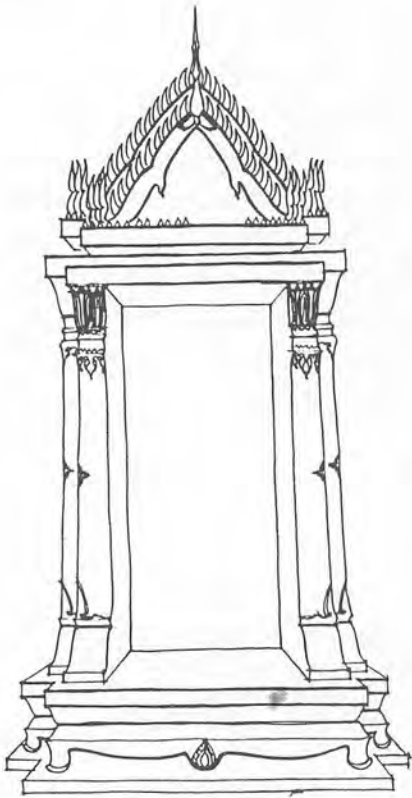
Figure 11. *Maheyong type* gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Rakang, Thon Buri. Built in the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851).

Figure 12. *Maheyong type* gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Kee Lek, Thon Buri. Built in the reign of King Rama I.

3. Kee Lek Type

Wat Kee Lek in Thon Buri was consecrated in the late Ayutthaya period. During the reign of Rama I, his brother, the uparāja, or so-called "Second King," rebuilt the ubosatha hall of Wat Kee Lek and changed the name to Wat Suwan Kiri. The doors and the windows of the ubosatha hall were then in the popular style of the Maheyong type of gabled top (fig. 12). There are three portals in front of the building. They also have the Maheyong type





illus. 3.
Kee Lek type gabled window.

illus. 4.
Lintels, gables and pilasters arrangements of the *Kee Lek type* gabled window.

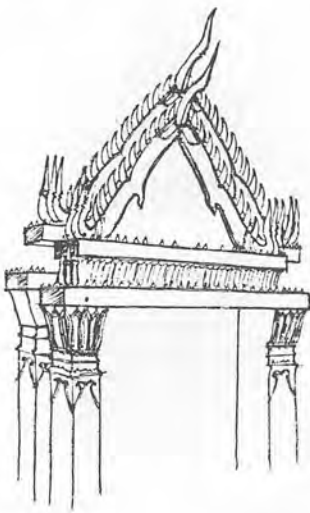


Figure 13. Gabled doors at the front of the ubosatha hall, Wat Kee Lek, Thon Buri.

of gabled top. But as the middle one was to be used by the Prince himself, it was made to look more prominent by adding another pair of lintels to it (illus. 3 and 4, fig. 13). Thus the Prince could enter his newly built ubosatha hall with the eminence and dignity due to his status. For this reason, a new type of gabled top for windows and doors was created, and it ought to be named the "Kee Lek type" for that is where it was first constructed.

The Kee Lek type gabled top did not become very popular among local monasteries. The reason might be that it is quite difficult to build, with its two pairs of lintels, and more over, each of them is not on the same surface, horizontally or vertically.

There have been various attempts to construct this type of gabled top in later years, but mostly it was used on royal monasteries: for example, the ubosatha hall of Wat Saket (fig. 15) in Bangkok, presumably renovated in the reign of Rama III; the ubosatha hall of Wat Arun, Thon Buri, built in the beginning of Rama III's reign; and the ubosatha hall of Wat Phra Buddha Bat, Saraburi (fig. 14), built in the reign of Rama IV.



Figure 14.
Kee Lek type gable door in the ubosatha hall, Wat Phra Buddha Bat, Saraburi. Built in the reign of King Rama IV.



Figure 15.
Kee Lek type gabled door in the ubosatha hall, Wat Saket, Bangkok, Presumably renovated in the reign of King Rama III.

