

The Changing Identities of the Buddhist Votive Tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri in Northeast Thailand

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Abstract

The Buddhist votive tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri in northeast Thailand have received little attention. Despite being small components of the vast array of Buddhist artistic expressions, the tablets could provide insights on regionally prevalent Buddhist art trends. To achieve the purpose, this study examined the history of votive tablets, their changing identities in response to sociocultural circumstances, and their motives for creating creative works of art. The findings revealed that, historically, the tablets could be traced back to Gupta art in India. Culturally, although the tablets depict the Buddha's history, they developed their own distinct identities in response to indigenous craftsmanship in the new contexts: from religious purposes as reminders of Buddha to souvenirs, national treasures, and commercial purposes. Three prototypes (namely "protection," "miracle," and "Pang Samati under the Bodhi Tree") designed for interior and exterior decorations were developed. The prototypes were assessed, and the experts were satisfied with all three developed prototypes at the highest level. Commercially, this study revealed that the Krunadoon votive tablets can be turned into decorations and graphic works. Culturally, the findings can create awareness and foster a sustainable artistic conscience among local residents and those nearby. Academically, future studies should direct themselves toward product designs that respond to the needs of diverse consumers, as partly provided by this study.

Keywords: Buddhist Votive Tablets, Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri, Changing Identities,

Introduction

Thailand's art has long been influenced by Buddhism. Traditional Thai art mainly consists of Buddhist art in which Indian epic scenes are featured. The ancient Thai sculptures depict the Buddha almost exclusively. Thai traditional paintings often feature Thai sculptures and paintings decorating palaces and temples. The royal court was the patron, building temples and religious places to make merit or honor important events. Later, Thai Buddhist art was influenced by the indigenous culture to develop its own unique style. However, little attention has been paid to the art as it was created by indigenous civilizations. It is, therefore, unclear how Buddhist art developed in indigenous culture and how the art interacted with indigenous civilization.

To draw insights into the dynamic relationship between Buddhist art and indigenous culture, this study investigated the Buddhist votive tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri in the northeastern region, where Buddhism has long been strongly held by the local populace.

The tablets, which were originally developed in a unique style in response to indigenous culture, were lost, discovered, and rediscovered. The identities of the tablets have changed over time in response to socio-cultural contexts. It is, therefore, interesting to trace the changing identities of the tablets, which not only connect us to the history of Buddhism but also reflect their unique style of indigenous culture. The insight could serve as inspiration for future works of art. Three objectives of the study were determined, which were to: (1) explore the history of the Nadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablets; (2) investigate their interaction with socio-cultural contexts; and (3) produce art works inspired by the tablets.

The contents of this paper consist of five sections. The first section outlines the background of the study, the research gap, and the research objectives. The second one describes the literature review, the framework of the study, and the research questions. The third one focuses on the research method. The fourth section presents the results of the study. The last one summarizes the conclusion, discussions, limitations, and implications of the study.

Literature Review

Buddhist Art in Thailand

Thai art was closely related to Buddhism (Chirapravati, 2009) and Gupta art. Buddhist art could be found in various forms, such as stupas (Byrne, 1995), murals (Brereton & Yencheuy, 2010), ceramics (Evans, 2015), and architecture (Woodward, 2018). This religious art yields insights into Thai Buddhist art at local and regional levels.

Locally, Brereton and Yencheuy (2010) propose that mural painting in Thailand has a tendency to concentrate on pieces that were ordered by the monarchy or other affluent people from the seat of power. The lively sub-school of painting from the Northeastern Region's rural heartland, commonly known as Isan, is the subject of this study. But the study shows that the murals, which were painted by ordinary villagers and were inspired by Buddhist practices in the area, show scenes from local folktales.

Regionally, using the statistical skills of a geographic information system, Evans (2015) integrates the ecological, cultural, and sociopolitical landscapes of the ancient and historic Upper Mun River Valley. This study demonstrates the sheer wealth and variability of settlement in the Upper Mun River Valley. As a result of this study, significant transitional sites discovered during this study will be further investigated through scheduled excavations in the future. Also, it is hoped that the success of the methods used in this study will encourage future Southeast Asian projects to use systematic, in-depth surveying methods.

