

The Characteristics And Meanings Of Annamese Sculptures On The Northeastern Buddhist Temples

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Abstract

This article is part of the study on *The Characteristics and Meaning of Annamese' sculptures on the Northeastern Buddhist temple to the souvenir design*. The study aimed to examine the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples using qualitative research methods, including document analysis, field surveys, non-participant observation, and interviews with individuals involved with Annamese sculptures. The research focused on selected provinces in northeastern Thailand that had been influenced by Annamese craftsmanship in Buddhist temples, particularly those featuring Annamese sculptures from 1917 to 1957. The collected data was analyzed using semiotic theory and principles of artistic composition. Research findings were presented through descriptive analysis. The research findings revealed that Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples from 1917 to 1957 were found in eight provinces. A total of 27 Buddhist temples featuring Annamese sculptures were crafted by Annamese artisans residing in the region. These sculptures were primarily found on *Isan Sim*, *Ho Jaek*, and *Taad Isan*. They were classified into three types: base relief sculpture, high relief sculpture, and round relief sculpture. The selection of temples for the study was based on the presence of Annamese sculptures, which were categorized into three stylistic approaches: realistic, semi-abstract, and abstract. Theoretical analysis revealed that semiotics served as a system of representation that enhanced perception and understanding of the origins of Annamese sculptures. It conveyed both explicit and implicit meanings through various forms of sculptures, contributing to their symbolic significance. These sculptures reflected cultural beliefs that auspicious symbols should be incorporated in northeastern Buddhist temples. This also involved symbols of power, protection, and the safeguarding of religion. Additionally, other positive cultural beliefs were also incorporated into northeastern Buddhist art. The researchers categorized the meanings of Annamese sculptures found in northeastern Buddhist temples into three major groups: (1) Animal Group, which included natural animals, Naga and dragon figures, and mythical creatures; (2) Human Group, representing human figures; and (3) Nature and Floral Vase Group, featuring decorative floral and vase motifs. These categories were expressed through the lens of Annamese artistic symbolism and belief systems. All of these sculptures conveyed auspicious meanings and served as symbols of power, bravery, and resilience. They functioned as protective element guarding against malevolent forces. Additionally, their implicit meanings were safeguarding Buddhism and preserving cultural heritage.

Keywords: Sculptures, Annamese Artisans, Northeastern Buddhist Temples

INTRODUCTION

The Isan people constitute the largest population group in the northeastern region of Thailand. They possess a distinct culture characterized by unique language, handicrafts, and architecture. The Isan people have inherited and preserved the cultural traditions of the Mekong River basin since ancient times (Lawan Rachana, 2015). The northeastern region of Thailand, also known as Isan, has a rich artistic and cultural heritage that has flourished alongside the development of its cities over time. This long history has given rise to various forms of Buddhism art within temples, each art exhibits different elements and characteristics. This diversity is shaped by the unique environmental and socio-cultural conditions of each community, which reflects their deep devotion to religious construction (Santi Leksukhum, 2007). Art is a fundamental element of artistic expression, which takes on various forms depending on the ways humans have expressed themselves throughout different eras. It serves as a reflection and transmission of life events, social conditions, thoughts, beauty, and beliefs in philosophy or religion. Art exists to bring joy, entertainment, and even solace in times of hardship. This expression of arts manifests across different forms, including literature, painting, architecture, and sculpture (Kamjorn Sunthornpongsri, 1981).

