

“วิถีโออาร์ต : เรื่องเล่าจากลายผ้า ชชาติพันธุ์ไทยทรงดำ จังหวัดนครปฐม

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาบริบท คุณค่าของลายผ้าและวัตถุทางวัฒนธรรมที่มีความสัมพันธ์กับพิธีกรรมของกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ไทยทรงดำจังหวัดนครปฐม 2) ศึกษาและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลทางวัฒนธรรมสำหรับนำมาใช้ในการสร้างสรรค์ผลงานวิถีโออาร์ตที่ส่งเสริมจินตนาการและเห็นคุณค่าทางชาติพันธุ์ไทยทรงดำ และ 3) สร้างสรรค์งานวิถีโออาร์ตที่ได้รับแรงบันดาลใจจากวัฒนธรรมของชาติพันธุ์ไทยทรงดำ จังหวัดนครปฐม ผู้วิจัยใช้วิธีการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยทำการเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนาม ณ บ้านไผ่หูช้าง ตำบลไผ่หูช้าง อำเภอบางเลน จังหวัดนครปฐม เพื่อทำความเข้าใจวิถีชีวิตและบริบททางวัฒนธรรมของชุมชนทั้งในอดีตและปัจจุบัน ผลการศึกษาพบว่ากลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ไทยทรงดำเชื่อถือเรื่องพญานาคและนับถือผีบรรพบุรุษอย่างเคร่งครัด มีความเชื่อเรื่องชีวิตหลังความตาย จึงประกอบพิธีกรรมหลังความตายโดยใช้ลายผ้าและวัตถุทางวัฒนธรรมที่สร้างขึ้น เพื่อส่งดวงวิญญาณผู้ล่วงลับให้ได้เดินทางกลับสู่เมืองแถนตามความหวัง ผู้วิจัยใช้แนวคิดการตีความทางวัฒนธรรม ทำความเข้าใจระบบความคิดของวัฒนธรรมที่แสดงในรูปแบบของสัญลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมและพิธีกรรมของชาวไทยทรงดำ ใช้ทฤษฎีสัญญาวิทยาเพื่อหาสัญลักษณ์ที่ปรากฏในวัตถุทางวัฒนธรรมและพิธีกรรมหลังความตาย ได้แก่ ธงผ้า นก เรือนแก้ว เป็นต้น ซึ่งวัตถุเหล่านี้ถูกสร้างขึ้นจากความเชื่ออย่างลึกซึ้งเกี่ยวกับการส่งวิญญาณกลับเมืองแถน และใช้ทฤษฎีจิตภาพเพื่อออกแบบผลงานสร้างสรรค์ โดยแบ่งโครงสร้างของวิถีโออาร์ตเป็น 3 ส่วน คือ ความกลัว ความหวัง และความสุข มีความยาวทั้งสิ้น 10 นาที นำเสนอสถานะของผู้ล่วงลับที่มีความกังวลว่าดวงวิญญาณจะไม่ได้กลับสู่เมืองแถน และสถานะทับซ้อนของโลกอดีต ปัจจุบันและอนาคต โดยออกแบบสถานะเหนือจริงของจิตวิญญาณที่กระตุ้นจินตนาการของผู้ชม ให้เข้าถึงการตระหนักรู้เกี่ยวกับการดำรงไว้ซึ่งวัฒนธรรมกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ผ่านพิธีกรรมหลังความตายของชาวไทยทรงดำ

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Video art: Narratives of Thai Song Dam ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom Province

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were to: 1) study contexts and values of cloth patterns and cultural objects relating to rituals of Thai Song Dam ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom; 2) study and analyze cultural data, and apply the results to video art creation that supported imagination and value realization of Thai Song Dam; and 3) create a video art inspired by culture of Thai Song Dam in Nakhon Pathom. Qualitative research methods were employed to collect fieldwork data at Ban Phai Hu Chang, Ban Phai Hu Chang Sub-district, Bang Len District, Nakhon Pathom Province, in order to understand way of life and cultural context of the community both past and present. The findings showed that Thai Song Dam ethnic strongly believed in *Phya Thaen* and ancestors' spirits worship. They believed in life after death, therefore they conducted rituals after death by using cloth pattern and cultural objects to send the dead spirits to *Mueang Thaen*. Interpretativism theory was applied to understand thinking system that expressed in the form of cultural symbols and rituals. Moreover, semiology was used to find signs in cultural objects and rituals after death, i.e. cloth flags, birds, wooden model house, etc. These objects were built based on the profound belief in sending the spirits to *Mueang Thaen*. Imagination theory was employed to develop a creative work. The 10-minute video art composed of 3 parts: fear, hope, and happiness. It presented the dead's worry about failure to return to *Mueang Thaen* and overlap state of past, present, and future. The design was in fantasy state of spirits which enhanced the audience's imagination, so that they realized culture preservation of the ethnic group through rituals after death of Thai Song Dam.

