

The Survival of The Local Art and Culture in 5 Star Hotels in Bangkok, Thailand.

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Abstract

Thailand is a land of long and rich history. After had many episodes of social and cultural adaptation, evolution and development, the predecessors of Thai people have left remarkable and distinctive art and cultural heritage, which is still carried on until nowadays. However, along with rapid progress in technology and communication system under the globalization era, Thailand also has been affected in many ways. In the field of construction, Thailand's architecture has evolved in terms of design, materials, method of constructions, demand and needs, functions and image. All these changes are due to Thailand's geographic and cultural crossroads factor, which is can be seen in palace, temple, residential, commercial, institution and others. Hence, this study is conducted to identify how modern architecture use local art and culture in reflecting local image and identity. In order to achieve the prime aims as outlined above, the objective of this paper is to have the overview of the general practice of local art and culture in 5 star hotels in Bangkok, Thailand. During this research, 22 samples has been observed and all information acquired through primary and secondary method. Some methods has been used namely literature review, observation, documentation and analysis. The finding of this research is giving an overview on how nowadays practice in using the local art and culture in new context. This will respond back towards government campaign about creating sense of Thainess in promoting tourism in Thailand. In conclusion, the importance of this research is it will give some information and guidelines to certain individuals such as an architect or interior designer in designing or implementing local art and culture in enhancing their design.

Keywords : survival, globalization era, Thailand's architecture, 5 star hotels, local art and culture

INTRODUCTION

Thailand is a southeast Asian country located between 5° 37' N and 20° 28' N, and between 97° 22' E and 105° 37' E, with a total land area of about 513,115 square kilometers. Thailand can be divided into six main regions¹, namely: Northern, Central, Eastern, Western, Northeastern and Southern Thailand. Thailand was formerly known as “Siam” by foreigners before 18th century. But, there are no clear evidence about the origins of the term. However, the term “Siam”² can be found in many Chinese sources and was also inscribed in ancient Khmer language on a 12th century stone bas-relief at Angkor Wat. This country is the only one in Southeast Asia that has not been colonised by a foreign power. However, Burmese³ had invaded several times during ancient period and also Japanese was in Thailand during WWII. But, Thai rulers managed to tolerated foreigners in good way to make sure that Thailand always in freedom. Thailand, which literally means “the land of freedom” got it’s name on June 23rd, 1939 by the Field Marshall Pibulsongkram government.

Bangkok, was founded in 1782 after King Rama I established the Chakri Dynasty. King Rama I have made tremendous action by asked Chinese⁴ community to relocate to Sampeng and move the capital to Bangkok in order to strengthen and restore the glorious culture that was wiped away with Ayutthaya’s destruction. Bangkok was developed rapidly with continues effort started from King Rama I(Chao Phraya Chakri) until King Rama IX(Bhumibhol Adulyadej). Along this timeline, many foreign influence has been implement in many Thai aspect. Started from King Rama IV(King Mongkut), he opened diplomatic and trade relations with Western nations. Then, his son King Rama V(King Chulalongkorn) maintained diplomatic relations with European powers. King Rama V, is the one who made the development very aggressively and Bangkok has expanded positively. King Rama V son, King Rama VI(King Vajiravudh) which is British-educated base, adopted European practices for

¹ Six major region based on natural features including geomorphology. See Ministry of Culture(2008), Thai Art and Culture. Bangkok:Amarin Printing and Publishing Public Company Limited,p.15

² Ministry of Culture(2008), Thai Art and Culture. Bangkok:Amarin Printing and Publishing Public Company Limited,p.19

³ Jotikalikorn,C., & Tan.A.(2006),Thailand Chic.Singapore:Archipelago Press,p.13

⁴ Lum,R.N.C(2005),Journey Through Bangkok.Singapore:Times Editions-Marshall Cavendish,p.6

the country. During King Rama VI reign in 1912, military coup began for the first time in Thailand. At this point, many incidents happened until in 1932 during reign of King Rama VII(King Prajadhipok), major coup was held which is headed by group of students. This major coup was successfully abolished absolute monarchy and have developed constitutional monarchy in Thailand. King Rama VII abdicated in 1935 and lived in exile in England. King RamaVII nephew, Ananda Mahidol was named to be the next successor and became the King Rama VIII after returned to Thailand in 1945. But, in 1946 he was shot dead in his bedroom. His 19-year-old brother, Bhumibhol Adulyadej became the King Rama IX until now. Even Thailand have many series of changes of the king, this country is still keep on develop in every aspect.

