

The Assumptions About Women in Khmer Royal Court's Accessories Shown in Apsara Sculptures at Angkor Wat

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This article is a part of a study of Apsara Sculptures at Angkor Wat: 'From the Philosophical Symbol and Aesthetic to the Accessories Design'. The research aims to study the styles of outfits and accessories and to surmise the Khmer ladies of the court's traditional use of various materials as accessories, as shown in Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat. The study site is Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia. This study shows the beauty of craftsmanship and the meaning of materials or arts of the time, reflected through different types of traditional outfits and accessories shown on the Apsara sculptures. These representations of traditional Khmer ladies in court outfits during the Angkor Wat period shown on the Apsara sculptures raise questions about the use of materials for making accessories. The analysis is based on iconography and symbolic interactionism. The relationship between the outfits and the accessories shown on the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat were analysed to find the most possible tradition of accessory materials used by Khmer ladies of the court. The diffusion theory of culture is also used to analyse the connections of religion and other factors including tradition, culture, environment, life, role of the ladies of the court, and social context. The findings from related documents and field interviews suggest that there is a connection between the Apsara sculptures' outfits and accessories and the traditional outfits of the ladies of the court at that time. The findings also suggest that it can be assumed that the materials used to make accessories were both natural and metal materials, depending on the wearer's caste, social contexts, environment or life. The beautiful crafting of these materials as shown on the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat also



reflects the social and the cultural, and the perspectives of local people.

Key words: *Accessories, Khmer Royal Court, Apsara, Angkor Wat*

Introduction

In the past, humans wore clothes only to cover up their bodies. However, civilisations have influenced the way humans dress; we started to use different types of materials to not only make clothes, but also to craft beautiful accessories to blend in with social norms. In the past, clothes and accessories were used to express the wearer's identities, such as status, race, caste, etcetera. The evolution of an outfit's value in each era depends on many factors, such as politics, economy or weather. Therefore, outfits can be studied from artifacts, archaeological evidence, history, geography, beliefs or religion.

The study of a pattern shown on an artifact is the study of interpreting an object into symbols with which we can make assumptions or explanations about different aspects of data or concepts that people in the past may have tried to convey through the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat. The study has relied on iconographic analysis, which is the analysis and interpretation of art forms, and also elaborates on the influence of religious beliefs towards Apsara sculpture creations including the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat as well (Suksom, 2018), which can be used to identify the meanings of symbols or art forms. These meanings are the philosophy of art forms in each era. Some people believe that Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat are only the imagination of the artist, who wanted to make the most beautiful version of Apsara, a beautiful angel according to the myth, to show his faith in God (Vishnu), just like the norm of the Angkor Wat building (Intrawut, 2005). Later on, during the late 12th century, the building were changed to be a Buddhist temple (<https://th.wikipedia.org>). However, many scholars assume that beautiful women who lived in the Angkor Wat era, such as courtiers or concubines in the Khmer royal court, were used as models for these sculptures. The accessories on the sculptures show that they are not commoners. In addition, these sculptures also reflect the way the ladies of the court liked to dress during that time. The interesting ways of dressing up and wearing accessories has raised the question about what types of materials might have been used, if these sculptures are modelled on the ladies of Khmer court. The assumptions must be related to the geography, environment and practicalities of the time and way of life. In addition, they the accessories had to be uniquely beautiful enough that they could be the fashion of Angkor Wat and yet are still fashionable nowadays.

Cambodia's Angkor Wat, the largest religious monument in the world, was originally built as a Hindu temple dedicated to the god Vishnu before it was turned into a Buddhist temple. Angkor Wat was built in the early 12th century by the Khmer King Suryavarman II. It reflects many iconographic ideas. The largest number of Apsara sculptures have been discovered here,



with approximately 1,800 sculptures. A distinctive feature of the Apsara sculptures that appear at Angkor Wat are the beautiful outfits and accessories that are remarkable in both design and styles. The figures also have a beautiful shape and smile in different poses. The way they are dressed is dependent on their castes (Intrawut, 2005). Because of the diversity of Apsara sculptures, the researcher is interested in hypothesising about the materials the ladies of Khmer court used to make accessories during the Angkor Wat era, from the styles that appear in the Apsara sculptures.