According to the Royal Institute Dictionary (1982 edition), the term *Pratimakam* (sculpture) originates from Sanskrit, while its Pali equivalent is *patima* or *patimakara*. Sculpture refers to a form of artistic expression that creates three-dimensional shapes with volume, weight, and spatial presence. It is crafted using various materials, which determine the methods used in its creation. The beauty of sculpture arises from the interplay of light and shadow on its surface. Sculptures are categorized into three types: base relief sculpture, high relief sculpture, and round relief sculpture. Sculptural works are considered a form of artistic object that effectively reflect beliefs, religion, and refined cultural values. While sculptures may incorporate contemporary influences or stylistic elements from other cultures, they are developed with an idealized approach. Distinct artistic characteristics have been passed down through generations. Newly created sculptures are designed to align with religious, cultural, and societal context, making them widely accepted by Thai society and the general public. Sculptural works have been created based on traditional Thai beliefs and aesthetic preferences. As the majority of Thai people practice Buddhism with deep devotion, artistic forms related to religion have been widely developed. This includes stucco sculptures designed to adorn Buddhist structures. (Prasert Wannarat, 2009) The introduction of Buddhism to Thailand has led to social and cultural changes and fusions, which are reflected in artistic works.

Buddhist art in the northeastern region reflects the deep-rooted beliefs and faith in Buddhism. Isan folk art has long been intertwined with the spiritual and cultural traditions of the local society, embodying the unique characteristics of each community. It is expressed with sincerity through the craftsmanship of local artisans, who skillfully serve Buddhism by creating various religious artworks, such as Buddha statues, mural paintings, stucco sculptures, and symbolic representations of Buddhist art. Additionally, these artistic creations serve as a means of alleviating spiritual suffering and function as sacred objects that provide emotional and spiritual support, deeply embedded in the rural Isan way of life. (Prachit Sakunaphat, 2008) With the expansion of transportation routes, Annamese artisans began arriving in Thailand around 1917 as they fled political conflicts both domestically and internationally. They settled throughout northeastern Thailand, particularly in provinces along the Mekong River. Over time, these craftsmen became increasingly influential as professional builders and contractors, specializing in the construction of residential buildings and, most notably, religious structures. Initially, as refugees, they worked in exchange for shelter and food. However, they eventually refined their expertise, earning recognition as highly skilled artisans. In later years, many of them married local Isan women. In this era, craftsmanship techniques had been blended. This led to a rise of a new form of religious architecture that integrated Lao, Annamese, Western, Thai, and Northeastern Thai Buddhist artistic influences. This art exhibited diverse characteristics, encompassing traditional Lan Xang style, a fusion of local folk art, and cultural ideologies expressed through the craftsmanship of Annamese artisans (Tik Sanboon, 2010), and their artistic styles. This fusion was further enriched by the tastes and traditional wisdom of skilled local artisans.

Wirot Srisuro (1993) described the overall characteristics of Annamese craftsmanship, noting that it often featured arched openings above doorways and windows. Staircases were typically flared outward, with