Economy of Thailand is one of the aspect which is have showed variety of product and keep on growing. Thailand economic sector which is can be classified into Service, Agriculture and Industry⁵(Figure 1) have contribute into major role in developing and upgrading Thai socio-economic status.

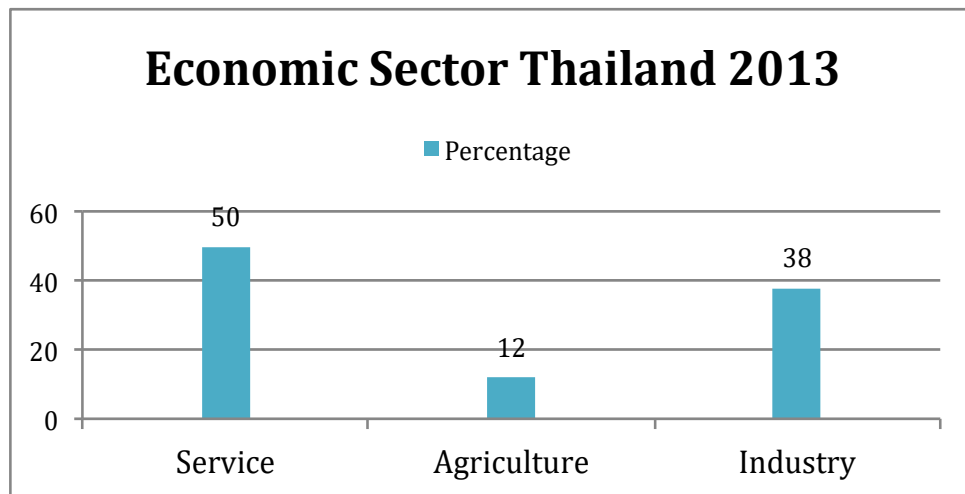


Figure 1:Economic sector for Thailand in 2013.

Source:Available at <http://en.aectourismthai.com/infoasean/1337> [Accessed:7 September 2014]

⁵ INDUSTRY:textile and garments, agricultural products, beverages, tobacco and cement. AGRICULTURE: rice, cassava(tapioca),rubber, and corn. EXPORT: tourism, rice, vegetables, computers, transistors, seafood, and clothing. Please refer to www.aseantourism.travel/documents/tourism-publication[Accessed:7 September 2014]

Thailand Gross Domestic Product(Figure 2) has increasing for over the last decade. However, this scenario has been affected and supported by many factors, namely: political situation, nature disaster, world economic crisis, domestic consumption, capability of manufacturing for export, manpower and plan from the government.