To get the best assumptions of the materials the ladies of Khmer court used to make accessories during the Angkor Wat era, the iconography and symbolic interactionism must be involved, together with the study of other possible factors such as size, weight, design, shape, or even the practicality of wearing them. In addition, other related factors such as traditions, cultures, environments, life, and roles of the ladies of the court in that time must also be considered. Related documents including textbooks, literature, research, observations, surveys and interviews show that the Apsara sculptures could reflect the way ladies of the court actually dressed at that time. It can also be assumed that the materials for these accessories had to be carefully chosen to make them suitable for the roles and life in the Royal court. There were two types of materials: 1) local and imported natural materials, including leaves, flowers, plants and parts of animals, 2) metal materials including gold, silver, and brass (Marchal, 2005) (Diskul, 2004). Both types of materials can be practical in real life. The style of wearing them is mainly influenced by Brahmanism - Hindu from India (Long Naree, 2020). Research and historical records show that the Khmer royal court in the past, especially during the Angkor Wat era, was prosperous in terms of society, culture, trade and economy. There is a lot of evidence concerning international trade and exchange. Therefore, designs and materials depicted in parts of the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat have a variety of origins, which can be connected to international trade and exchange. However, the present study only aims to propose ideas or assumptions for a possible perspective which may be useful for further studies.

According to the interesting points mentioned above, the researcher is interested in studying and gaining assumptions from and about the popular materials used to decorate the costumes of women in the Khmer Royal court from the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat. This is a study of the outfit and accessory styles that are related to the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat, the beautiful ancient place known for its art that flourished during the ancient Khmer period and that has become a symbol of Cambodia today. It is a study about the connection between religious beliefs and the traditional values of women in the Khmer Royal court, which reflects the society, cultures and ideas of local people or the artist who carved the sculptures, through the fashionable art forms in the Angkor Wat era. This study can be a guideline for the future study about the way women at Angkor Wat and other eras dressed, or be used to set more assumptions in the future.



Objectives of the study

1. To study the outfit and accessory styles shown in Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat.
2. To surmise, from the sculptures of Apsara at Angkor Wat, the material used to make women's accessories in the Khmer Royal court.

Research Methodology

The study of styles of Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat was done to surmise the popular materials used to make Khmer ladies of the court's accessories. Apsaras were believed to be beautiful goddesses in Brahmin-Hinduism. They would dress up beautifully with gorgeous robes and accessories. There are a variety of styles of outfits, hair, accessories and expressions. These varieties lead to the assumption that these styles mimicked the actual outfit of women in the Khmer Royal court in the Angkor Wat era. Therefore, the origin of these arts might be reflections of outfits and accessory materials used among the women in the Khmer Royal court. The symbolic interactionism theory, which is about the interpretation of meanings or origins from symbols or styles, must be studied, along with iconographic theory, the study of the history, explanation and interpretation of an image, object or art, such as those that appear on the Apsara sculptures.

The types of materials appearing in Apsara sculpture at Angkor Wat can be used as an assumption on the use of materials for women in the Khmer royal court's accessories in the Angkor Wat era, including the placement of the sculptures. For example, the sculptures at the outer balcony appeared to have less accessories compared to the main castle. It is possible that the dressing styles of women in the Angkor Wat era depended on their castes, like in India. Therefore, it could be assumed that the popular material used to make accessories may also be based on a woman's caste. For example, the sculptures that mimic a high-class woman may have a finer design, shape and texture of accessories compared to other sculptures that mimic a lower-class woman. These details can be seen from layers of flower petals, garlands, or the designs or numbers of accessories. These symbols can be shown in various ways. The most common designs were natural designs, such as leaves, flower stems, twigs, flowers, corals, etcetera, or styles and designs that show that they were made from natural materials, such as garlands, bouquets, hairpins, etcetera. Symbols in Apsara sculptures can be interpreted into several different main points. First, these sculptures might be made from real natural materials such as local plants, according to related art theory, which is the theory about the relationship between humans, symbols, environments and activities in a particular period of time. They could also be the materials from trade and exchange. Second, the materials could be metals, and the most possible types of metals are gold, silver and brass, because humans can form them to mimic shapes in nature. These symbols were base-relief sculptures which have two dimensional shapes, textures and designs. This can lead to the assumption of material used to make women's accessories in the Khmer Royal court.



