The signification approach of decorative contents on Western buildings in Siamese Ornament and Decorative art revolution; A.D.1876-1896

การศึกษากระบวนการสร้างความหมายของเนื้อหาการออกแบบประดับตกแต่งอาคารตะวันตกภายในประเทศไทยที่เกิดขึ้นช่วงปฏิรูปประเทศ พ.ศ. 2419-2439

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is discuss and argue the signification of Siam ornament and decorative art on the western building as “cultural object” by structuralism semiotics approach. The criteria analytic to access the knowledge via theory of an educational system from the essence contents of design structure in Thai community during the western influenced had important roles in setting and creating this change of perception in term of decoration intellecction.

This study is qualitative research. The analysis study of the thought structural system was determined to study in the Siam western building where built 1876-1896. Aimed to study western building as a kind of material, not only creating beauty to the society, but also having signified of a key reflection of the mindset which helped illustrate the cognitive process, development of Siam decorative art paradigm, aesthetics and key variations to definite the Siamese’s elite characteristic decoration.

Research methodology was semiotic approach that highlighted the importance of thoughts while growing up under the cognition process of the Siamese’s elite imprint to finding the motif and the criteria of elite’s decoration, which was core of Thai disciplinary in the period of multicultural study. True denoted meaning originated from the design itself, not from the interpretation or connoted meaning by the human. Thus, the relationships of all the signifiers within the structure of the western buildings had significance and reason; the design composition is explained in its own truth, which could be significantly understood through the

* The article part of the dissertation The paradigm shift of Siam Ornament and Decorative Art by Italian art and design influenced in A.D.1876-1932

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semiotic structuralism discourse. Nevertheless, the outcome of the study is the body of knowledge of Neo-Siam decorative art paradigm and the manual for decoding signified in Italian and elite’s Ornament and Decorative Art.

Key words(s): Ornament, Decorative art, Signification, Siam western building, Structuralism, Cultural object

1. Introduction

The ornament and decorative art as one of social reflection, represented the personal aesthetic. This dissertation studies the Western building as the cultural objects between 55 years, In the time period where the Siam’s Ornament and Decorative Art paradigm change while westernization became national agenda. The research’s content related to intellectual and the elite in the Court of Siamese royal family who authorized to design and has ordered to construct many important Palaces, Villa, Monuments, Temple and other official buildings. It’s show cultural relativity, confidence, trust between each other

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1 In the scope of dissertation, The researcher study the development of Ornament and Decorative Art between 1876-1932 in Thai context.
as well. The Western building that was still remains today are referred to the Italian intellectual Influenced. A cooperate between Italian technician and elite has created many types of decoration in the western building.

Core of this dissertation was to study the core of thought in term of decorative science. Study among the period of civilization development discourse. The phenomena was to understand Thai community cognitive how paradigm have shifted as the time to Realize and criticize how the elite produced the cultural object reflected in the hybrid form of various styles. Modernity?, Contemporary?, or Civilization? That was importance once to describe system of thought of elite and crystallize the integration between western colonial with Siam tradition to demonstration, analyze and synthesis to construct the body of knowledge.

This research will create access ability to knowledge of decoration from the multi-cultural study. Tools for synthesis procedure that is manual for academic and designer who study or work in the decorative fields. For this observation comprehension and estimation about all factors in A.D.1876-1932, is nationally achieved. It’s simply to offer opportunity to the science of decoration to general public, create awareness and more focus on issue which’s separate from the other segment. However, the body of knowledge is more effective, efficiency and support Thai designer, in finding the strong standpoint of its own culture to improve stability of its owns design and aesthetics in the decoration or related fields.

2. Hypothesis of the research

Ornament and Decorative Art development in Thai community was driven and influenced by Italian technicians among Western colonization since A.D.1876-1932, which became the crucial part of Siamese paradigm shift from traditionalism to modernism by the western decorative art is the model of Siam capital progression.