4. Mondop of Wat Maha That Type

Wat Maha That in Bangkok was called Wat Salak in the late Ayutthaya period. The same prince who built the ubosatha hall of Wat Kee Lek mentioned earlier, also renovated the whole of Wat Salak in 1783, and renamed it Wat Maha That. The important buildings in the compound of the monastery are the present ubosatha hall, the vihāra, and the mondop. All the doors and the windows of the three buildings are decorated with the Maheyong type gable (*fig. 16*), which was then the befitting style for royal monasteries. The mondop itself was crowned with prasāda roofs.

Figure 16. *Maheyong type* gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Maha That, Bangkok.

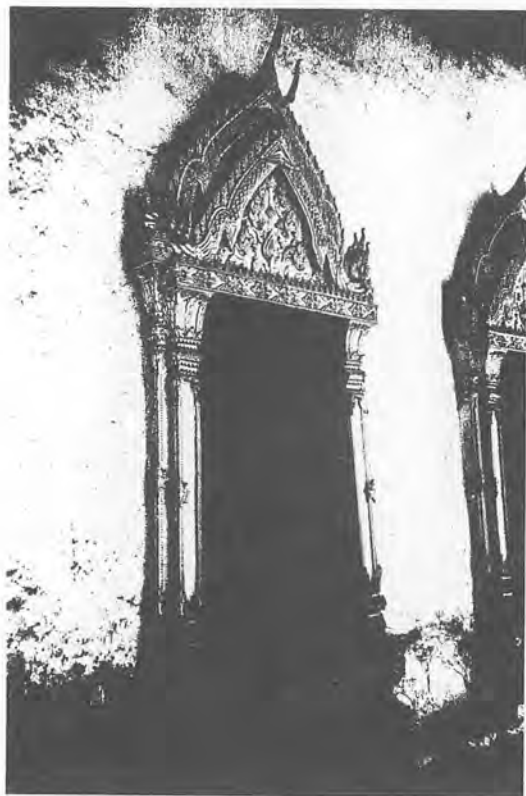
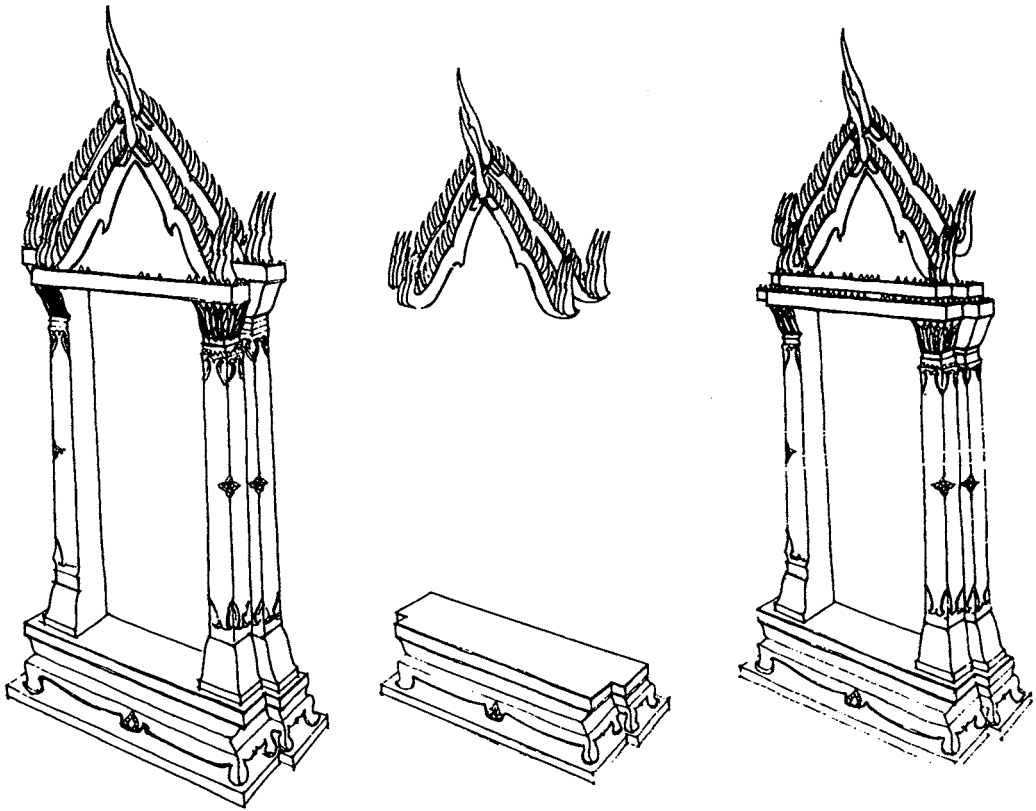