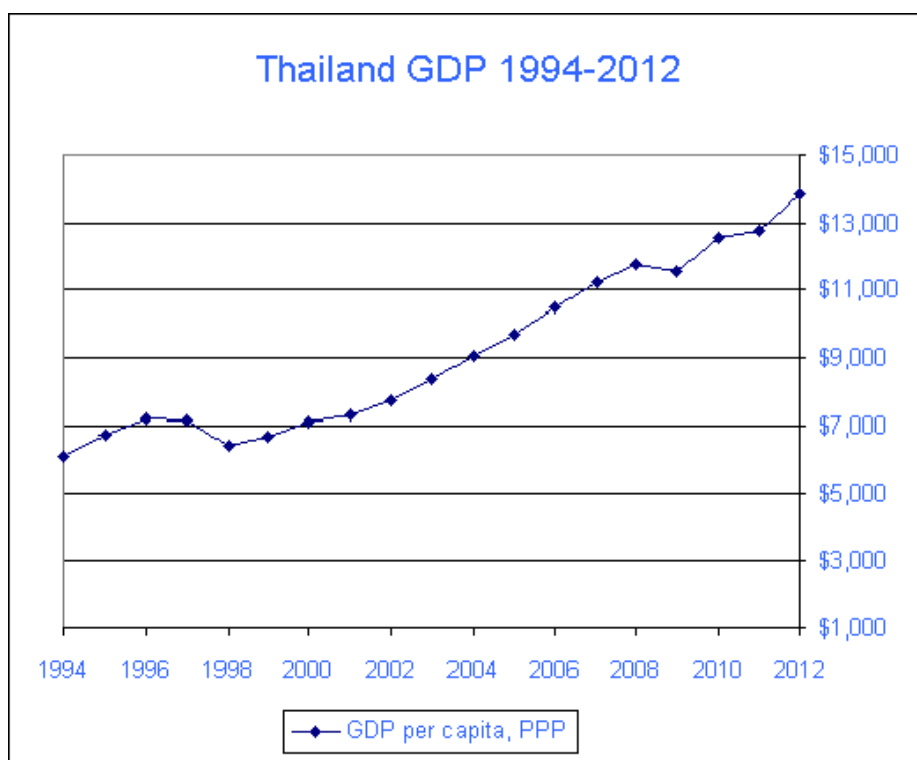


Figure 2:Thailand GDP per capita.
Source: <http://www.thaiwebsites.com/thailand-GDP.asp>. [Accessed: 12 September 2014]

Among those sector, tourism is consistenly contribute into Thailand overall economic growth. With increasing the number of tourist arrival in Thailand (Figure 3), tourism have contributes high percentage of GDP for Thailand. Tourism is identified as a main economic sector by generates employment in many related sector⁶. Tourism can be defined, activity of visitors, and a visitors is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor) if his or her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise⁷.

⁶ from construction to agriculture or telecommunications. See Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2013.

⁷ United Nations ESCAP(2003),Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2013.Bangkok:United Nations Publication,p.269

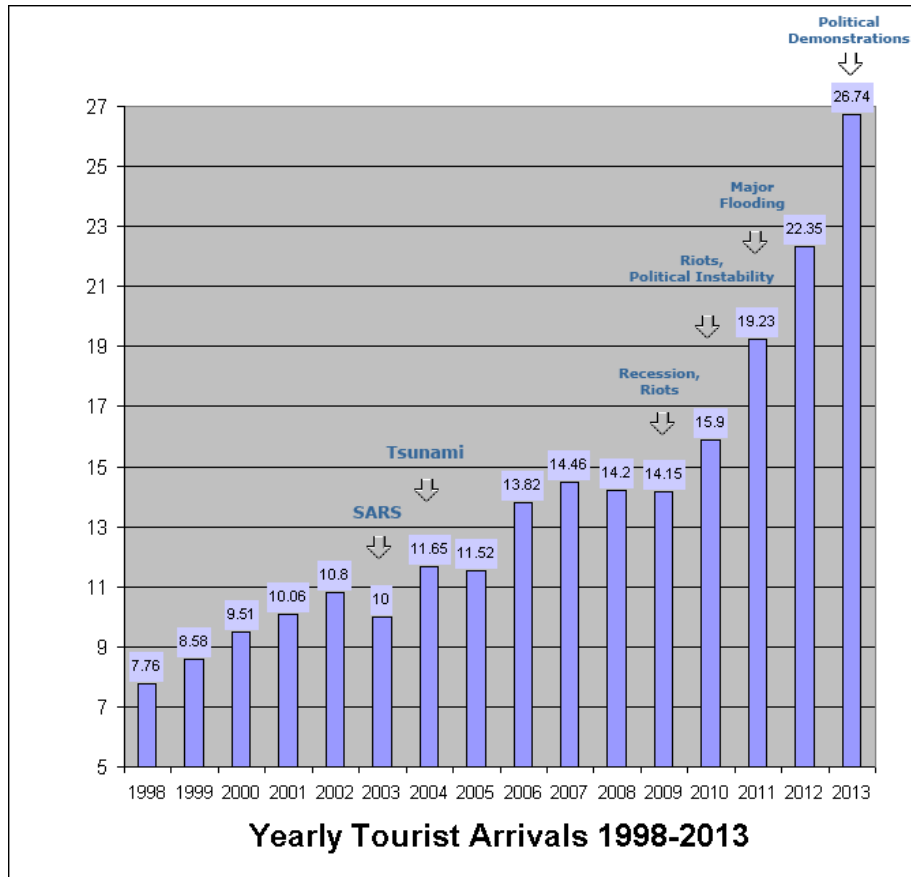


Figure 3:Yearly Tourist Arrivals between 1998 until 2013.
 Source <http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism.asp>. [Accessed:10 September 2014]