columns and handrails curving along the steps. The balustrade openings were usually carved into vertical oval shapes. Decorative motifs were commonly sculpted in stucco, often depicting dragons or qilins in place of traditional Nāgas. Even when Nāgas were represented, they were often stylized to resemble dragons, as seen in various northeastern Buddhist temples. Annamese craftsmanship carries an enchanting depth, inviting exploration into thoughts and beliefs behind its meanings. Most of them are associated with auspiciousness, which highlights their significance. Annamese artisans also incorporate traditional symbols of good fortune from their homeland into their architectural works in Northeastern Thailand. These positive beliefs were also intertwined into northeastern Buddhist art, featuring motifs such as dragons, bats, butterflies, tigers, phoenixes, vases, and a variety of floral patterns. (Chawalit Athipattayakul, 2014) This aligns with Tik Sanboon (2010) who stated that Annamese artisans often expressed symbolic beliefs through decorative patterns, particularly animal motifs. Many of these symbols were derived from Chinese cultural influences, which served as a dominant inspiration. Each motif conveyed auspicious meanings. For example, the qilin symbolized virtue, prosperity, power, and stability. The Chinese referred to the qilin as the “dragon horse.” Additionally, other Chinese ritual symbols, such as vases and flower pots, were commonly depicted. Numerous other fascinating forms and meanings can be found throughout the northeastern region, particularly in Annamese decorative art adorning Buddhist temples. A Buddhist site is a structure built for religious activities related to Buddhism. It consists of buildings or spaces constructed within a designated area, enclosed by walls that define its boundaries. This place is commonly referred to as a temple. Examples of temple architecture in the Isan region include the Sim Isan, Ho Jaek, and That Isan. These structures are classified as visual arts in the field of architecture. Stucco patterns, wood-carved door decorations, and other ornamental carvings are classified as visual arts in the field of sculpture. Meanwhile, mural paintings found in significant locations fall under the category of painting. The creation of Buddhist art is not bound by fixed symbols, forms, or identities. Rather, it is influenced by diverse contexts such as ethnicity, values, ideals, and beliefs. (Adun Lanwong, 2020) Thus, it can be observed that sculptural art in Isan Buddhist sites has continuously evolved in both form and meaning, adapting to the dynamics of local community life and the regional context. Social, political, and cultural changes have significantly influenced the creation of Isan Buddhist art, particularly the distinctive styles of Annamese craftsmanship. These styles can be categorized based on the patterns used to decorate Buddhist sites, incorporating artistic elements such as realism, semi-abstraction, and abstraction. This has led to the symbolic communication of Annamese sculpture, conveying both explicit and implicit meanings. According to Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic theory, these sculptures function as signs that establish a direct causal relationship with real-world objects. This research aimed to investigate Annamese sculptures found in northeastern temples between 1917 and 1957, covering eight provinces, including Ubon Ratchathani, Roi Et, Maha Sarakham, Kalasin, Khon Kaen, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, and Mukdahan. The study also encompassed the story of Annamese artisans who faced political turmoil, leading them to flee the colonial conflicts of French Indochina and seek refuge in Isan and Laos. During this period, Chinese, Vietnamese, and French artistic influences were introduced into Isan and Lao art, expressed through stylistic elements, material techniques, and symbolic motifs in craftsmanship. Given the significance of these influences, this study aimed to examine the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures on the northeastern Buddhist temple. The research sought to analyze their artistic patterns and symbolic interpretations, reflecting the cultural beliefs and semiotic traditions of Annamese craftsmanship.

Research Objective

To study characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples

Research Methodology

The study on the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples was qualitative research aimed to examine the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures within Buddhist temples in the northeastern region of Thailand between 1917 and 1957. The study covered 27 temples across eight provinces, including Ubon Ratchathani, Roi Et, Maha Sarakham,

Kalasin, Khon Kaen, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, and Mukdahan. These temples exhibit influences from Annamese craftsmanship. The research applied principles of artistic composition and semiotic theory to analyze the levels of symbolism and the depth of meaning embedded within these sculptural representations. The target group included scholars, experts, community leaders, Buddhist monks, local sages, the general public, and tourists. The researcher employed various data collection tools, including field surveys, observations, and structured interviews with categorized questions for systematic analysis. The study covered key aspects such as the general context of the study areas, environmental, social, and cultural backgrounds, historical developments, and the role and significance of Annamese sculptures. The data collection process was conducted in two ways, 1) Secondary data collection and 2) Primary or field data collection. The collected data was analyzed according to the research objective to generate knowledge and synthesize ideas. Once both documentary and field data were gathered, the next step was categorizing and summarizing the information. To ensure accuracy, data triangulation was applied, cross-checking data from various sources. This involved comparing documents, observations, and recorded interviews to verify consistency and reliability before drawing final conclusions.