Keywords: cloth pattern, culture object, ethnic group, Thai Song Dam, video art

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1. Introduction

Thai Song Dam is the name of an ethnic group settling down in Thailand called “Thai Dam” or “Tai Dam”. They are also known as Thai Soong, Lao Soong, Thai Song, Lao Song, Loa Song Dam, Lao Suang Dam, Phoo Thai Dam, Phoo Tai Song Dam, and Thai Dam. It is assumed that the name “Thai Dam” or “Tai Dam” derived from the name of their origin group who lived in the State of Sip Song Chau Tai or Dien Bien Phu City in Vietnam. Although the names are different, researchers and anthropologists define the same group of people who dress in black cloth and have their own language, belief, ritual, and culture. Thai Song Dam have migrated and settled down in Thailand for more than 200 years due to political reasons during Thonburi Era (1997 A.D.) and King Rama III of Rattanakosin Kingdom. Every migration, the kings of Thailand kindly gave them royal permission to live in Phetchaburi Province. [1]

The reason for allowing Thai Song Dam to settle in Phetchaburi was there are lot of trees and mountains in the province, as well as creeks and streams. Phetchaburi is located in high ground similar to *Meuang Thaeng* or *Mueang Thaen* in State of Sip Song Chau Tai. [2] Even though Thai Song Dam emigrate to Phetchaburi in Thailand, they have strong commitment to their homeland, and express their reminiscence of their origin through ritual context [3] and the story telling from generation to generation that they are non-Thai who emigrated to Thai because of necessity. There are several researches about the effort of Thai Song Dam to return home; for example, by fleeing from feudal bosses. Moreover, it was found dispersal of Thai Song Dam ethnic in many provinces of Thailand which can be explained as the failure

to return to Mueang Thaen. They lost their way home, so settled down in the areas around Thailand. [4]

Nakhon Pathom is an area where descendants of Thai Song Dam or Thai Song moved from Phetchaburi and settled down in 31 villages of Mueang District, Kamphaeng Sean District, Don Tum District, Sampran District, and Bang Len District. Ban Phai Hu Chang is a community located in Ban Phai Hu Chang Sub-district, Bang Len District, Nakhon Pathom Province. There are 8 villages in the Sub-district; Ban Phai Hu Chang covering area of Village 4 and Village 5 The geographical feature of the area is flat plain with prosperous soil with natural canals, suitable for agriculture. Therefore, most of the population plant rice and do animal farming. [5] Most of the residents are Thai Song Dam ethnic who profoundly maintains their traditions and cultures, especially the belief in *Phya Thaen*, ancestors’ spirits, and rituals after death. They have unique practices which are community identity and play important roles to the society, as mentioned in the interview of Piyawan Sukkasem [6], a teacher in Wat Phai Hu Chang School and a Thai Song Dam ethnic:

“Thai Song Dam people live in areas Ban Phai Hu Chang. Most of community members adhere to the belief of *Mueang Thaen*, the return to *Mueang Thaen* after death, and ancestor’s spirit worship. Every Thai Dam house has “*Ka lor hong*” (as in Figure 1), spirit shelf or spirit room, as an abode of the ancestors’ spirits. The youth generations has been taught to do “*pad tong*” ritual, to worship ancestors’ spirits on death anniversary. “*Sen ruen*” (a ritual for making offerings to the spirits),

“*pup phee*” (the spirit name books) and social relation based on house spirits can be found in the community. Moreover. However the new generation does not pay more attention about this issue.”