The local and regional contributions of Buddhism to Thai art have drawn attention from scholars partly because ancient Southeast Asia had complex societies (Miksic & Yian, 2016), but mainly because Buddhist Thai art has a long history, which can be traced back to the advent of Buddhism and the Gupta art in Thailand in the Dvāravatī era, which exported the Gupta Buddhist art all over the country, including northeastern Thailand.

Spread of Buddhist Art

Scholars (e.g., Skilling, 1997) investigated the introduction of Theravada Buddhism to mainland Southeast Asia and discovered that Buddhist pilgrims had an impact on Thailand. As indicated by Olsen (2021), religious travel has always played a significant role in the development and upkeep of both personal and communal religious identities as well as holy geographies. At local, regional, national, and international levels, religious travel has also long had an impact on

politics, economic growth, and communal cohesion. The act of pilgrimage can take place in both seemingly ordinary locations and the hearts of revered shrines (Coleman, 2022).

Investigations to understand the influences of Buddhist pilgrims have been attempted. Higgins and Hamilton (2020), for example, explored how material things can extend *communitas*, or a loosely organized society where everyone is on equal footing, beyond the pilgrimage site's physical boundaries. They employed the lens of palpable *communitas* to investigate the ways that material artifacts taken home and abandoned at the pilgrimage site exhibit spontaneous *communitas*. This demonstrated the mobility of *communitas* and how it could be experienced in normative form and decoupled from liminality. The finding of emphasis on religious materiality also provided a fresh appreciation of the significance of religious kitsch materiality outside of discourse.

Approaches to Buddhist Art Study

Major approaches to Buddhist art study include these approaches: historical, political, cultural, and integrated. Below are details about each approach.

Historical Approach

The studies of the spread of Buddhist art were based on a historical approach. Ray (2017), for instance, explored archaeology and Buddhism in South Asia, using a historical approach to recount the historical development of Buddhism in South Asia and its regional variations. The project moves away from traditional studies that show Buddhism as a rival to the Vedic tradition. Instead, it looks at religion in terms of *dharma* (Buddha's teachings), *dāna* (the practice of cultivating generosity), and engagement with the written word, with a focus on the multireligious context of the subcontinent in the first millennium BCE.

Using the historical ecology research paradigm, Murphy (2013, 2021) investigated the spread and growth of early Buddhism on the Khorat Plateau during the *Dvāravatī* period. Moated sites played a significant role in the spread of this religion in the area, which was mostly influenced by preexisting settlement patterns. Buddhism also brought grand structures and a recognizable art movement to the area. It should be noted that there have been some discrepancies in the findings over time. Earlier, in a trace of the Buddhist pilgrims in Southeast Asia, Woodward (1988) indicated that several positions (namely, "the victory over Mara" in a tiny bronze statue of the Buddha, the "earth-touching motion," and the demon Mara, who stands for death and the last traces of unclean thought and was vanquished by the Buddha at the time of his enlightenment) were found in several areas.

Political Approach

Swearer (1999) analyzed the relationship between Buddhism and politics in contemporary Thailand from the establishment of the great Thai city-states of Sukhēthai, Ayutthaya, Nakorn Si Thammarat, and Chiang Mai in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to the establishment of the modern nation-state. According to the research, Buddhism has always played a key role in Thai politics. The Buddhist *sangha* and the classical Thai kingdoms appear to have had a mutually beneficial relationship, despite the fact that the historical knowledge currently available from monastic chronicles and archaeological artifacts undoubtedly omits many aspects. The event was supported by royal patrons.

Cultural Approach

Modern studies of Buddhist art expand the scope of studies into culture, a phenomenon that transcends geographical borders. Understanding our neighbors' cultures and how we connect with them has become crucial in the context of today's Asianizing world. Several

scholars have adopted this direction. Ghosh (2017), for example, explored India–Thailand cultural interactions, focusing on shared cultural markers. Marwah (2020) examined reimagining India–Thailand relations from a multilateral and bilateral perspective. Sen (2014) geographically focuses on material culture, politics, the economy, languages, and literature, as well as religious institutions, practices, and rituals. The study uncovered the material, intellectual, and cultural interaction networks of Buddhism throughout Asia.