From

this tourist arrival statistic, they have spent more for accommodation compared to other category(Figure 4). Followed by shopping category, it is obviously shows that Thailand is shopping destination for tourist. Back to accommodation category, tourist stay averagely 10 days in Thailand. Mostly tourist from Europe, they spend two and three weeks in Thailand. So, apart of origin of the tourist, duration of traveling to Thailand, how much they spend for accommodation, and what is the X factor that make the tourist to decide to stay more longer and often in Thailand, this paper will look on how accommodation in Thailand have design their premises to attract the tourist to stay at their place. To narrow down the research, the using of local art and culture in the interior space will be observe. This paper will reflect back the campaign from Tourism Authority of Thailand which is they promoting

Thainess, happiness, sustainability, as well as balanced and equitable growth⁸. Sense of Thainess will be explore throughout this research.

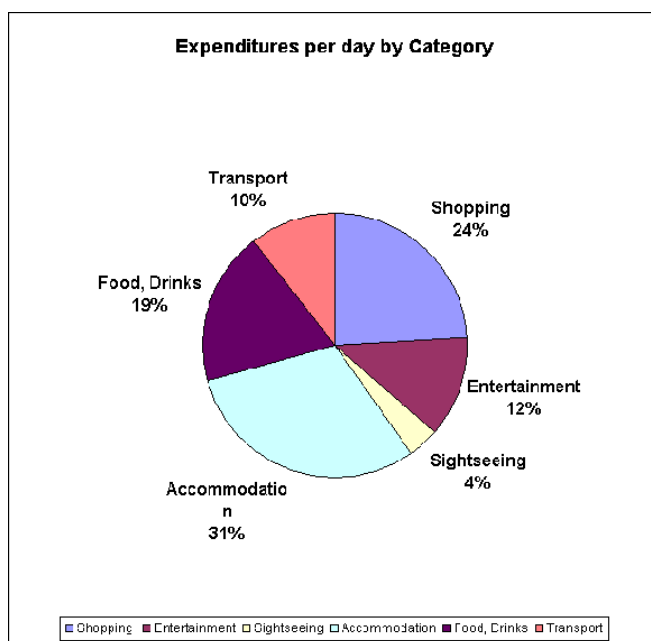


Figure 4:Expenditure by tourist in Thailand.

Source: <http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism-income-Thailand.asp>. [Accessed:10 September 2014]

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research are mainly to identify how modern architecture use local art and culture in reflecting local image and identity. The objective is as follows.

- To have the overview of the general practice of local art and culture in 5 star hotels in Bangkok, Thailand.






SCOPE AND LIMITATION


- Scope
 - The scope of this research is focussed into local art and culture in lobby area of the hotel's building. Apart of hotel guest privacy factor, lobby has been chosen because the lobby plays a crucial role in branding and creating the

⁸ See http://marketingdatabase.tat.or.th/ewt_news.php?nid=1751&filename=default_en# [Accessed: 16 September 2014]

hotel's desired atmosphere(Rutkin,2005).The number of samples are 22 of 5 star hotels in Bangkok, Thailand. Only 5 star hotels was selected due to avoid the bias and also this category of hotel have enough capital in presenting their image and identity. All these hotel also have achieved the maximum requirement in hotel ratings.

Table 1:Hotel rating in Thailand.
Source:Thailand Hotel Association

Star Rating	Number of hotel
	
	9
	55
	99
	68
Total	231

 22 hotels in Bangkok

- Limitation
 - During this research conduct,there was limitation have involved. There was:
 - i. Having difficulties during documentation at the site. Some of the items are difficult to reach and the documentation of those structures are limited.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. The first primary data used was observation. The observation and documentation has been done in all 5 star hotels in Bangkok, Thailand. All selected buildings has been observed and documented based on the research needs. The secondary data is depends on literature review which is has been done at Thailand Creative and Design Center(TCDC), Chulalongkorn University and Chiang Mai University.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