These types of material prompted the researcher's interest in comparing and speculating the possibilities that would lead to information about certain ways to dress up appropriately in a certain culture and tradition or religion during a certain period of time. This study can be a guideline for the future study about the way women at Angkor Wat and other eras dressed up, or to set more assumptions in the future. The data collected from related documents and field works were gathered and analysed to make the most possible assumptions to achieve the objectives of the study. The participants were experts in the design of Apsara sculptures and the outfits and accessories in Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat. The selected participants included local philosophers, scholars and archaeologists who were experts in clothes during the Angkor Wat era or experts in Khmer arts. The tools used in this study were a survey and structured and unstructured interviews. After data collection, the data were analysed according to the research framework, as mentioned earlier.

Scope of the Study

Scope of Content

The designs of clothes and accessories in Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat were investigated to make assumptions about popular materials that may have been used to make the Khmer ladies of the court's accessories. There are more than 1,800 different Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat, which required the use of iconographic theory, historical records, myths, previous research, and symbolic interactionism to analyse the collected data and set the assumptions.

Scope of Area

The researcher selected Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia as a research site because it is an important religious place built in the time of Khmer King Suryavarman II. The ancient Khmer kingdom was prosperous in both architecture, culture and trading. Khmer was one of the most important transportation and trading routes in the past, according to evidence and documents. These sculptures were influenced by India, as obviously seen in their designs, structures, details and techniques. These factors are the important factors of the present study. The results from this study are related to social values, cultures, traditions, environment and beliefs, which also reflect the way women in Khmer Royal court liked to dress during the Angkor Wat Era.

Results

Clothes and accessories have been with human beings for a very long time and they have been developed into something that can also make the wearer beautiful and feel satisfied. The results from this study show that the outfits and accessories depicted in the Apsara sculpture at Angkor Wat could be the actual styles of outfits of Khmer ladies of the court during the Angkor period, including high-class women, courtiers, royal concubines, royal dancers, etcetera



(Punnawanijsiri, 2013). They wore different, beautiful, fine outfits (Diskul, 1971). Their outfits attracted people and they became fashionable costumes during that time (Naree, Interviewed). The question is, what materials could they have used to make those outfits and accessories? The Apsara sculptures consist of many possible shapes, patterns and textures that could be both natural materials and man-made materials. Moreover, outfits and accessory styles of the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat are very similar to other sculptures that are believed to be people in the Khmer Royal court. For example, they wore the same headdress, round decorative collar with small leaves hanging down, armllets, bracelets, earrings, etcetera. These characteristics were mostly found in sculptures or sculptures of high-class people such as kings or the royal family, or important people in the upper caste, including Brahmin (based on the Indian castes), because they played a significant role in the social and political aspects of the Khmer court during the Angkor Wat era.

Apsara's outfit and accessory designs at Angkor Wat were found to have a big collar, belt, earrings, breast chain, headdress with leaf garland, bracelets, anklets, and a crown with floral motifs (Diskul, 1971). These accessories looked similar to natural plants such as flowers, leaves, branches, stems, wheat, etcetera. Some of them are nested in layers, similar to flowers and garlands hanging down. Most of them decorate the head or hair rather than the body. It can be noticed that most of them look like hair pins that were used to push into a bun or headdress. Another characteristic is the circle-shaped garland that was used as a bracelet, anklet or hair band; however, these characteristics were rarely found. These mentioned characteristics of Apsara raise the researcher's interest in the possible types of materials used for these accessories.

The materials that were often used to make these women's accessories in the Apsara sculpture at Angkor Wat, according to the diffusion theory of culture, were influenced by Indian outfits that spread to Southeast Asia. Indians liked to use colourful fragrant local flowers as women's accessories, including branches and stems, and many Apsaras appear to have flower stems with and without leaves on their head. Natural materials were used to make accessories or garlands. This might have been the fashionable way to dress up in those days. According to iconographic theory, which in this case describes the influence of religious belief towards the creation of the Apsara sculptures under the constitution of Brahmin - Hinduism, it is possible that Apsara was believed to be the most beautiful angel. The fact that the sculptor added these accessories refers to the belief that angels liked to use flowers to adorn their hair or body. Moreover, a higher class Apsara seems to have more flower-shaped accessories on their head, hair or crown, compared to normal lower-class Apsara. Everything that appears in these sculptures reflects the beauty values of women in the Angkor Wat period.