Integrated Approach

This integrated approach is effective for explaining significant aspects of Thai Buddhism since the turn of the century in broader contexts under state-supporting groups and anti-state movements. Several scholars have attempted this approach. For instance, Evans et al. (2016) assured the needs of the local cultural and physical environment as well as larger supraregional tendencies. Wolters and Wolters (1999) investigated the links between Southeast Asian history, culture, and region. Revire (2016) provided a careful reevaluation of the artifacts and inscriptions from these two nearby parts of mainland Southeast Asia (namely Dvāravatī and Zhenla) and highlighted the intricate and dynamic character of that period's religion as seen through the philosophy of merit. Further investigation and doubt are raised over the apparent religious affiliation of some artifacts and inscriptions connected to this philosophy. McDaniel (2006) gave an overview of how Thai Buddhists have dealt with and navigated modernity.

Artifacts for Study

Archaeological Artifacts

As indicated by Revire and Murphy (2014), although research on Dvāravatī has advanced greatly since its inception in the first half of the 20th century, little is still known about its history, political structure, or geographic scope. The majority of what we do know comes from archaeological artifacts, such as stupa or caitya (or chedi in Thai) foundations, stone and bronze sculptures, clay and stucco artifacts, and a fair number of inscriptions, most of which are religious in nature. Most studies in Buddhist art pay attention to Buddha images (namely, the teaching gesture (vitarkamudr) and a few variations of "turning the wheel of the law" (dharmacakramudr or dharmacakrapra-vartanamudr) with both hands) (Revire, 2015), iconographical issues in archeology (Pathom Revire, 2010), and visual culture (Revire, 2022).

Cultural Artifacts: Votive Tablets

Cultural artifacts like votive tablets, which are more closely related to the local people than archaeological artifacts as their creative products, can shed more light on the history, political structure, or geographic scope of Buddhist art, especially in northeast Thailand.

Several researchers have used votive tablets to learn more about the history of Buddhism in peninsular Thailand. These studies include the cult of votive tablets in Thailand (sixth to thirteenth centuries) prior to the Thai times under the Sukhothai dynasty (Chirapravati, 1994, 2018); Siamese votive tablets (Coedès, 1927); forms and functions of votive tablets in pre-modern Thailand (Davis, 2013); and a shared past through Buddhist votive tablets across Eastern India, Bangladesh and Peninsular Thailand (Ghosh, 2014); Buddhist sealings and the ye dharmā stanza (Skilling, 2008); the iconography, purpose, and ceremonial context of Buddhist sealings in Thailand and Southeast Asia (Skilling, 2008); the origin, styles, and uses of votive tablets in Thailand (Chirapravati, 1997); Buddhist votive tablets as cultural heritage (Wisudthiluck & Sangsnit, 2013); and reconsidering Dvāravatī votive tablet (Woodward, 2009); and more.

Prior studies revealed that there are geographical variations among the Buddhist clay tablets from Dvāravatī. Ghosh (2017) indicated the primary motivation behind the creation of these tablets was the act of manufacturing them itself as a form of merit-making, religious practice, or meditation. The study also examined how India may have impacted or modified the process of creating these tablets, as other plaques with identical designs dating from the seventh to the eleventh centuries were discovered on numerous Buddhist sites in India. Despite being a minor component of a vast array of artistic or religious expressions, the essay contends that moulded clay tablets should be taken into account when attempting to identify common cultural patterns throughout Asia. Similarly, Mu (2018) compares modern tablets from the Mon State, Riksetra, Vesali, and Bagan, as well as tablets from India, central and peninsular Thailand, and west Java. These tablets were categorized into three sections based on this methodical approach: 1) Buddha (either a seated or standing Buddha, surrounded by stupas), 2) Buddha triad; and 3) episodes of the Buddha. However, Iamkhorpong and Kosuta (2021) found no clear distinction between the amulets' religiosity as it transitioned from "purely" animist amulets to "purely" Buddhist Buddha images. Instead, Thai religiosity continues to flow unhindered across a shifting but connected spectrum, much like the visible light spectrum. Three categories—forms, functions, and empowerment—within Phra Khrueng and Khrueng Rang have been compared in a number of studies to highlight their link in terms of physical features and functions.