Figure 1 “*Ka lor hong*”, an abode of the ancestors’ spirits in “*pad tong*” ritual, to worship the ancestors’ spirits in spirit room

Source: Nopparat Kumpa

The dominant culture of Thai Song Dam at Ban Phai Hu Chang is weaving. This important cultural object commits the identity of Thai Son Dam. The weaving sound of “*pha sin lai*” (striped skirt) is regularly heard from Thai Song Dam’s houses. There are only elderly women who weave for living, and a few families still weave. For example, Aunt Renu Thongdonmai, learned to weave from young age, is a maker of traditional dresses in the community. Figure 2 is shown weaving of the villagers.



Figure 2: Aunt Renu Thongdonmai (Left), Aunt Daeng Thongkonghan (Right)

Source: Nopparat Kumpa

Regarding the literature review, it was found relevant researches about Thai Song Dam at Ban Phai Hu Chang and neighboring area. As the study of Boonmee [7] about ritualistic belief in ghost of Thai Song, Ban Phai Hu Chang, Bang Len District, Nakhon Pathom Province, it claimed that Thai Song Dam people have belief in ancestors’ spirits and strictly follow the rituals that have been passed on through generations. They view the rituals as something beautiful, showing their royalty to their ancestors, bringing luck and prosperity to those performing the rituals. According to the study of Renu [8] about the belief in ancestors’ spirits of Thai Song in Ban Ko Raet, Bang Len District, Nakhon Pathom, it said that the belief in ancestors’ spirits obviously related to society and culture that was transmitted from the past, and it was sustainably support the strength of Thai Song society. Additionally, Pattama [9] studied about textual data management of Thai Song ethnic group in Ban Phai Hu Chang. The research emphasized on compilation of visual and audio data in Ban Phai Hu Chang. The results were textual data of Thai Song ethnic group and motion picture recorded in real location and setting, which were disseminated on website.



However, this work is mainly aimed to record real events for database information.

Regarding a survey of documentary programs during 1990 - 2015, there were 3 programs that presented content about Thai Song Dam : 1) Lok Salap See: Vietnam by Pacific Intercommunication Ltd., [10] 2) Spirit of Asia by Thai PBS, [11] and 3) ASEAN Connect by Public Relations Department in the series of “From Thaen to Chao Praya Basin”. [12] These documentaries showed way of life of Thai Song Dam ethnic which traced back to Thai Dam in *Mueang Thaen* or the Vicinity of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. These video documentaries present content, story, event, person or place in real condition; in order that the audience can gain both knowledge and entertainment. However, it lacks content of belief in life after death. It is an important abstract concept transmitted from the past that needs creative thinking to transfer imagination to visual image.

From the study of relevant researches and literatures about belief in *Phya Thaen*, ancestor’s spirit worship, and rituals of life after death, and documentary programs, the researcher realized ethnicity value of Thai Song Dam. Moreover, spending long time on fieldwork and making acquaintance with community members, the researcher was bound to villagers as their kinship and was impressed by community way of life. When feeling the change of community belief and culture and young generation’s neglect, it inspired to conduct this research. The modern media, video art creation, was chosen to carry on cultural value of Thai Song Dam to next generation. Rituals after death of Thai Song Dam, which included various spiritual cultural objects, were focused. Interpretativism theory and semiotic analysis

were used to analyze data and define video art content. Imagination theory and semiology were used as guidelines to produce contemporary video art, which reflects concept and belief of life after death and the need to return home of the dead spirits. Also the researcher expected the video should enhance imagination of the audience, realization of ethnicity value regarding individual perception, and ethnical culture preservation.

2. Objectives

2.1 To study contexts and values of cloth patterns and cultural objects, related to ceremonies of Thai Song Dam in Nakhon Pathom Province, which affected video art creation.

2.2 To study and analyze cultural data, and apply the results in video art creation that supported imagination and realization of ethnicity value of Thai Song Dam.

2.3 To create video art inspired by culture of Thai Song Dam in Nakhon Pathom Province.

3. Research Method

In this research and art creation, the researcher applied the following research process:

3.1 Study concepts, theories, articles, journals, researches, books, information media, interviews and fieldwork materials which were relevant to the research and art creation in term of content and format.