The data about the assumption of popular materials used to make accessories for Khmer ladies of the court from the designs, shapes, textures, observations, survey, interview, comparing arts in each era, together with other factors such as environment, tradition, culture and belief, shows that in the Khmer royal court of Angkor Wat, women were topless and wore only a sarong at

the bottom. Sarongs were worn in several different ways, such as folding, lifting and in a short style. Accessories were worn differently according to the wearer's caste. Fresh flowers were often used as hair and body accessories based on Indian influence. Later on, when there was trading between different countries, the dressing styles were mixed with other countries' cultures such as Chinese or Siamese. Therefore, the material that was often used to make Khmer ladies of the court's accessories assumed from symbols in Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat can be divided into two main types as follows.

Natural materials

Fresh flowers:

Snead Sok was the local name of the Lion's Ear flower that was believed to be used with hair pins; however, it is not clear how this flower looked, exactly. Most Apsara sculptures appear to have this flower on their buns or crown while only a few of them have this flower on their clothes. It is also believed that the Apsara outfits depicted the ways women of the Royal court dressed. The flowers that had different shapes of petals probably depicted the different kinds of local flowers they used. The flowers found were mostly similar to local flowers, such as hundred layers flowers, marigolds, lotus and jasmines, as the petal shapes and overlapping, as well as their sizes, are very close to these flowers and are easy to find. However, some sources state that these flowers might be plumeria because it was believed that white plumeria was a symbol of prosperity and angels. In addition, Khmer craftsmen who inherited the stone sculpture from their ancestors mention that these flowers could be Pha Ka Phlut, as it is locally called. They are ancient flowers often found in the area. They look like West Indian Lantana, but smaller in size.



Figure 1: The comparisons between the shapes of flowers on Apsara's crown a hundred layers flower (Phaka Muay Saro Tieb), and West Indian Lantana or Pha Ka Phlut (Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/Grusombat/posts>)

Another assumption was that these fresh flower petals found in the area were finely strung, stitched, tied or woven to use as decorations at Angkor Wat. Mr. Long Naree, the Angkor Wat's Apsara specialist stated in an interview that the Cambodian historical record says that Angkor Wat was a sacred place where Vishnu lived. The royal courtiers would make pedestal trays,

mobiles or devotionals made from fresh flowers, petals and leaves whenever a king came to Angkor Wat to worship the gods and goddesses. The Angkor Wat castles would be filled with devotions made of fragrant flowers to be used in a religious ritual or as decorations. Evidence about the long-established art of flower arrangements in Southeast Asia shows that women in the past had to learn and practice these skills. Therefore, it is possible that women in the Khmer Royal court used the skills they learned to make use of local flowers as their accessories. Even though these fine accessories were only made for high-class women such as high-class concubines or queen(s), the women who made the accessories did not necessarily have to be high-class women. Other normal courtiers might use a single fresh flower or ordinary flowers that could be easily found to decorate their hair or clothes. Another observation is the Apsara sculptures with a crown and a headdress have more of this flower than the Apsara with a bun.



Figure 2: The assumption about using various types of fresh flower petals to create petals that were stacked in layers for a crown or bun accessory (Retrieved from: <https://horoscope.mthai.com/>, <http://apinyapnoomnil.blogspot.com/>)

Mr. Kao Vann (2020), the local guide, suggested that these assumptions were highly possible as flowers were light, easy to find in the area, and had various types based on each season. These factors were the reason why the petals in the sculptures were different. Some flowers might even have come from India. In addition, the different types of hairpins found in many sculptures could show that hairpins might have been worn by a lot of women in the Royal court of Angkor Wat. One of the most found hairpins is pinned to a hair bun or crown, pointing out on both the left and right side. These hairpins look similar to ears of wheat, or leaves. This observation led to another assumption that they could be either the ears of the palm or the ear of rice as a Chinese ambassador, Zhou Da Guan, recorded that the Cambodian lowland was a very fertile rice plantation. Nowadays we still see many palm trees in the Siem Reap area, where Angkor Wat is located. The data from the interview pointed out that these palm trees have been in the Angkor Wat area for a very long time. Local people also made use of many parts of these palm trees such as the stems, leaves and fruit. In addition, these hairpins could be coconut flowers or betel trees as they are similar in shape, too. It is possible that the hairpins used among women in the Khmer Royal court might be made from these local materials. The