3. Material / scope of study

Author selected western building where has initial participation between the elite and Italian technicians as the case study. They are clearly evidence as shown how the vision of elite would like to be in the period of study. It’s seem like the imprint of elite still remain today in term of study the paradigm of decoration in Thai community. For the 55 years of

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2 Cultural object is an object made by humans for a practical and/or spiritual purpose. see http://australianmuseum.net.au/What-is-a-cultural-object
revolution is range of time to study. All case studies in the Reign King Rama V to VII. In term of decoration, Analysis the data on the design documentary, historical information and survey design physical focus on the building at sites. dividing and grouping the case study by analysis from the period of time; as 4 period of study such as 1) Incubation, The early Reign of King Chulalongkorn / 2) Variation, The 1st King Chulalongkorn visiting Europe / 3) Filtration, The 2nd King Chulalongkorn visiting Europe and 4) Integration, the contemporary aesthetic and nationalism ideology to the end of the Siam’s absolute monarchy. All the period classification are classify for selected 2 or 3 cases study for a period by the condition as below:

   a.) Perfection of places: The building’s conservation as the cultural heritage, all case studies where selected must be entirely in the design existing or less restoration from the original decorative building. The case study must be officially notified with the government.

   b.) Completion of data: Documentary or related reference about the building’s selection must have necessary data to be used in the analysis of dissertation such as construction and design data, historical data, Architects, Technicians or designer referred including the academic data about the palace, throne hall, villa, religious place and official place where are the group of selection.

   c.) Possibility to access: Most of the case studies are restricted area and forbidden for the generally people because they are under national heritage restriction conservative, surveying or collecting the data are allowed with service of authorities as well.

   d.) Continuation of working progress: classified and grouping the case studies in each period by analyzed from the relationship between Siam political or National social context with Italian technician working progress. The sequences as divide as 4 periods which are important to describe and discuss about how Siam decorative art developed to the paradigm shift progress is the core of study.

4. Methodology of the research

The classification of decorative art data in 1876-1932, crucial sampling is represent how richness, valued, aesthetic, system of thought of Thai decorative art where appeared in each sequence of case studies as the Siam’s civilize decoration criticism, which analyze by the motif, synthesize and criticism by the structuralism semiotic for demonstrate, Interpret to how Siam decoration paradigm shift while Siam confronting to western colonization in term of decorative science. The semiotic as the tool to deconstruct and assimilate the body of

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3 All the case studies were establish in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), King Vajiravudh (1910-1925) and King Prajadhipok (1925-1935)
knowledge of Siam Ornament and Decorative art in the decorative art composition and structure of decorative contents as the grammar structural, to discuss and criticism as social discourse which link to Siam’s civilization aesthetic, myth, mindset or policy as the diagram 1 represent as :

**Diagram 1 Research’s organization**

5. Role of decorative art on Siamese western buildings in 1876 –1896

*Figure 1 The 1st Period 1876-1896, 4 buildings case studies*

From *figure 1*, The case studies in this article consisted of Wat Niwet Thammaprawat⁴, Varophas Piman Throne⁵, Ministry of Defense⁶, and Military survey.

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⁴ Gothic temple where elite use for sacred budhism rite in Bang Pa In, Ayuttaya province (see Peerasri Pohwathong, 2010: 266-9)
⁵ The Throne Hall, part of the Bang Pa In Palace (see Peerasri Pohwathong, 2010: 136-9)
⁶ The official place (see Peerasri Pohwathong, 2010: 354-7)
department; They’re first period study from all 4 periods, designed and built by Mr. Gioachim Grassi and Mr. Stefano Cardu, the Italian technician, under control of Siam’s monarchy. The decoration of these buildings were directly associated with the system of thoughts of cornerstone by the elite of Thailand’s art and culture. Thus, the study of this first group case study was particularly important to understand the appearance of the paradigm role on decorative art at the time of the study; the description about the elite’s attitude or position posed a threat against the nation and; the acceptance of the western influence whether conducted intentionally or not. However, the answers were crucial to the selection process, acceptance, combined design, and the results of the design process of decorative art. The ornament and decorative arts of each western building was not created by the need to imitate the original, but to express the elite’s need to combine and create new elemental perception in the decorative arts during the time. It was the crossroads of the development of beauty or aesthetics of new ways of housing decoration (conservation + modernism), along with the advance in the innovation and western architecture ideology.

The content of decorative arts on the case study was independence from the origin; they were created to meet individual’s specific use purposes. Therefore, The signification of the decorative arts are rich with individualism and multi-cultural with the combination of traditionalism and westernize culture. For the design analysis signification structural, the comparison of each building/site was considered as one structural system, which comprised groups of signifiers; they were together in the different position, space, or plane, of the whole structure, jointly determined by the Thai elite and the Italian technicians. Although the signifiers or encoding process of each western building were coated by the classical or modern western styles, based on the information of the designed work; on the contrary, when the signification structural was demolished. The relationship of each signifier depicted by each component unit was considered carefully, the combination of various ideas was found.