Figure 17. Gabled window (after renovation) in the Mondop, Wat Maha That, Bangkok.





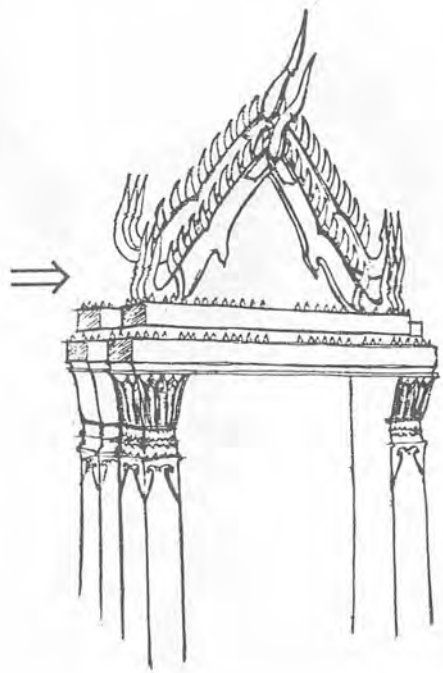
illus. 5. Stages of the Mondop's windows, renovation after the fire, Wat Maha That, Bangkok. Starting from the original *Lop Buri* type to the Mondop of *Wat Maha That* type.

In 1810, the *prasāda* roofs of the mondop were destroyed by fire, so the mondop needed to be restored. The restoration of the mondop included the construction the present hip roof to replace the former *prasāda* roof. Since the walls of the building were built of brick, they needed little repair. Presumably, parts of the gabled tops of the doors and the windows, such as the lintels and some parts of the pilasters, were damaged by the burnt wooden panels, and needed repair. As a result of this restoration, a new type of gabled top was created.

In replacing the new lintels, the masons chose the *Lop Buri* type to replace the former *Maheyong* type, but, at the same time, had them arranged in two pairs in the fashion of the *Kee Lek* Type (illus. 5).



Figure 18.
Mondop of Wat Maha That type gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Kok, Thon Buri.



illus. 6.
Gables and lintels arrangements of the Mondop of Wat Maha That type gabled window.

It appears that the *nāga* on both sides of the triangular inner gable are floating in mid air without any support from the lintels below (*fig. 17, illus. 6*). This is because the gables of the original construction are of the Maheyong type, while the repaired lintels belong to the old Lop Buri type. The reason for choosing the Lop Buri type of lintels instead of the Maheyong type might be because they are easier to build, and in any case, the mismatch can hardly be noticed.

There are not very many monastic buildings that adopted this type of gable. One of the very few is the ubosatha hall of Wat Kok in Thon Buri, which was built during that period, (*fig. 18*).