assumptions about accessory materials such as local fresh flowers or ears of palm or rice being used to make hairpins corresponds with the Apsaras' poses, which look like they are picking up flowers, leaves or such hairpins to dress up their buns. It was also found that these Apsaras have a garland in their hand, and on their arm, wrist and ankle.



Figure 3: A comparison between the hairpin of the Apsara at Angkor Wat, the ears of palm trees, coconut flowers and ears of rice.

Apart from the characteristics of the hairpins that are shaped like ears of rice, ears of palm, or coconut flowers, the women of the Royal court might also have used fresh local flowers such as jasmine, dahlia or other flower petals, that were shaped like a garland to decorate their buns and veils, based on the Angkor Wat arts. They also might have used these garlands as the base of a metal crown to make it smell good. In addition, the garland-based crowns were lighter than crowns that were purely made of metal. This could be seen from the garland-like part hanging out from the side of a crown, or the flower petals stacked higher up to like a cone.

Branches, flower stems, and leaves:

There are symbols that looked like flower stems, or flowers or leaves on branches. These symbols are slender, long, streaked with many leaves, similar to flower hairpins nowadays. It could be assumed that women in those days trimmed or arranged them into a beautiful bouquet before putting them onto their buns. It can also be noticed that the branches, leaves and flowers mostly appear in the Apsara sculptures with their buns pointing upwards from their head more than Apsaras with other hair styles. These materials could be tropical plants that could be easily found and were lightweight, such as the Royal Poinciana, the Pride of India, the Sacred Tree or the Golden Rain tree. These trees have bouquets of flowers that are similar to the symbols found in Apsara sculptures.

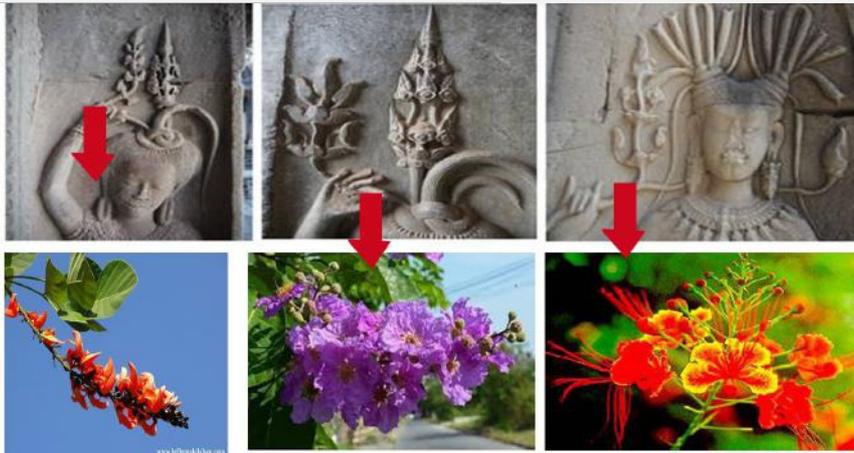


Figure 4: Hairstyles with flower stems, branches, and leaves, which could be tropical plants such as Pride of India, Sacred Tree, or Royal Poinciana (Retrieved from: www.hwllomukdahan.com)

In addition, symbols that look like lotus stems were also found, both blooming and in buds. In the past, lotus bouquets were used in various rituals because they were easy to find and every part of them were useful. There were several Apsaras holding a lotus; therefore, it is possible that the concubines and courtiers spent their time making handicrafts out of lotuses. The source of the lotus is not difficult to assume as the area around the Angkor Wat has evidence of the excavation of ponds, canals and large barays (water pond), in which were possible to have a lot of lotuses. Therefore, the lotus might have been a popular plant used to make women's accessories in the Khmer royal court.