The ideas had been arranged and combined with groups of signifiers, signifier/unit; each unit had significance and practical specification; the combination of all the signifier in the designed structure could be categorized into 4 important groups, 1) the religious/rite, 2) the national/racial, 3) the power/monarchy, and 4) the colonial, modernity. Each group had specific and different signification form and physical form according to the decoration purpose in each western building. The variations of use and signifiers, or sign chosen from different

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7 The official place (see Peerasri Pohwathong, 2010: 370-1)  
8 Gioachino Grassi or Goachim Grassi (see Somchart Jungsiriarruk, 2010: 91)
groups were determined by the idea framework and the ideal design of the place, controlled mainly by the Siamese elite.

6. Grammar of ornament and decorative arts / 4 signification statements in decorative content of Siamese

The appearance of the signifier in any of the western building was originated from the intention and arrangement of lots of decorative signifiers in the building. It could be understood by studying the decorative art structure based on the 4 categories of signifiers; they were like a grammatical system in a language. The decomposition would help depict the circular and repetitive duties of the signifiers that contributed the system of value to each other. The diagram 2 below shows the group separation or the creation of the system of value.

L1 / <signification / system of value>

| Religious / Rite | National / Racial | Power / Monarchy | Colonial, Modernity |

L2 / <Social discourse / myth of policy>

| Traditionalism | Nationalism | Progressivism |

*Diagram 2 Decorative art structural of Siam western building and signification relative*

The diagram showed the relationship inside the signification process and structure of each group signifier in 2 levels; the first level (L1) the signifier provided denotation in the appearance and the connotation would appear in the second level (L2), connoted by the cultural objects itself to associated with other social contexts such as traditionalism, nationalism or progressivism, etc. For this reason, the common signification of the signifier within the 4 groups was important to the design composition of the decorative arts of the building linked to the unity and signification of the building itself; inevitably, it was also critical to the process of the design. Prior to entering into the design criticism, the reader should understand the groups signifier. The structure of the decorative arts of the building, the author criticized the denotation of the signifiers towards each semiotic group of the 4 groups about details of themselves as follows.
Figure 2 Religious signs and rite signifiers which appeared on Siamese western buildings

**Group A Religious / Rite signifiers** were related to the religion, rite, belief, or imagination in Buddhism. They were very important signifiers that infiltrated deeply into the human heart and dominated feelings and thoughts in all dimensions of Thai society, where all ages had roots in the Buddhist literature, the idea of “Traibhumikatha” or the story of three planes of existence; this moral principle was still essential explain action to logic of life and results of all the actions in the social context. This group of signifiers became crucial instruments to rule all the societies.

From figure 2, religious role / court culture were directly related to human creative thought system since human beings maintained, sustained, and uplifted their mind to control and ruled the society with a religious system for a long time until these signifiers became a group of ideas rooted deeply into thought and cognitive systems, and created an abstraction to explain or create signification for some social benefits. The division of people’s levels and castes, based on various unequal merits, evil deeds, destination, goodness systems, religious significant interpretation for the creation of the design to make their social system development and made the intangible become the tangible, signification, difference, and value of the society.

When human beings interacted with the creation of the design to meet the social need, such as, faith, repentance, spiritual power, myths and others; creating decorative elements in the religious / rite group could be considered very crucial signifiers to the old Thai society, which were prosperous in art and culture, especially in the studied period. Containing the signification in a cultural object / decorative art had been continually developed until accepted as regular process. The decorative art in the original society had specific forms; they were familiar with terms such as “convention or tradition”. In this group of signifier Thai traditional context was represented.
Figure 3 Thai alphabet / numeric use in nation and racial group of signifiers

**Group B Nation / racial signifiers** were related to the signifiers group created the signification of ethnics, group identity; entity; area, social, or land owners; ownership, such as using alphabet or nationality which showed motif characteristics, realm, or scope that could cover or explain the ownership of the signification approach limitation. Regarding to the ethnic signification, this group of signifiers are easy to classified and might consist of signification in the communicative manner such as the language, color, flag, or some related forms. However, Author defined this group as only the ethnic signification.