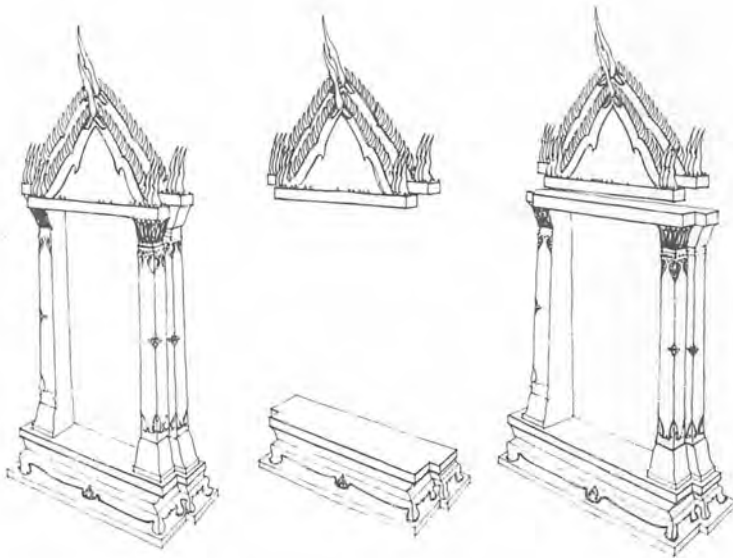


Figure 19. *Maheyong* type gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Chana Songkram, Bangkok. Built in the reign of King Rama I (1782-1809).

5. Chana Songkram Type

Wat Chana Songkram in Bangkok was formerly called Wat Krang Na. It was built in the late Ayutthaya period. In the reign of Rama I, the Second King, his brother, the same prince who built the ubosatha hall of Wat Kee Lek and the mondop of Wat Maha That mentioned earlier, also renovated this monastery in 1787, and gave it the new name of Wat Chana Songkram.

As the ubosatha hall of Wat Chana Songkram was built by the same person who also built Wat Maha That, the buildings of both monasteries are in the same style. The doors and the windows are also of the *Maheyong* type gabled top, as can still be seen on the windows on the ubosatha hall, (*fig. 19*).



illus. 7.

Stages of the renovation from the original *Maheyong* type gabled window to the present *Chana Songkram* type.

Originally the doors and windows of this ubosatha hall, it is assumed, had the same width. So, in the case of the doorway, it would have been quite narrow. Presumably during the renovations which took place at the beginning of Rama IV's reign, the doorways of the ubosatha hall were widened to what they are at present.

By widening the doorways, the masons had to destroy the side pilasters of the original doorways, and once they were widened, new pilasters were built. The work was carried out without destroying the original Maheyong type gable (*illus. 7*), but then the width of the new doorways did not correspond with the width of the original gabled tops. The problem was solved by the addition of a new pair of lower lintels, which are longer (*fig. 20*). As the new pair of lintels are in the Lop Buri type, and the upper original pair are of the Maheyong type, the two pairs of lintels do not correspond. Again, the difference can hardly be noticed. The Chana Songkram type of gable is unique to this monastery — it is not found anywhere else.



Figure 20. Gabled door of the ubosatha hall, after reconstruction, Wat Chana Songkram, Bangkok.

6. Lingkob Type

During the reign of Rama II, his brother, the Second King (a different person to the Second King of the reign of Rama I) renovated Wat Lingkob in Thon Buri (the exact date is not known) and gave it the new name of Wat Borwan Mongkol. Then again in 1868, during the reign of Rama IV, a son of this Second King repaired his father's monastery.

It is assumed that during the restoration works of 1868, the present middle door gabled top of the ubosatha hall was built. The design of this middle door gable is somewhat similar to the Mondop of Wat Maha That type in having a double pair of lintels of the Lop Buri type. But it was improved by having the nāga at the end of the larger gable lowered, thus, resting on their lintels (*fig. 21, illus. 8*), and no longer floating in mid air as those of the Mondop of Wat Maha That's gables. As well as this improvement, two further changes were made. Firstly, a horizontal groove on the lower lintel was made, giving the appearance of a three level lintel. Secondly, both gables were set on the same surface vertically. Now, the larger gable could no longer be considered to be the "inner"; nor the smaller the "outer."