Animal materials:

According to the Chinese ambassador, Zhou Da Guan of the Song Dynasty, who is recorded speaking about trading, asserting that most of the Cambodian exports were rare forest foods, saying that "Fine products include kingfisher feather, ivory, rhino horn and beeswax. Rough products include cockspur thorn, cardamom, Gamboge tree, sealing wax and chaulmoogra oil" (Yongboongerd, 2000). The Chinese liked to use bird feathers as accessories, especially flamingo and peacock's tail feathers. The kingfisher feather was special because it had a unique colour and was lighter than other feathers. In 1834, a Chinese document stated that the Khmer sent kingfisher feathers as one of their major tributes to China, which means kingfisher feathers had to be exported as both goods and tributes. Therefore, it became a rare and expensive item. Chinese kings and aristocrats admired the dazzling glitter and bright turquoise colour of kingfisher feathers for 2000 years. They usually used the feathers to decorate their crown, or they were used to make accessories or exquisite arts such as fans or folding doors. The blue crowns Chinese Kings wore in the past were also believed to be made of kingfisher feathers by cutting the feather into small pieces and gluing them on to the crown or metal accessories layer by layer until it looked like flowers. This exquisite work of art made of the kingfisher feathers

was called “Tian-Tsui”. Tian-Tsui appears in Chinese paintings, especially in the paintings of the Queen of the Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty. These values of bird feathers might also have influenced the Khmer. The kingfisher feathers, which were light and soft and had a unique colour, might have been material for the accessories and crowns of high-class women in the Khmer Royal court. This royal style, in turn, might have become an inspiration for sculptors to add these accessories to the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat. It is also assumed that the Apsaras were decorated with corals and shells, which were rare items from the sea, and perhaps influenced by the Chinese as well. However, no symbolic form of these materials was found in Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat; therefore, it is only an unclear assumption which suggests they might be actual products from trading, but that were not often used as accessories.

Metal materials

The Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat were influenced by Indian arts; therefore, the patterns are a mixture of Indian style with Khmer social values, including from influential people who had important roles in politics, society, culture or beliefs, such as kings, queens, concubines, brahmins, and so on. It is also possible that the women in the Royal court adored and were inspired by the way the Apsara dressed. These outfit values reflect on the outfits of Cambodian Apsara dancers, imitating accessories, crowns and everything from Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat. It could be assumed that metal materials might be used as moulds for accessories such as headdresses, cone-shaped crowns, gold necklaces with leaf-shaped mobiles hanging down and without a pendant, and breast chains. Their arms are decorated with low-relief armllets with a vine or flower pattern. The bracelets, assumed to be entirely made of metal or gold that fitted with other accessories, or a garland that might have been worn on each wrist instead of a bracelet. It was also found that Apsara did not wear animal-shaped bracelets such as swan, peacock or naga (Rattanamala, 2012). However, many scholars have argued that gold or metal is heavy. If it was actually worn during the Angkor Wat period, it would be a huge obstacle to the life of women in those days since most of the activities required them to move a lot. The issue about weight gave a rise to another assumption, that these accessories could have been partly metal and further decorated with fresh flowers as mentioned earlier. As for the silver, the information from the interview suggests that it could be moulded to be Apsaras’ crowns as well, but it was not popular because the silver would attain black stains which made it less beautiful if it was exposed to air for a long time. Moreover, the designs of silverware in Surin Province show that the history of silverware and the silver makers came from Cambodia to Thailand. These silverwares were inspired by the Khmer royal court arts. Initially, gold was used for moulding jewellery, but it was replaced by silver later on. In addition, the designs of silverware in Surin are similar to the flowers on the Apsaras’ crown at Angkor Wat (Jeawthong, 2011).



Figure 5: A comparisons of the designs on Apsaras' crowns at Angkor Wat, and of Khmer silverwares from Surin (Retrieved from: <https://www.thailandtopvote.com>)