3.2 Do field trip survey, conducted from 2014 – 2016, in Ban Phai Hu Chang, Ban Phai Hu Chang Sub-district, Bang Len District, Nakhon Pathom Province and neighboring areas. Data were collected through interviews of community members, shamans, local scholars, artists,

cultural leaders, and relevant experts. The participatory behavior observation was also done with community members about relationship between cloth patterns and life after death.

3.3 Set research framework by collecting cultural data of Thai Song Dam, belief in *Phya Thaen*, and life after death. The relevant theories of video art creation were studied, i.e. imagination theory for designing visual, audio, and composition setting; semiology for interpreting symbols in cloth pattern and cultural objects; interpretativism theory for studying connection between cloth pattern and cultural objects with rituals. These theories were used as research framework and define a video plot. Works and concepts of Bill Viola, a video art artist, were studied as a guideline for video design and creation technique. Images and symbols related to death and spirit were used as a theme (as in Chart 1).

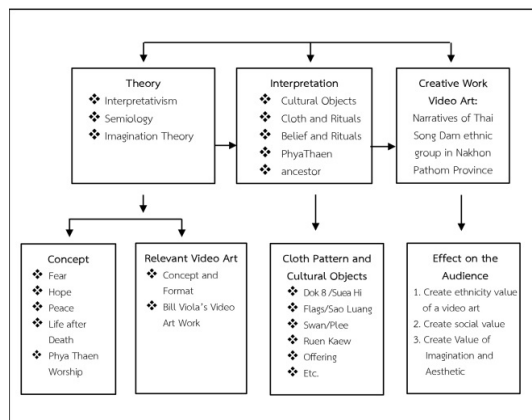


Chart 1 Research Frame Work

3.4 Analyze cultural data and a video art work based on imagination theory, semiology and interpretativism theory concepts to define video structure. The develop video art was different form anthropological videos in the past. The video structure composed of 3 parts:

fear represents spirit, hope represents death and happiness, and peace represents life after death. The results of the analysis were as follows:

3.4.1 Regarding the concept of creation, it based on belief in spirit worship, *Phya Thaen*, and life after death.

3.4.2 As for the format, it applied technique to capture real situations. Computer techniques were used to adjust visual and audio in consistent with the video concept.

3.4.3 Regarding the composition of video art, the visual was in black and white and the soundtrack was expressed sacred rituals.

3.4.4 As for the value of creative art, in ethnological aspect, it enhanced audience's imagination and aesthetics, different from documentary videos.

3.5 In developing the video art, imagination theory and semiology were used as guideline for creation by reflecting concepts and belief of Thai Song Dam.

3.5.1 Video structure design and visual elements.

The video was divided into 3 parts—fear, hope and happiness—with 8 components: 1) image of *Mueang Thaen*, 2) cultural objects in rituals after death, 3) change through dimensions to life after death, 4) Thai Song Dam way of weaving, 5) prepare offerings in *sen ruen* ceremony, 6) atmosphere of rituals after death, 7) image of ways to *Mueang Thaen*, and 8) video title and ending

The video was recorded at real location in real situation, no story board preparation. During fieldwork, the researcher could not predict when would a person die, or how the house or shooting location was. The visual images then were recorded as much as possible, because the chance to capture the moment



again was nearly impossible. Video cutting techniques were used to adjust the video art color to be black and white, so it was consistent to emotion and feeling of rituals after death. The moving speed was reduced to be slower than normal to create visual emotion related to the move through after death dimensions. The scenes were swop to represent the overlap condition of time in the past, present and future.

3.5.2 The audio and soundtrack design gave importance to each state of the story: fear, hope and happiness. Fear state meant the fear that after death, they could not return to *Mueang Thaen*. In this session, the soundtrack gave the feeling of discomfort, loneliness and searching. Hope state was about Thai Song Dam descendants strictly maintain and follow rituals after death for their ancestors. The video were captured from the real event, so it contained a lot of noise. The research avoided using real sound and used soundtracks to present emotion instead. In the last part, happiness state, it showed the delightfulness to return to heaven. The soundtrack was the music played by Vietnamese musical instrument. The poems were recited with flute sound in the background. Flutes were the musical instrument of Thai Dam in *Mueang Lo*. In the happiness time of Thai Song Dam in Thailand, *Khean* (Lao pan flute) music was used.