Though the Lingkob type of gable has no impersonator or follower, it is considered to be the originator of the various types of gable that followed.



Figure 21. Lingkob type gabled door in the ubosatha hall, Wat Lingkob (Borwan Mongkol), Thon Buri.



illus. 8. Gables, lintels and pilasters arrangements of the *Lingkob* type gabled window.

7. The Corrupted Types

During the reign of Rama IV, many types of gabled windows and doors were designed and constructed. They have no set formula nor rule. The designs depend entirely upon the whim of the masons, so long as the overall appearance somewhat resembles the traditional gabled top. As there are too many variations, only one example will be shown here, namely, the gabled window of the vihāra of Wat Thep Nari in Thon Buri.

The vihāra of Wat Thep Nari was built in the early part of the reign of Rama IV. Its gabled windows (*fig. 22*), though quite traditional in their appearance, are different from elsewhere. It can be said, in some respects, that the gabled window of this monastery is a further development of the Lingkob type. Firstly, the masons omitted the horizontal groove on the lower lintels that made the lintels of the Lingkob type appear to have three pairs of lintels superimposed one upon the other. The gabled windows of Wat Thep Nari, thus, have gone back to the traditional two pairs of the Lop Buri type. Secondly, there is only one

gable instead of the traditional two. The reason for this is to eliminate the confusion. Since the gables of the Lingkob type (*fig. 21*) are arranged on the same vertical surface, the nāga at the base of each gable would have to be placed next to each other, and since each of the nāga has five heads, there would be altogether ten heads of the nāga in one setting. This would give a somewhat cluttered and confused appearance. As well as these reasons for the changes described, the main cause was to make the structure easier and less costly to build.



Figure 22.

The Corrupted type gabled window in the ubosatha hall, Wat Thep Nari, Thon Buri.

Conclusion

The old types of gabled windows have not been abandoned, nor have they declined in popularity, even though new types are being evolved and used. The Lop Buri type of gabled window was still in use right up to the early Bangkok period. The Kee Lek type of gabled window was in use from the reign of Rama I up to the reign of Rama IV, overlapping with the latest Lingkob type and most of the corrupted types. It is therefore impossible to place any type of gabled window in a definite period, as happens in Western architecture. This seems to be a characteristic of Thai architecture and art history. This is probably because Thai craftsmen and builders do not consider one particular style or type as being "in fashion" or "out of fashion," as in the West. For them, a religious building is not a piece of "architecture" to be admired, neither is a Buddha image regarded as a piece of sculpture for appreciation. They are made as objects of veneration. The essential function of each architectural feature is not ornamentation, but symbolism, and must be seen in the context of the whole structure. The overall impression is the paramount criteria. As soon as these symbolic forms become set in their design, i.e. traditional, and the original symbolism is forgotten, or has become indistinct, they are then likely to be modified to the point that, in some cases, the original form can no longer be recognised.

The front porch, gabled windows and doors, in their high relief form, were but the stylized designs that symbolised a real building. It was mentioned earlier that the Khmer had a similar form for porticos of their *prasāda*. Whether the masons of King Narai's reign were influenced by Khmer porticos, or they were their own conception, is still unknown, but is not really relevant. The main features of the Khmer portico, once evolved, changed very little over the centuries, whereas the style of Thai gabled doors and windows changed quite rapidly over two hundred years. This shows that once the Thai masons' work had been done, the original motivation was soon forgotten. The Lop Buri type of gabled window eventually developed into just one traditional element of later gabled types, and this was used to enhance the veneration of the building, and to convey a religious appearance. Once the form becomes just a symbolic veneer, because its original motive has been either neglected or forgotten, such as the Kee Lek type, then it is permissible to change, or reinterpret, the original design without being concerned with the initial architectural scheme. This is a concurrent theme throughout all Thai art and architectural forms and features, and the changing designs of gabled doors and windows are just further examples demonstrating this evolution.

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