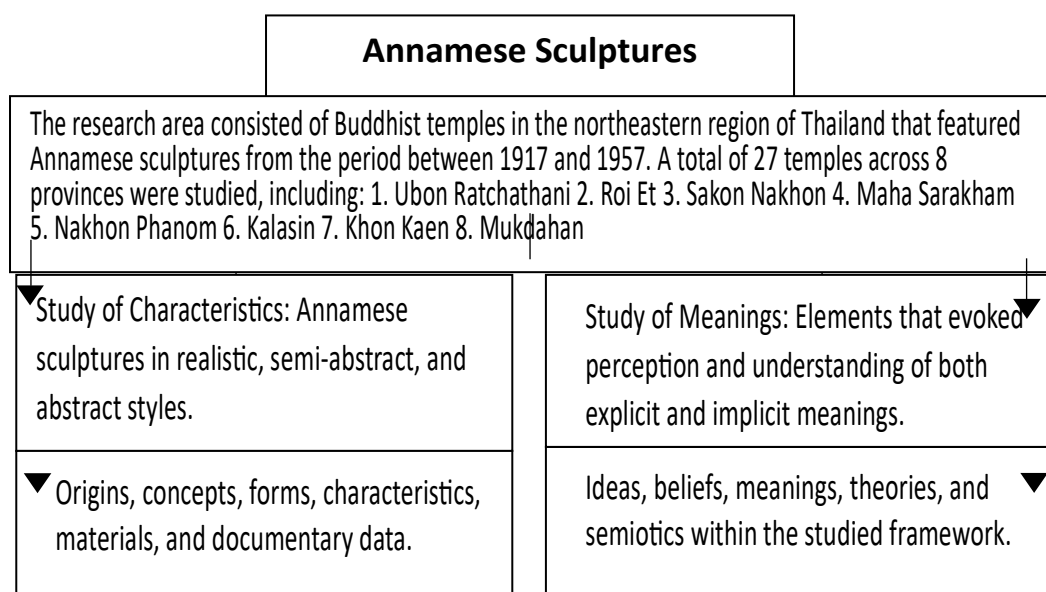


Figure 1 Data Structure

Research Findings

The study on the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples was conducted and analyzed according to the research objective with details as follows:

The researchers studied document, texts, and related research and found that the Vietnamese, or Annamese artisans, entered the northeastern region of Thailand at an uncertain date. However, the clearest evidence pointed to the arrival of the first group of Annamese settlers in Isan, who initially took refuge in Nakhon Phanom province. This location served as a temporary shelter before they were relocated to Nong Saeng Subdistrict in 1862 (end of King Rama IV's reign), situated north of Nakhon Phanom City. Later, in 1885, the missionary bishop followed to gather the Annamese people and convert them into a unified religious community. During this period, the construction of Christian churches began, utilizing labor from the Annamese settlers. This marked the inception of Western-style architecture in the Isan region (Thai Cultural Encyclopedia, Isan Edition, 1999). The Annamese artisan lineage emerged due to political conditions, as they migrated to Isan and Laos to escape the turmoil of war during the French colonial era. This migration brought with it artistic influences from China, Vietnam, and France, which were incorporated into the art of Isan and Laos. These influences were expressed through stylish forms, material techniques, and symbolic beliefs within the craftsmanship. From around 1917 to 1957, the Annamese artisan group gradually played an increasingly significant role as

professional builders who constructed houses and buildings, particularly religious structures. Initially, they worked in exchange for shelter and food, given their status as refugees. However, they later developed their skills and eventually became master craftsmen with specialized expertise.

The analysis of the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples was based on both structural and material aspects. These sculptures included bas-reliefs, high-relief sculptures, and freestanding sculptures. The study applied principles of artistic composition and semiotic theory to explain the levels of sign usage and the depth of meaning embedded in these symbolic representations. The research scope focused on Buddhist temples in the northeastern region that featured Annamese sculptures from the period between 1917 and 1957 (B.E. 2460-2500). The study covered eight provinces, including 1) Ubon Ratchathani, 2) Roi Et, 3) Sakon Nakhon, 4) Maha Sarakham, 5) Nakhon Phanom, 6) Kalasin, 7) Khon Kaen, and 8) Mukdahan, totaling 27 temples selected based on specific criteria. The selection criterion was that the northeastern Buddhist temples must exhibit Annamese sculptures. These sculptures were categorized into three groups, including realistic, semi-abstract, and abstract forms (Suchart Thaotong, 1996).

Time Line (2460-2500)

The Northeastern Buddhist Temples Featuring Annamese Sculptures, Totaling 27 Temples.