Research Gap

Buddhism was a major religious influence in Southeast Asia and Thailand. It is evident that the votive tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri in northeast Thailand were overlooked by academic scholars despite their geographical, cultural, historical, and artistic significance. Typically, the tablets contain images of Buddha. Some possess sacred impressions as well. Buddhist monks created them in order to accrue virtue for themselves. The tablets were supposed to provide their donor with good fortune and protection. The tablets now have high commercial value. In spite of being a little piece in the huge array of Buddhist artistic expressions, this study contends that votive tablets should be considered while attempting to draw insights into common Buddhist art patterns throughout northeast Thailand. To close the research gap, a systematic research study was required.

Framework of the Study and Research Questions

Framework of the Study

The framework of the study could be photographically illustrated as follows:

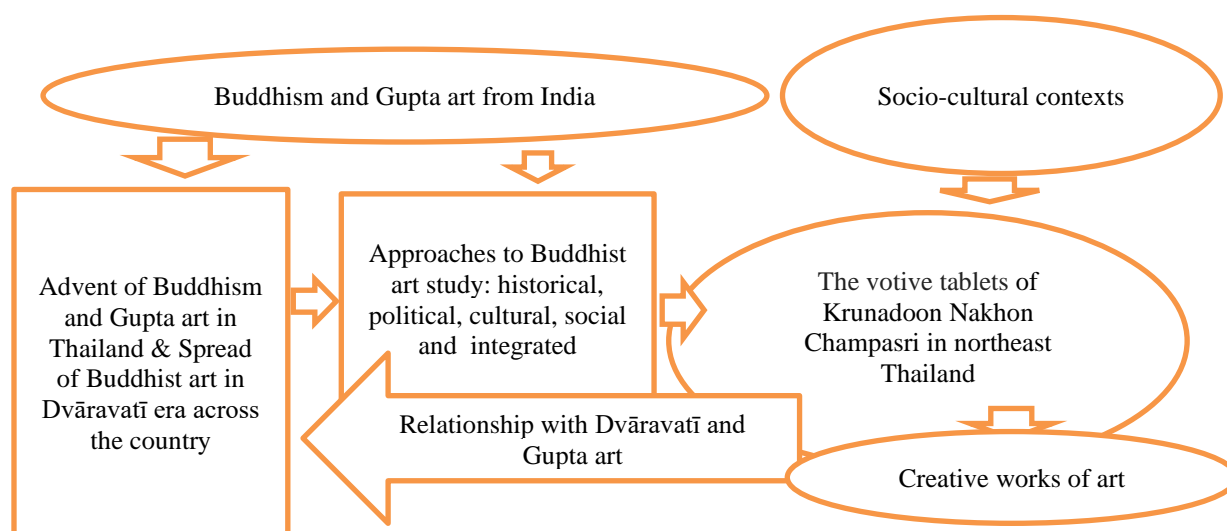


Figure 1 Framework of the study

Figure 1 illustrates the framework of the study. Buddhism spread from its homeland, India, to Thailand. The Buddhist pilgrims brought Gupta art with them to Dvāravatī area, which later spread Buddhist Gupta art across Thailand. The attempts to draw insights into the Buddhist arts employ historical, political, cultural, and integrated approaches. Drawing upon an integrated approach, this study investigated how the votive tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri in northeast Thailand were influenced by Dvāravatī and Gupta art and how they interacted with socio-cultural contexts. The results of the investigation were the sources of inspiration for creating works of art.

Research Questions

In response to the study's theoretical framework, three research questions (RQs) were determined.

RQ 1: What was the history of the Nadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablets?

RQ 2: What the relationship between the votive tablet and its socio-cultural contexts?

RQ 3: How did the results of the investigation inspire the development and production of the art works?