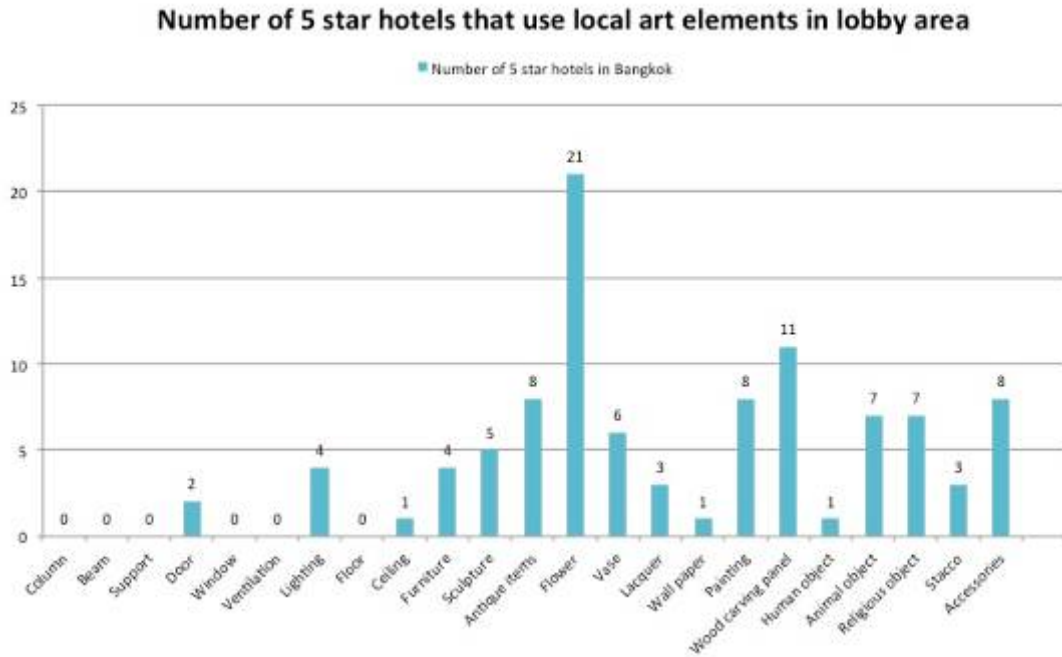


Figure 5: Number of hotels that use local art elements.
Source: Author(2014)

a) Flower

From the observation, almost all sample use flower in their space(Figure 5). But, surprisingly many use orchid instead of using Thailand's national flower. The national flower for Thailand is Golden Shower Tree (*Cassia fistula*)(Figure 6). This tree have several names base on the region. Normally they called "Tok kun" but, in northern region more familiar with "lomleang" and southern region more known as "Ratchaphruek".



Figure 6: Golden Shower Tree
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassia_fistula. [Accessed : 19 September 2014]

The reason why they use orchid because orchid are more long-lasting compared to Golden Shower Tree. Besides, orchid are more variety of colour and shape, and easily to get from the market. Apart of orchids, they use *heliconia*, lotus, lucky bamboo, *anthurium*, jasmine, frangipani, daisy, *chrysanthemum*, rose, *globe amaranth* and lily. The key factor in selecting the type of flower in their decoration is the availability of the selected flower, shape, colour (purple is the favourite colour and closely related to royalty⁹), cost, religion (lotus always related with Buddhism), culture(e.g.jasmine and globe amaranth flower for making worship at Thai temple), medicine value¹⁰(e.g.Rose(*dok kularb*):nourishes the heart,relieves fatigue and acts as a mild laxative,West Indian Jasmine(*dok khem*):high in fibre and helps ease constipation) and others.

b)Wood carving panel

Wood carving panel has been used at the wall which is can be found behind the counter, lift lobby area and stairs. Some of these wood carving panel has been recycled and reused in new way approach(Figure 7).



i)Pediment from the old building has been reused as wall decoration.



ii)*Khong khiew* normally can be seen at temple building.

Figure 7:The reused of old component of the building into new approach.(i)Shangri-La Hotel (ii)Anantara Bangkok Riverside Resort & Spa.

Source:Author(2014)

⁹ See <http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/colorselection/p/purple.htm>

¹⁰ See http://pastebangkok.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cache-issue14_FoodieFocus.pdf



i)Wood carving panel at stairs.



ii)Wood carving panel behind the reception counter.

Figure 8:The customized of wood carving panel.(i)Mandarin Oriental Hotel (ii)Pullman Bangkok King Power.

Source:Author(2014)

c)Antique items, Painting, Accessories

Antique items are an old collectable item. The reason why they collect or buy this antique item because of its age, beauty, rarity, condition, utility, personal emotional connection, and/ or other unique features(Wikipedia,2007)¹¹. Besides, the decision to have antique item in their space because to match with the concept of the space. Among the favourite items are an old telephone, antique iron, gramophone, Thai cartwheel, small boat and bronze bells.



i)Bronze bells behind the concierge.



ii)Thai cart wheel.