*Figure 3*, the example all the alphabets in a language had linguistic meaning while the alphabet in the semiotic approach could be one item that represented the forms of signification as well; for instance, the alphabet, numeric or other forms in this group. For the interpretation since there was less limitation and variety than the other groups, the singularity or specific characteristics of this signifier group had possible influence as the others group. The nationality was one of the findings, and the signifiers of this group were used in many western buildings as referred to nationalism. Thus, the singularity indication through the signification process in this group, was critically crucial, and the rotation of signifiers to important positions and variation by the progressive innovations of the decorative composition.

*Figure 4 Power and Monarchy signifiers which appeared on Siamese western buildings*
Group C Power / monarchy signifiers were in the semiotic group related to power and prestige of the absolute monarchy power showed in the decorative art system and the details of the western buildings. This group should be considered separated from the religious / rite although they came from the same origin but for the period of study, image and power of elite (King) has separate from the Siam mythology as God. King in the civilisation represent more human being although positive meaning still remain. However, Power / monarchy semiotic group had its development base from the religion / rite group so the content and styles could have been closed and related to each other in some dimensions.

The religion dimension was separated clearly from the monarchy dimension at the time of the study, so this group of signifier had dynamics of critical thinking of the decorative art development. Moreover, the decoration in this group was also a reflection of feudalism with an indication at the differences between humans in the society. In additional, from figure 4, Power and monarchy Group had direct interaction to the significance in feudalism, and the signification about the differences of social classes and specific traits ruled by the society. The author used these rules to classified the signifiers of one group to the other, through analyzing how the intention of each signifiers appearing at a different important position of the buildings.

Figure 5 Colonial and Modernity signifiers which appeared from western building reflected influences.

Group D Colonial / Modernity signifiers were the group of signifiers that coated the signification process of the whole building’s decoration. Despite its coverage or vast scope of area than the other groups of signifiers, the decoration scale was correctly where the signification was equal to the others. Secondary impacted, which can considered as the main theme, used as the complementary information for analyzing the signification process of the

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9 King in the traditionalism was a God, reincarnated into the earth to created virtue and supported Buddhism (Traibhumikatha, 1985: 158-61)

10 The civilization, main social discourse drove Traditional Siam to be the modern age.
whole system. This group was associated with its social context and changes of western styles in the study period; For the internal context (the context of Siamese society) during the reformed period as the considering various signifiers in this group. The cultural dimension was not carried over to imitation, but selected by the elite to identify the attitudes of its own group which affected the transformation of the internal decoration contents.

In additional, from figure 5, composition in the structure is quite flexible, where many of western decorative form or styles appeared in one building (cultural object), combined for one solution is the beauty or the elite’s aesthetic. It’s is the indication what Thai context was not fixed within one type of decoration.“They did what they like.”, represent the decorative styles more or less in each object that’s depending on the imagination of elite who were mainly responsible as director. Thus, It’s shown how the independent elite and crucial understood the variation in object of western type decorative for this group signifier.

7. The system of signification of decorative arts inside the western buildings

The system of thought where the 4 key groups of signifiers appeared in the combination of decorative arts was found within the composition. In the system of thought analysis was based on Ferdinand Saussure’s linguistics theory about dividing between Langue with Parole \(^{11}\) – the same way as the author separated design’s thought from the design’s object. However, decorative art in the context of western building study was different due to the designed objects, such as three-dimensional buildings with external and internal sides, so the 4 signifier group were effective on positional change or appeared in different context without any set rules like the language syntax (language system), Setting” was associated with the design conceptual, as to the syntax of the decorative arts mentioned before.

Understanding the working process of the decorative art structure was like understanding the language syntax with grammatical structure to arrange the signifiers to make sentences, although the language syntax would have positions in the structure such as distinctive grammar that could signify a signifier when they were in different positions and could cause a signifier to have no significance when it was in the wrong position. In the same respect the position of decoration on the western building also has the rule (grammar of ornament) but with more complexity though remain flexible to compose elements to the position that the designer needed, signified still valued as the impact for sensational perception will increase or decrease depending on the position of the viewers.

\(^{11}\) see Chainat Jareansinaolan, 2012: 11-6
8. Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic relations, Analyzes approach of the decorative arts in the western buildings.

The arrangement of units in the system linking to the design process could achieve the decorative arts created in the studied western buildings; their signifiers were arranged similarly to sentences in the language syntax, but on the other hand, each signifier had the signification process and could exist by itself. The significance created by the designer was the signifier that could move and make new significance when it changed its position or place or had the combining processes within the structure of the unit of the decorative arts.