3.6 Regarding presentation, the developed video art was done 4 times and asked for opinions from community members in Phai Hu Chang and experts to improve the work. After that the video art was exhibited to public during 1-8 July 2016 at Chulalongkorn University Museum of Natural History. Thai Song Dam of Ban Phai Hu Chang jointly performed the dance in the opening ceremony of the exhibition.

Additionally, they gave additional opinions and recommendation to improve the work. There were 78 viewers. The audience was also interviewed to get more recommendations. The researcher revised the video art and concluded the results of the research.

4. Research Results

The research results can be concluded into 2 main parts as follows:

4.1 Belief and rituals of Thai Song Dam ethnic group. It can be conclude that belief in *Phya Thaen* and ancestor's spirit worship had been handed in from generations to generations. Thai Song Dam originated from *Mueang Thaen*, then after death the dead spirits have to return there. In order to follow the belief, the hand-woven cloth including swans and flags, are created as signs leading the dead to heaven, *Mueang Thaen*. Although Thai Song Dam ethnics are Buddhists, they have carried on their traditional practices and maintained the ethnic identity. The researcher, inspired by the field study, designed video plot and content by using authentic audio and visual. Specialized computer programs were used to create aesthetic feeling together with sacredness and spirituality.

4.2 Video art creation concepts. The researcher studied concepts and theories of video art creation, and differentiated from documentary videos. The semiology and interpretativism theory concept were applied as a thinking framework in video art creation. The video was created based on semiotic concepts of Thai Song Dam culture. The audience's perception comes from individual imagination and interpretation of audio and visual. The audience can understand the meaning the



researcher intends to transfer. According to the interview of the general audience and Thai Song Dam viewers, they can understand the message sending by the researcher. Therefore, it can be concluded that a video art based on imagination theory can be a cross-cultural media to create mutual perception of the audience inside and outside cultural groups.

5. Discussion

There were 4 discussions about the research and video art creation as follows:

5.1 The process of video art creation 'Narratives of Thai Song Dam ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom Province'. There were 3 processes in video art creation.

5.1.1 The process of this video art creation is different from other documentary videos. The researcher did not prepare a storyboard. The video recorded during the fieldwork with emphasis on natural feeling of the event. The shooting was done in the perspectives of an artist and an anthropologist. The observation and data collection was done without prior hypothesis, but tried to understand what happened. As a result, the researcher received data as a basic idea in creating art work about belief in *Phya Thaen*, and life after death, including relationship between cloth and cultural objects and rituals after death.

5.1.2 Regarding the video art structure, the main content are the understanding of cultural objects and the interpretativism theory in rituals after death. Based on imagination theory and semiology, the video art is divided into 3 parts to present fear, hope and happiness in consistent to belief of Thai Song Dam towards life after death.

5.1.3 The guidelines in video art creation come from the interpretation of belief in life after death. A valuable art work in the past was recreated, based on concepts and methods designed by the researcher, by using symbols or cultural object to relate the meaning of the return to *Mueang Thaen*.

5.2 The video art can enhance the audience's imagination about the dead's worry about failure to return to *Mueang Thaen* and overlap state of past, present, and future. The design is in fantasy state of spirits which enhances the audience's imagination through video art format.

5.3 The video art can enhance realization of ethnicity value of Thai Song Dam, and awareness of ethnical culture preservation. According to exhibition, the audience said that the video is good in content, and visual and audio composition. They are satisfied and impressed with the exhibition.

According to the experiment, it can be concluded that it is not necessary to use traditional music in a video art. To create a work of art, the researcher aims to enhance the viewers' imagination with the content by using cello music as an audio soundtrack. The sound of cello is in harmony and suitable with content and feeling of the video art. The sound of cello can express warmth, solitude, and neglect better than *Khaen*. To sum up, the music instrument from outside culture can be used to enhance and connect imagination more effectively. However, in documentary videos, the producers still have to use traditional images and sound of original music instruments to communicate realistic information, not imagination.



6. Suggestions for further study

After research conduct and video art creation, the researcher had suggestions for further study as follows:

6.1 The research based on Thai ethnic group or selected local art which contained value in the past to create new creative work, especially content about ethnic groups, could be created in other formats for benefits and effects of individuals and society.

6.2 Several techniques in creating artwork were used in this research, so that the creative work could be produced according to the research framework to develop thinking system and create new works in art field and for those who interested in applying knowledge in creative work.

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