Figure 9:An antique item.(i)Banyan Tree Bangkok (ii)Anantara Bangkok Riverside Resort & Spa.

Source:Author(2014)

¹¹ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antique>

Painting that can be found from those hotels are mostly about Ramakian(the story is about the victory of man over the power of evil)¹², Jataka(life of Buddha), Buddha image, *lai thai* motif(flames,leaves and flowers)¹³ and also some abstract design.



i)Oil painting at the lobby.



ii)Painting of Buddha behind the reception counter.

Figure 10:(i)Centara Grand at Central World (ii)Banyan Tree Bangkok.

Source:Author(2014)

Accessories that they use are almost similar like we had at home such as candles with holders, plate, food container, small vase, music instrument, miniature and etc. They also have *Hsun Ok* offering box which is were used to carry gifts of food and other offerings for monasteries.



(i)Offering box in black and red lacquer.



(ii)Candle with *globe amaranth* flower.

Figure 11:(i)JW Marriot Bangkok.(ii)Mandarin Oriental.

Source:Author(2014)

¹² Read more at As written by King Rama 1 with Illustrations from the mural Paintings in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha(1998), Thai Ramayana. Bangkok: Wacharin Publishing Co.Ltd.p.3

¹³ Read more at Sthapitanonda,N. & Mertens,B.(2006),Architecture of Thailand: A Guide To Traditional and Contemporary Forms.London:Thames & Hudson Ltd.p.188

d)Animal object, Religious object

For animal object they use elephant, horse and deer. Elephant are the most famous among those animals. Apart of being one of the Thailand national symbol, elephant also is a symbol of tradition, history, royal, fortune and superstition. Based on Buddhist legend, Queen Maya of Sakya, Lord Buddha's mother, was dreamed that a divine Bodhisattva on white elephant touched her side. Later she became pregnant. This is why elephants are place in high esteem and reverence to Thai people, and white elephants are representing as high dignity and majesty¹⁴. For Thai people, they also have zodiac same like Chinese zodiac. There are twelve animals each representing a year,namely: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, serpent(dragon), snake, horse, goat(ram), monkey, rooster, dog and pig.



i) An elephant object at the lift lobby.



ii) A horse at seating area.

Figure 12:(i)Mandarin Oriental (ii)JW Marriot Bangkok.

Source:Author(2014)

Religious object

Religious object mostly they use from Thai Ramakian tale. Image such as half-lion, half-human beast such as Norasingh; half-maiden, half-goose creatures known as *kinnaree* and many other mixture of animals has been used widely in Thailand. They also have Buddha statue and Lord Ganesha in their space.

¹⁴ Read more at (2011,March). Thai Elephants and Its Significant to Thai Culture and History. Retrieved September 11, 2014 from <http://www.studymode.com/essays/Thai-Elephants-And-Its-Significant-To-645605.html>



i) *Kinnaree*. ii) Lord Ganesha
Figure 13:(i)Intercontinental Bangkok. (ii)Swissotel le Concorde Bangkok.
 Source:Author(2014)

e)Sculpture, Vase

Sculpture is the branch of the visual arts that operates in three dimensions and one of the plastic arts. Sculpture that they use can be divided into several themes namely:religion(Jataka or Ramakian), nature, human, equipment and in abstract form. Some of the sculpture is the recycled from the old building components such as *cho fa*.



(i)*Cho fa* has been recycled back from old building.

(ii)Sculpture in human form.

Figure 14:(i)JW Marriot Bangkok.(ii)Pullman Bangkok King Power.
 Source:Author(2014)

Vase in Thai culture is functioning as a water container. So, normally they have big vase near to the water elements such as at pool or water fountain.



(i)Big vase at seating area.



(ii)Big vase at water elements.

Figure 15:(i)Amari Watergate Hotel.(ii)Anantara Bangkok Riverside Resort & Spa.
Source:Author(2014)

f)Lighting, Furniture

Lighting in a space is a very important part in enhancing the beauty of the space. It is important to have the right lightings effect in order to get the right ambience. In lighting aspect, some of the hotels take several approach by designing some parts in order to let the lights come in during daytime. This can be achieved by having perforated wall. Some hotels have design their lighting according to their concept.



(i)Pendant light was design like bronze bells at the temple.



(ii)Lights from outside came in through perforated wall.