Diagram 3, The decorative art of the western buildings had processes of thoughts that linked to the religious, power, racial, and social groups of signifiers, the essence of the significance processes in the western buildings where the author saw the coherent structure of thoughts of decorative arts that always existed; however, Siam structure might be converted, changed, or replaced according to the strong trends of Western culture. All of the existing things significantly reflected internal relations of the ideals of the elite appeared in the buildings of all times; the internal experience of the elite and the changed system of thoughts affecting the decorative arts displayed on the western buildings. Although the changes were very strong and the change of the Siamese elite might be different from other countries in the region, the core essence of the ideas that happened after the interaction with western ideas would show the evolution of the decorative arts, according to the relative and replacement table, respectively.

The physical changes that occurred rather contradicted the essence ideas of the elite; although Siam did not lose its independence among the threat of the West influence, the trends of decorative arts showed the attitudes of the nation and altered traditional values in numerous social ways.

Diagram 3 Decorative signifier relative on building decoration system
From the case study 1 (AD 1867–1897) about the buildings built in the past 30 years in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, designers, architects or engineers from the West were imported; including Mr. Goachim Grassi, an important Italian engineer who highly contributed to the development of the western buildings during this time. If we questioned about the physical appearance of the western buildings built during this period of time, and brought western-styled art into consideration, we might find some answers linked to the subject of comparison or interpretation by the external world to supplement the process of finding the answers in the Siamese society. Most of the styles during this time were Neo-Classic, Colonialism, and Gothic, according to the external characteristics cited by many experts. However, the discourse made in the society, signifiers occurred within the decorative art of the western buildings became the important point of this paper. The author was not certain about the conclusion of the current discourse in the Thai society whether it could effectively answer the real questions or understood the system of the thoughts of the work arising from the internal incubation.

The question about the foundation of the idea, core matter, essence of the design, the source of the trends of culture or set of ideas that determined the decorative arts in Siamese western buildings created concretely and visually challenged perception of the Siamese elite in the past. As the traditional works were still robust, the challenge was extreme individualism of the Siamese decorative arts became such a challenging educational cognition at the time of this cross cultural study. The author created a framework of the western buildings during the beginning of their physical changes in the early period of the reign of King Chulalongkorn, 1867-1897. The western buildings of the study were composed of Wat Niwet Dhamma Prawat, Varophas Piman Throne, Ministry of Defense, and Department of Military Maps; all were built by Italian engineers who played a key role in design and construction in collaboration with the Siamese elite. The 4 western buildings had interesting unique characteristics of the combination between westernism art and Siamese traditional arts. The details of the decorative arts of each building varied in types, characteristics, and practical purposes.

Although the physical appearance was entirely different, the process of signification of all the 4 western buildings had the structure of thoughts related to the details of the 4 semiotic groups together. The author would analyze the relatives between the syntagmatic structure and the paradigmatic structure to find the relative significance of the system of the decorative arts in all the buildings in the case study, shown in the analysis table as follows by table 1.
Table 1 Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relation of Siamese Ornament and Decorative art signifiers, The 1st period: 1876 – 1896. Discussion

From Table 1, the relationship between the common signification of various signifiers within the system of thoughts in each western building is shown, where significance, of the western buildings related to the system of thoughts of the elite, and emphasized that “The Siamese elite did not lose their independence of thoughts.”

Incubation was the author’s defined terminology to the forms of the systems of thought to Siamese decorative arts in the period of time when the western personal were transferred into Siam; it would be specifically discussed in terms of decorative arts. The adopted thoughts during the studied period did not aim to copy or imitate the styles, but the creative activities driven by the elite occurred. Unfamiliar perspective and limited experience about the knowledge of the West, the designs on the western buildings were created and supported by the combination between the old and the new knowledge, that caused by the elite’s intentional or unintentional ideas. However, the results became the norm of thoughts, a map of the ideas of the elite reacted to the West acknowledgement, interpretation, and results implementation from this critical set of cognitive processes. This is important period was the beginning of western culture introduction in term of decoration as a part of national development; the discourse on the subject led to the goal of civilization.

When the changes caused by the common appearance of decorative arts on the western buildings at this time, the combination between the traditional arts and the westernism, if just the appearing images were taken into consideration, we might be misled by the overall cover and coating of the western decorative arts that the West progress was only imitated for political benefits. Moreover, the hypothesis might cause a serious conflict when we considered the decorative art in the dimension of the signification process of the western influenced buildings in Siam.