Conclusions and Discussions

The assumptions about the ladies of Khmer Court's accessories as shown in Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat was investigated within the Angkor Wat area, Siem Reap, Cambodia. The investigation used data from related documents and research to study about the designs and symbols. The diffusion theory of culture was employed, along with symbolic interactionism theory, to analyse the connections between backgrounds and designs from the past to the present. These theories were also used to analyse the symbols, designs, shapes and texture of the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat, in order to set assumptions about the material the women in the Khmer royal court might have often used to make their accessories. These Apsaras did not only show the perception of beauty in oriental culture but also that based upon the perception of Brahmin-Hinduism beauty. The assumption that Apsaras sculptures imitated the outfits and postures of women in the Khmer royal court has led to the observation of the designs and shapes of the shown symbols and about the possible materials that could have been used to make the accessories. Cultures, traditions and beliefs were taken into account under the constitution of iconographic theory to find the connection between the women in the royal court's outfits, their ways of life or roles, and the possible famous materials. These materials had to be feasible and practical in daily life. The source of these materials had to be possible to find in the area and consistent with other conditions such as trading, culture and environment, among others. Based on the background information, and other relevant information about Apsara sculptures, it can be concluded that the materials women in the Khmer royal court often used to make accessories were: 1. Natural materials such as flowers. These flowers were likely to be fresh local flowers as it is believed that the flowers used as hairpins are locally called Snead Sok or Lion's ear flower. Therefore, it is possible that the shapes of the flowers in the

Apsara sculptures, especially on the crowns and hair, come from the use of real flowers as accessories among women in the royal court. There are various types of flowers that appear in Apsara sculptures, most of which are stacked layers of petals and of sizes similar to hundred layers flowers, marigolds, lotus, jasmines, and so on. Apart from fresh flowers that look like a single flower, the hairpins were also long and thin sticks, similar to coconut flowers or ears of rice. It is possible that these materials were used as hair accessories because they were easy to find and grew everywhere in the area. Another assumption about flower material is that fresh flower petals were often made into a fine piece of art by way of stringing, stitching, tying or weaving. The ladies of the royal court might have used these techniques to craft accessories from fresh flower petals. However, the finely crafted hairpins might have been used among women in the higher caste only. Apart from flower-like hairpins, it was also found that some hairpins look similar to branches, flower stems and leaves, which might also be the branches of local trees such as the Pride of India, royal poinciana, or golden rain tree. It should be noted that the use of branch-like hairpins mostly appears in Apsara sculptures with buns pointing upwards from their head, more so than the Apsaras with crowns and headdresses. There are also some accessories that look like corals and other materials which are believed to have been influenced by international trading. A record of a Chinese ambassador, Zhou Da Guan of the Song Dynasty (Yongboongerd, 2000), claims that Cambodia exported rare products to China, including light turquoise kingfisher feather, which Chinese kings and higher-class people liked to use as accessories. Therefore, it is possible that the flower-like shapes in Apsara sculptures might have been made by stacking kingfisher feathers layer by layer until they looked like flowers. In addition, these cultures of decorations might have been influenced by China. The second materials used to make accessories among women in the Khmer royal court, such as crowns, necklaces, breast chains, bracelets, and earrings, might have been gold, silver or brass. It is believed that gold might have been used primarily in the past, based on the outfit style of the Apsara dancers which mimics the outfit of the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat. However, wearing heavy metal accessories like this could have been challenging in daily life in the past.

At any rate, the study of “the assumptions of ladies of Khmer Court’s accessories shown in Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat” is only primary assumptions based on speculation from collected data, observation and interview. There is no clear evidence that can confirm the materials that were used as accessories or how much the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat reflect the outfits of women in the Khmer royal court during the Angkor wat era yet. These sculptures might only be the artists’ imaginings. These questions still need to be answered and the researcher hopes that this study will be useful for such future studies.



Suggestions for future research

- 1) The results of the present study can be further applied to future research.
- 2) The assumptions about the ladies of Khmer Court's accessories shown in the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat can be a guideline for future study about other materials or outfit styles.
- 3) The results from the present study can be an inspiration for future research about Apsara in other areas.

Limitations

There are many other possible assumptions about the ladies of Khmer Court's accessories shown in the Apsara sculptures at Angkor Wat. There also are many areas that the researcher did not investigate thoroughly. If the researcher has a chance to study again in the future, the researcher will investigate more interesting areas.



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Interviewee:

- Mr. Puan Jeawthong (interviewee), March 14, 2011.
- Mr. Long Naree (interviewee), January 29, 2020.
- Mr. Kao Vann (interviewee), January 30, 2020.
- Mr. Prom Utt (interviewee), January 30, 2020.