Figure 16:(i)Mandarin Oriental.(ii)Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit.
Source:Author(2014)

Furniture in those lobby are mainly followed the concept of the hotel. Mostly use modern furniture but only a few hotels use traditional or local design furniture. Manuscript cabinet, chinese table and cabinet, coffee table, low Thai table and Thai triangle pillow has been selected to mix and match with other type of furnitures.



(i) Thai triangle pillow.



(ii) Manuscript cabinet.

Figure 17:(i)Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel & Towers.(ii)JW Marriot Bangkok.

Source:Author(2014)

g)Lacquer, stucco

The lacquer, which in Thai is called “Lai Rod Nam”, meaning, washed lacquer¹⁵ or ornaments merging from washing the work with water¹⁶, is believed comes from China. This technique use gold leaf and lacquer from the sap of the sumac tree (*Anacardiaceae*). Lacquer technique always use to decorate many objects for religious purposes and common uses.



(i)Lacquer at panel showing the 12 zodiac from the 12 cycle calendar .



(ii)This lacquer contain Ramakian tale which is can be found at lift lobby.

Figure 18:(i)JW Marriot Bangkok.(ii)Swissotel Le Concorde Bangkok.

Source:Author(2014)

¹⁵ Read more at Sthapitanonda,N. & Mertens,B.(2006),Architecture of Thailand: A Guide To Traditional and Contemporary Forms.London:Thames & Hudson Ltd.p.194

¹⁶ Read more at Bhirasri,S.(2006),Thai Lacquer Works.Bangkok:Fine Arts Department

Stucco is used as decorative coating for walls and ceilings and as a sculptural and artistic material in architecture. Stucco are more use at outside of the building compared to plaster. The use of stacco in Thailand was started since long time ago when Thai people really admired with Khmer architecture. During that time, Thailand also lack of fine rock such as sandstone for carving. So, they have to change into stacco. The demand in stacco is tremendously increase in Thailand during the reign of King Rama III, which is stacco often displaced wood carving. The high cost of quality wood is main factor for the builders to use stacco more frequently. In these sample, they use items made from stacco such as statue, window frame and *lai thai* motif pattern.



(i)Stucco with sukhothai window design.

ii)Stucco with *lai thai* motif, painted in gold colour.

Figure 19:(i)The Sukhothai.(ii)Mandarin Oriental.

Source:Author(2014)

h)Door

In Thailand, same like in Burma, Cambodia and Laos, they always enhancing their buildings by decorate more or have beautiful ornaments at doors, windows, roof, pediments, eave brackets, base, columns and ceilings. Nowadays, they have tried to put some those elements into certain area of the buildings.



Figure 20: Shape of *cho fa* has been adapted here. Might be representing the protection from the evil from entering the building, Shangri-La Hotel.
Source: Author (2014)

i) Ceiling, wall paper, human object

There is one hotel that have different kind of ceiling style. The Sukhothai have designed the ceiling of the lobby base on the chedi shape. Wall paper has been used with the image of Ramakian. The human object that can be found in those space are the sawadee lady statue only.



i) Ceiling design with character of chedi but in upside down way.



ii) Wall paper of Ramakian behind the counter.



iii) Sawadee lady statue.

Figure 21:(i)The Sukhothai.(ii)Anantara Bangkok Riverside Resort & Spa.
(iii)Metropolitan Bangkok Hotel
Source: Author(2014)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, from the findings:

- it is clearly shows that the application of local art elements are more into decoration items compared to main building components. All samples are more prone using the decoration items in enhancing the beauty of the space. This scenario, really contradict with old practice which is the beauty of the design or building normally can be seen at main building part such as at the doors, windows, walls, floor, ceilings, column, beam, and roof.
- by using too many decorations items, it seems like the an architect or interior designer are not knowledgeable and not skillful enough in creating the space base on the concept. They are trying to overcome the design problem by using too many decoration items. So, the space will be overshadow by the unnecessary things.
- Theravada Buddhism have play important role in every aspect of Thai social and culture. Credit should be given to the hotels that use this approach. By using these local art elements, it shows that Thai society still appreciate and respect to religion and culture.

- Thailand have implemented and adapted influence from neighbouring country such as Burma, Laos and Cambodia in a good way.
- the number of hotel that use local art and culture can be increase by more involvement from the government, an architect, interior designer, contractor, academician, NGO and the community itself.

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