From the analysis of the conceptual process of the mold variations shared cultural characteristics needed by the elite, the Italian technicians who translated abstract thoughts into the concrete explanation. For this reason, the analysis did not identify humanism importance, but it focused on knowledge about designs and systems of thoughts occur on the Siamese western buildings during the change of the country. It was dramatically important as a vital linkage of fantasy and reality, that author praised along with the elite’s system of thoughts.

The consideration, changes of thought, were vulnerable and challenging to the traditional society; the purity of thoughts carried out in the manner of containing with an
emphasis on harmony (the dimension of signification) or the composition of decorative arts were brave and risky to break out the traditional decoration to minimize the role of the trend in traditional Siamese society. On the other hand, the form of the western work appeared in the period of the study was also truncated, reduced. Adapting the decoration of the two trends with the pressure of social situation, or various limitations, demonstrated that the form/family of the Western art was simple and not complicated; had the composition of the decorative arts originated from merging and combination; and it was very useful for the study process of the system of thoughts to connect with the decorative arts during the period.

The decorative arts without refinement and association to modern innovations of the western society became advantageous at the first stage. However, having taken them into consideration, we could see that some common characteristics of the traditional and western artworks had clear alienation in physical dimension. We saw certain key decorative elements transferred from Siamese conservative works co-existed with western element in the western buildings. The key factors of such phenomena were objectives, intention, sub-consciousness or thought system, and beliefs of the elite who still wanted to link and continued the traditions to the spirit of the arts.

From the analysis table 1, we could see the ornament selection for the significance of the signifiers in the religious and rite group on decorative details outstandingly and independently visual alienation; the religious and rite group was the signifiers that could distinguish styles precision. The signifiers appeared in the signification system of the western buildings in the period of study were namely, various Buddha images, Erawan elephant, Singha, Kodchasi, Khom scripts, U-naa lohm, etc. These signifiers, or the decorative elements on the buildings clearly linked to the conservative group of thoughts that linked to the story of faith and rites in Buddhism, Brahman, foundation of Siamese’s ideas since the ancient time continually to the period of the study. They signifier appeared obviously in the western buildings, such as thought imprint, system of thoughts at the level of sub-consciousness of the Siamese elite, who beliefs in religious, sacred items, luck, and even gods. Even though some of these original signifiers were transformed or truncated, the design content was still the same.

For this reason, investigated the facts from some relating information and the signification system in decorative art, sifting, selection and truncation of the conservative decorative art elements in the early Rattanakosin era developed the styles from the late Ayuttaya era by truncation to have content and significance, and then integrated them with the innovative tradition design of the West, and then they were easy to be touched or
accessed, and transformed into developed signifiers as “The simple communication from Siamese decorative traditional complication.”

7. Conclusion

The key crystallized thoughts, driving the dynamics in decorative arts, critically affected the changes of the condition and the system of thoughts of the Siamese elite as mentioned. Another one was the flexibility of the elite who were broad minded enough to truncate some key decorative elements and reduce the conservative complexity, detailed elements, and some significance, such as assumed gods until the late 19, this gods became something more familiar reached or understand by the people in society in the past the gods which once some in the distance world. Now can be accessibly reach to understanding. All were linked to the changes until they met their equilibrium and had the key common point in the extremely different poles of the decorative arts.

For the case studies, highlighted Wat Niwet Dhamma Prawat, the western building was built to be a temple for religious activities of Bang Pa In palace, Ayutthaya. This Buddhism building was completely westernization coating; and among the main decorative arts, there were some decorative elements mixed at important places, to create and communicate the significance of the building, around the area, in all planes. The structure of the signification with units or signifiers, decoration and important items can be analyze by issues was as follows.

The first issue about the core of Buddhism is the elite clearly needed to maintain the key principles of Buddhism - the national religion, and Brahman ritual symbols, as the core of the decorative contents on the western buildings. The decoration of the conservative religious buildings had complex signification of the signifiers and other decorative elements, originated from Buddhism ideals, beliefs, and native imagination (Traibhum) even though some various complex signifiers of the signifiers in Siamese decorative art traditionalism appeared in Wat Niwet Dhamma Prawat were also truncated. It’s decrease lot of decorative details still remain for the necessity of communication.