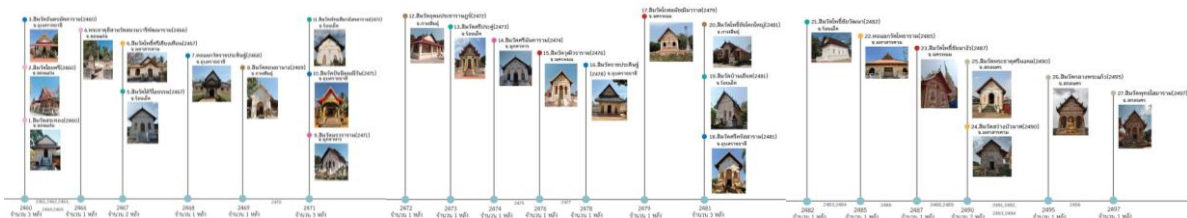


Figure 2 Timeline of the Northeastern Buddhist Temples Featuring Annamese Sculptures

The researchers divided the timeline into 10-year intervals with the following details: 9 temples featuring Annamese sculptures were identified during 1917-1926 (B.E. 2460-2469), 9 more temples with Annamese sculptures were found during 1927-1936 (B.E. 2470-2479), 5 temples were recorded to have Annamese sculptures during 1937-1946 (B.E. 2480-2489), and 4 temples with Annamese sculptures were identified during 1947-1957 (B.E. 2490-2500). From this data, it was evident that in the earlier periods, there was a higher density of northeastern Buddhist temples featuring Annamese sculptures. Additionally, most of these sculptures were found in Isan Sim, with a total of 24 temples. This was followed by Ho Jaek with 2 temples, and lastly, Phrathat Isan with 1 temple.



Isan Sim

Ho Jaek

Phrathat Isan

Figure 3 The Northeastern Temples

The analysis of Annamese sculptures found in the northeastern Buddhist temples from 1917 to 1957 (B.E. 2460-2500) covered 27 temples across 8 provinces. These temples featured a total of 245 distinct sculptural designs attributed to the Annamese artisan lineage. It was evident that Annamese artisans excelled in stucco craftsmanship, which became a defining characteristic of their architectural contributions. Most Isan Sim were constructed using stucco, reflecting this expertise. Additionally, Annamese artisans integrated auspicious symbolic motifs into the northeastern Buddhist art, including dragons, tigers, phoenixes, and floral vases, blending their cultural beliefs with local Buddhist traditions. Annamese sculptures were often expressed through symbolic animal figures, representing creatures drawn

from belief systems rooted in Chinese, Vietnamese, French, and Lao cultures, which were blended with the traditions of the northeastern region. These designs were often crafted in plaster, with dragons or qilins standing in for Nāgas. Even when Nāgas were depicted, they were frequently stylized to resemble dragons. Another important skill was the creation of arched frames above doors and windows, a technique influenced by France. This reflected both structural and material design elements, which included a large number of low-relief sculptures, totaling 215 styles. Following this were 22 styles of free-standing sculptures, and the least common were high-relief sculptures, with only 8 styles. The Annamese sculptures could be categorized into groups: the most abstract, with 139 styles; semi-abstract, with 71 styles; and the least common, realistic styles, with 35. Thus, it could be concluded that the majority of Annamese sculptures found in Buddhist temples of the northeastern region were primarily low-relief and predominantly abstract in form. The Annamese artisans were highly skilled in plasterwork, a distinctive craftsmanship evident in the construction of many Buddhist temples in Isan. Their work often incorporated auspicious symbolic elements, blending them into the region's Buddhist artistic traditions.