The second issue is about the decorative functions are the selection of Buddhism signifiers in the functions and arrangement of the element composition. For the functional part, building the main Lord Buddha image for the significance of Wat Niwet Dhamma Prawat

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12 From the abstract to the concrete ones who could be touched and experienced more than the ones in the early Rattanakokin era and worshiping during the reign of King Rama 1-4 when the upperclass and supported elite all had intention at maintain the religion and the assumed gods, which were united into the same institute, and shared signification in decorative arts for a long time.
created the roles of protection and fulfillment with Buddhist. For the arrangement, use of Lord Buddha images as parts of decorative structure according to the idea of Buddhist art, and the systematic collocation; use of sacred statues decorated at important places of western buildings was usually practiced. Placing the principal Lord Buddha image was not only the beginning point of the investigation, but it was also the beginning point of the signification process, which allow accessibility to a general information receiver, as well as recognized the objectives of this cultural object.

The placement of secondary Lord Buddha images at the cornered column poles as the protectors of the four directions, and the placement of the Indra and Phra Panjasingkorn images at the entrance created the obvious primary significance to the building, it’s created practical objectives. Moreover, there were Lord Buddha statues in different positions such as the seated Buddha under the Naga position, etc, placed around the temple under the Neo-Gothic ornament; the reflected the idea philosophy of the elite in “maintaining but truncating the excess clutter” from the conservative system to be proper, and balanced within the thought framework of the elite. The consideration of the western role in art could become either positive or negative interplay for the Siamese social context.

The third issue is about the Khom scripts adoption, The religious and rite dimension of Wat Niwet Dhamma Prawat still had a lot of key elements such as the Khom scripts which were similar to the decoration of the tympanum of Varophas Piman Throne with U-naa lohm that signified Lord Buddha’s eyes or the decoration with Bali characters and U-naa lohm at the same place. The facts of the signification system appeared on this group of buildings were beliefs and faith in rituals or the symbols that signify luck and link to conservative practice, appearing in significant religious buildings and royal buildings as well. Thus, the buildings at the time of the study were unique and different from other western buildings built in some neighboring countries dominated by colonialism.

The fourth issue is about Myth tradition, Use of Himmapan decorative elements appeared on the 4 buildings was still linked to the tradition, and only some images were truncated or adapted to be less complicated, but they still remain strictly Himmapan images. In the case of Varophas Piman Throne, the lower tympanum was decorated with the heads of Erawan elephant in stucco technique. For the details of the decoration on the Ministry of Defense in the same decorative area, the image signifiers of Singha or Kodchasi on the plane were around the western building; that showed the styles of the strict traditional art both in forms and the process of signification. Although they were small decorative elements, the
examinations showed the contrary signification process of the image signifiers that had significance over most parts of the building.

Besides, the findings of the western buildings at the period of the study (1st period: 1876-1896) also showed the importance of conservative forms in the key signifiers related to the religion and rites. Use of Himmapan animal images for the building’s decoration emphasized conservative idea, that the society was influenced from the signification of religious motif principles (imagination + ideology). The content was considerably transformed to match the innovation in western decorative styles, the core principles were the guidelines from Traibhum key ideas were still abided; this kind of decorative arts was clearly observed in all the western buildings of the case study. The transformation became the keynote that created some common characteristics of different art groups; where it could be originated from the single religion or combination between Traibhum and mythology.

Certainly, the key ideas of the decorative arts from mythology were not composed on these Siamese western buildings, the composition reflected from the Italian technician / artists’ thought and did not dominate the elite; but only served and utilized to meet the needs of the monarch. On the other hand, Siamese’s conservative beliefs replaced the main principles of the decorative of the buildings, and the philosophy of the western arts inspired from the mythology or Christianity served as a covering of the core principles of the decorative arts that the elite contained in each western building during the period of the study. Thus, we could assumed that colonialism just classified Siamese conservative significance for the social purpose and the new image creation for the society.

The fifth issue is about the elite’s individualism, This group of western buildings was directly related to the monarch and the elite, so the significance of power was showed in the decorative arts of the buildings in the changes of the monarch’s power so the context was the key assumption dominated the signification of the forms of the decorative arts relating to the power significance were changed to have more individualism than those in the previous time. New images of the new elite were created as the leaders who led the country to the modern age. The individualism or the status of human being of the elite issue. was more outstanding and analyzed to a point on the nature of the decorative arts that underscored more individual characteristics of King Chulalongkorn’s specifications in the decorative arts on the western buildings.