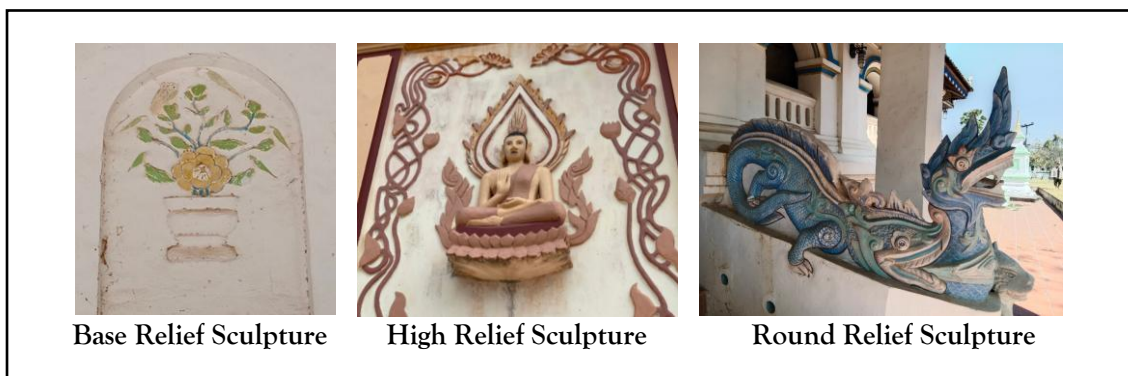


Figure 4 Characteristics of Annamese Sculptures featured in the northeastern Buddhist temples

The analysis of the meaning behind Annamese sculptures in the northeastern Buddhist temples focused on their distinctive forms as they appeared in these sacred places. These sculptures served as symbolic representations that evoked perception and understanding of their origins. Their meaning could be categorized into explicit and implicit interpretations, conveyed through various sculptural forms. The process of embedding meaning into these sculptures reflected the principles of semiotics, drawing insights from depictions of Himavanta mythical creatures and references from the Royal Institute Dictionary (2011). The scope of this research covered Buddhist temples in the northeastern region that featured Annamese sculptures, specifically those built between 1917 and 1957 (B.E. 2460-2500), totaling 27 temples. The objective was to examine both explicit and implicit meanings of these sculptures within these sacred spaces. In this analysis, the researchers categorized Annamese sculptures found in the northeastern Buddhist temples into three groups based on their forms; human figures, animal figures, and natural forms, as detailed below.



Figure 5 Human Figure Category

The Annamese sculptures in the human figure category included representations of Phra Mae Thorani, Mani Mekkhala, Ramasura, celestial beings, giants, gate guardians, soldiers, as well as depictions of the Buddha and scenes from Buddhist history. According to the Royal Institute Dictionary (2011), their explicit meaning primarily involved important figures from legends and Buddhist narratives, representing both benevolent and malevolent aspects. However, the implicit meaning conveyed moral teachings derived from these supernatural beings, revealing the virtues and flaws of human nature. These sculptures symbolized emotions, actions, and the essence of all living beings and elements. Additionally, prominent Buddhist figures were depicted as protectors who safeguarded these sacred spaces from invading forces.



Figure 6 Animal Figure Category

The Annamese animal sculptures found in northeastern Buddhist temples were the most numerous. To clarify their meanings, the researchers has categorized them into following groups. 1) Animal that existed in nature. This group included tigers, elephants, monkeys, birds, fish, turtles, rabbits, cows, and Singha. According to the *Royal Institute Dictionary* (2011), their explicit meaning referred to mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles, encompassing animals considered auspicious as well as fierce creatures known for their great strength. Their implicit meaning primarily symbolized power, courage, and resilience. These animals were associated with protection, prosperity, fortune, wealthy, good health, and longevity. 2) Nāgas and dragons. This group included dragons, qilins, phoenixes, nāgas, and garudas. According to the definitions of Himavanta creatures, their explicit meaning identified them as beings of the mythical Himavanta forest, semi-divine, part-human, part-animal entities possessing supernatural abilities beyond those of humans and ordinary animals. Their implicit meaning symbolized power, dominance, and greatness. They represented authority, protection, and the enhancement of prestige, as well as agricultural prosperity and human well-being. These creatures were embodiments of abundance, strength, sovereignty. Beyond the group of real animals and nāgas and dragons, there was another category, 3) Imaginary creatures. These included hybrid beings, either human-animal or animal-animal combinations, whose meanings could not be clearly defined.