The decorative elements in the composition of these western buildings concerning King Chulalongkorn were mainly coronets, crowns, royal arms, monogram or portraits created with western innovative techniques such as stain-glass and bas-relief images. Thus, the
mentioned decorative elements were created in the structure of western decorative arts that encouraged the elite’s individualism, and they were used together with the other groups of signifiers through easy installation. Then, they could create direct significance in the details of the decorative arts in Wat Niwet Dhamma Prawat, Varophas Piman Throne Hall, and other official buildings.

The sixth issue is about race and ethnic, The processes of signification in the race and nation group were related to nationality, ethnic groups, and races. The findings from the detailed decoration of the western buildings showed the decoration with Thai alphabets in many important places. Although Thai alphabets were effective and be able to communicate the significance in the linguistic process in the dimension of structural analysis, they were only considered as decorative elements or signifiers that showed or created specific significance about a nationality that was different from other societies.

Using the Thai alphabets as an element of decoration in the western buildings, relating to signification processes, Thai alphabets served as decorative objects that were be able to make significance for the decoration as well as had effectiveness in the linguistic system – thus, giving emphasis on the decoration with Thai alphabets should not be overlooked. There are elite requirement, which possess that’s innovation by seal with Thai race / ethnic ornament. The combination of decorative content give elite the precedence exercise to create differ version of aesthetic even if the letters is still useful for the signification.

The last issue is about colonialism and modernity, the signifiers of the social popularity or the trends appeared as dominate decorative content of all the western buildings, where indicated colonialism. If considered roughly or estimated from whole building not analyze each fragments into the signification of the decorative structure, The truth will not yield. The elite’s would be modernized by using the western evidences as a tool for successful shortcut. The colonialism extensively shown elite’s policy is the representation of civilize appreciation and respond to the civilization (social discourse) soundly.

Any selection of style, combination, or transformation, directly reflected a system of thought within the decorative arts during the period of study, and they had significance of modernity of each western building, accordingly to art philosophy dominating at the time, and the selection also included experience and innovations. In the simple terms, the innovations in this signifier group were the tools or the group of signifiers, which created the signification of the modernity in different styles based on the experience and trend. The selection of any western decorative style, which called coating or rituals,
reflected the colonialism acceptance policy, views about art, aesthetics that changed accordingly to time, and the progress of modern art experience among the elite. For this period of study, the western buildings were an accessibly comprehension in term of decorative contents.

8. Suggestion

The system of thoughts of the Siamese elite on the decorative arts that appeared on the western buildings at the early reign of King Chulalongkorn, could be considered the real beginning of bringing western culture in to be a part of the trends of ideas, paradigm shifts, and the blending of cultures. Additionally, the author analyzed the cultural blending and the important findings were evidenced the reaction to Siamese decorative arts in the western buildings that were changed accordingly to the previous social trends. The reason for the beginning of the major paradigm shift, although it was just a phenomenal start, the content in the design showed the elite’s essential ideas and valuable essence of the traditional idea – the conservative signification process resulted with the development that rooted their beliefs into the ideas in Traibhumikatha that could not be immediately cut, withdrawn, or substituted with new things such as the western influence.

Changes that seemed to be the breaking point between the art ideologies and aesthetics between traditional and modern practice, showed just the outside images, namely shape and appearance that were only coated by westernism. Such changes were only the discourse of the study affecting the signification process. The structure of the signification process of the building design in the study showed the religious and rite group at the extreme level in both the decorative elements and the system of thoughts. Moreover, we could observe that during 1867-1897 the changes happened to the elite did not leave the root of any traditional ideas, either intentionally or unintentionally, and the image was changed according to the fashion trends of the decorative content in the social and modern signifier group. In conclusion, the period of study 1867-1897 could be an important crossroads and the crucial beginning of the transformation of conservative ideas to modern ones and the norm of modernity was from the western arts and images.

Although the event in the Siamese society during the period of the study were in swift and strong cultural trends, the discourse was referred in the academic environment that everything happened from the key factor, civilization, which was the important drive force that yielded the development forward and ignored significance details. Even though the author’s findings of this study had crucial clues having conflicts against the main discourse of people
who studied the society in other fields during the restoration time, the author wanted to emphasize the importance of the system of thoughts that was the key and real elements or dynamics that drove the society forward, not the cultural objects that the author compared as the destination of the social production we often gave importance to, and misled us to the other directions opposite the reality appeared in the Siamese society about the decorative art study in the period of 1867-1897.

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