Figure 7 Natural Form Category

The Annamese sculptures in natural form category included real flowers, floral vases, and vine patterns. According to the *Royal Institute Dictionary* (2011), their explicit meaning referred to flowering plants, which were parts of trees or branches that bloomed into natural elements. Vases were open container commonly used to hold flowers for decorative purposes. Their implicit meaning symbolized devotion, reverence, and worship in Buddhism. They represented faith, honor, and the preservation and protection of the Buddhist religion. Additionally, they embodied abundance, virtue, wisdom, purity, and a serene, untainted mind.

SUMMARY

The study on Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples covered eight provinces in the Isan region. A total of 27 temples featuring Annamese sculptures were identified. These sculptures were created by Annamese artisans who had settled in the area. Annamese sculptures were primarily found on Sim, Ho Jaek, and That. They included low-relief, high-relief, and free-standing sculptures. The selection criteria for the studied temples were based on the presence of Annamese sculptures in these sacred spaces. Annamese artisans commonly created arched designs above door and window frames, with decorative plaster reliefs of dragons or qilins in place of nāgas. Most of these ornamental patterns were created between 1917 and 1957 (B.E. 2460-2500), coinciding with the period when Annamese refugees settled in the region. Annamese craftsmanship relied heavily on practical experience and keen observation rather than oral instruction. In traditional local architectures, structures were typically built on mortar foundations. Annamese craftsmanship was primarily characterized by plasterwork, with distinct artisanal features visible in the construction of Isan ordination hall or Sim. These artisans incorporated auspicious symbolic elements into northeastern Buddhist art, such as dragons, tigers, phoenixes, floral vases, and vine patterns. Annamese sculptures could be categorized into three stylistic groups, including realistic, semi-abstract, and abstract. As for theoretical analysis results, from a semiotic perspective, Annamese sculptures functioned as symbolic representations that conveyed both explicit and implicit meanings. These meanings reflected the origins of Annamese craftsmanship and the integration of their auspicious beliefs into northeastern Buddhist temples. The sculptures were categorized into three major groups, 1) Animal group. This group could be divided into three subgroups, including natural animals, nāgas, and dragons, and mythical creatures. 2) Human group, and 3) Nature group, represented through flowers and floral vases. These sculptures were interpreted through the patterns and motifs of Annamese artistic traditions. Collectively, the symbolized auspiciousness, power, courage, and resilience, serving as protective elements against malevolent forces. Their deeper meaning extended to the preservation and safeguarding of Buddhism while maintaining cultural heritage and tradition.

DISCUSSION

This research examined the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples, focusing on 27 temples across 8 provinces in the northeastern region of Thailand.

These sculptures were crafted by Annamese artisans, who migrated to the region because of political condition and war. Their craftsmanship introduced elements of Chinese, Vietnamese, and French art into Isan and Lao artistic traditions. This influence was reflected in architectural styles, material techniques, and symbolic motifs. Thus, it had shaped the region's artistic heritage between 1917 and 1957 (B.E. 2460-2500) (Wirot Srisuro, 1993). Annamese artisans gradually played an increasingly significant role as professional builders and contractors, constructing houses and religious structures. Initially, they worked in exchange for shelter, food, and necessities. However, they developed their skills and became highly specialized craftsmen (Tik Sanboon, 2010). The influence of Annamese art in northeastern Buddhist temples was deeply tied to the migration of Vietnamese communities into the region. Along with their settlement, they introduced cultural elements and construction techniques into local architecture. A distinct feature of Annamese sculptures in northeastern temples was the arched designs above doorways and windows. It was often adorned with plaster reliefs of dragons or qilins instead of traditional nāgas. Even when nāgas were depicted, they were frequently stylized to resemble dragons. (Wirot Srisuro, 1993) Additionally, the craftsmanship of Annamese artisans in northeastern region was often associated with auspicious symbolism. Their decorative works reflected the importance they placed on the structures they were responsible of constructing. They always incorporated traditional beliefs and auspicious symbols from their homeland into the decoration of Isan Buddhist temples (Chawalit Athipattayakul, 2011). This aligned with Tik Sanboon (2014), who noted that Annamese decorative motifs frequently featured symbolic animals derived from Chinese cultural beliefs, all associated with good fortune. For example, the qilin was a symbol of virtue, prosperity, power, and stability. The Chinese referred to the qilin as the "dragon horse", while the lion symbolized a guardian figure, protecting sacred spaces. Additionally, Annamese artisans incorporated Chinese auspicious objects such as vases and flower pots into their decorative motifs. In later periods, the ornamentation of Ruean That increasingly featured political and nationalistic symbols, such as the Garuda emblem and the Dharmachakra seal. These elements reflected the spiritual and artistic preferences of the Isan-Annamese community of that era. The Annamese sculptural forms found in Buddhist temples were defined by both their structural design and material composition, comprising low-relief, high-relief, and freestanding sculptures. All categories were all classified based on artistic composition principles (Chaloot Nimsamer, 2001). The research focused on northeastern Buddhist temples that featured Annamese sculptures from 1917 to 1957 (B.E. 2460-2500). A total of 245 sculptural forms were identified across these temples. Among these, low-relief sculptures were the most prevalent, with 215 examples. Freestanding sculptures followed with 22 examples, while high-relief sculptures were the least common, with only 8 examples. The classification of these Annamese sculptures was based on the art form according to Suchart Thaonthong (1996), as follows: abstract sculptures were the most numerous, totaling 139 examples. Semi-abstract sculptures ranked second, with 71 examples. Realistic sculptures were the least common, with 35 examples. Therefore, it could be concluded that the majority of Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples were categorized by low-relief and predominantly follow an abstract style. Regarding their meaning, these Annamese sculptures found in northeastern Buddhist temples possessed unique features. They served as symbolic representations that conveyed an understanding of their origins, expressed through both explicit and implicit meanings. Based on the various forms of Annamese sculptures, analyzed through the lens of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, the study found that northeastern Buddhist temple from 1920 to 1957 (B.E. 2460-2500) contained sculptures deeply rooted on the auspicious beliefs of Annamese artisans. These beliefs originated from their homeland. They were incorporated into northeastern Buddhist temples through the craftsmanship of Annamese artisans. Many of these sculptures reflected spiritual and symbolic significance, blending auspicious motifs into northeastern Buddhist art. The most frequently found figures included dragons, qilins, tigers, phoenixes, nāgas, garudas, as well as real animals, mythical creatures, humans, deities, giants, guardian figures, warriors, representations of the Buddha, and scenes from Buddhist history. Additionally, floral motifs, decorative vases, and vine patterns were also prominent. All figures were intricately expressed through the distinctive artistic symbolism of Annamese craftsmanship. These symbols were often expressed through animal representations, reflecting beliefs in various spiritual traditions. Each creature conveyed auspicious meanings, serving as symbols of power,

courage, and strength. They were believed to ward off evil, providing protection and safeguarding against harm. Additionally, their implicit meanings included a role as guardians of Buddhism, as well as preserving faith and cultural heritage.

SUGGESTIONS

1) There should be efforts to disseminate knowledge about the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures, particularly their application in religious spaces and other locations. This would help in effectively communicating the significance of the patterns found in northeastern Buddhist temples. Additionally, a comprehensive database should be developed to integrate this knowledge into educational resources. This could further be utilized for creative works, handicrafts, and other artistic projects.

2) The dissemination of knowledge about Annamese sculptures requires multiple factors, such as media, database, scholars, local wisdom keepers, especially community leaders and temple abbots. A well-structured and systematic approach should be established to ensure the process aligns with the local context, way of life, and northeastern Buddhist spaces (temples).

3) Future studies should expand research on Annamese sculptures for more diversity. There should be additional research on each area. Archives should be established to collect, preserve, and disseminate knowledge. Therefore, this information could be transformed into community learning resources.

4) The application of the characteristics and meanings of Annamese sculptures in northeastern Buddhist temples to creative design requires careful planning. Future research should emphasize experimentation with production techniques and material selection to offer suitable alternatives for local artisans and target groups. The designs should be practical, well-balanced, and aligned with the way of life of the target audience.

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