To answer the RQs, the research method was designed as shown in the next part.

Method of the Study

Research Design

The study employed a mix-method research design. The data were collected in 2020–2022, during the COVID-19 outbreak. Residents of Nadoon District, Mahasarakham Province, and surrounding areas made up the population. The samples were selected by accidental sampling. The total number of survey respondents was 72, with females accounting for 61.11% (n = 44) and males accounting for 38.88% (n = 28). These samples assessed the drafts of prototypes, and ten of them who were residents were interviewed for insights into the history of the Nadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablets. Ten experts were selected by purposive sampling. The experts included these figures: creative designers and manufacturers of pottery products; local art philosophers, and local cultural and educational experts. Following the completion of the prototypes, these experts evaluated the drafts of the art works.

Instruments for Data Elicitation

As this Buddhist art study was based on an integrated approach, it included historical, political, cultural, and social contexts. To serve the purpose of the study, the instruments for data elicitation included all these: the analysis of the tablets; a document analysis; a site survey; in-depth interviews; an experiment with materials and the development of prototypes; and an assessment of the drafts and the prototypes.

Analysis of the Nadoon Nakhon Champasri Votive Tablets

This analysis of the tablets focused on analyses of the contents, purposes, styles, forms, and functions of the tablets to draw insights into the influences of Buddhist art on them.

Document Analysis

The history of Buddhism and its arrival in the Dvāravatī kingdom; the styles, forms, and functions of Buddhist art and Gupta art in the Dvāravatī era; the spread of Buddhism and Buddhist art; and the relationship between the Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablets and Dvāravatī and Gupta art were all examined in this document analysis of relevant documents.

Site Survey

The survey of the site where the tablets were discovered and rediscovered focused on archeological, socio-cultural, and political contexts, activities, and interactions among the local people, residents, and those nearby. The history of the discoveries and restorations at the site is reviewed.

In-depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews involved the history of the Nadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablets, as well as the traditions, activities, and interactions among the local people that were practiced in the area where they were discovered and rediscovered. The interviews also focused on the development of beliefs and values associated with the tablets associated with Dvāravaṭī culture and art. Guided questions included: How was the Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablet first discovered and excavated in 1979? How did its status alter over time? What was the relationship between the votive tablet and its sociocultural contexts? How was the relationship between the votive tablet and contemporary art and culture?

Material Experimentation and the Creation of Drafts and Art Works

Drawing upon the aforementioned instruments, the data elicited were motivations for creating, drafting, designing, and developing prototypes. To achieve their goal, the researchers conducted a material and production experiment, combining handicraft methods such as modeling and collecting work details with industrial ceramic production processes such as mold making and prototype production processes.

Assessment of Drafts and Created Art Works

Two sets of questionnaires for the draft assessment and the prototype assessment were designed. The former was assessed by the local residents and those nearby, while the latter was done by the experts. The contents of the questionnaires were drawn from the data of the aforementioned instruments. Overall satisfaction with the work, the origin of the cultural society in the area, beauty and perfection in artistic elements, emotional impacts and awareness-raising of local arts, symbols in the work and understanding of the concept or content of the creation, an interesting concept that clearly reflects the content of the story, the work reflecting the character of the locality, and the work reflecting the faith of the community were all evaluated. The local residents assessed the drafts of the prototypes, while the experts assessed the developed prototypes, which included all items from the draft assessments. Two items (namely, the feasibility of use and the suitability of materials and production processes) were added to the prototype assessment by the experts.

Data Analysis

As this was a mixed-methods study, all data was triangulated, interpreted, analyzed, and compared, including qualitative data from the site survey, in-depth interviews, the experiment, and the assessment of drafts and art works. The questionnaire data was statistically examined. The results were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed to draw a conclusion from the study. The reliability and content validity checks followed these procedures. The questionnaire was reviewed by five scholars in this area and adjusted based on their input. The Alpha Cronbach test was used to verify questionnaire reliability. 0.860 represents good, reliable values. The levels of satisfaction in the questionnaire fell into 5 groups: the lowest (1.00–1.50), low (average 1.51-2.50), moderate (2.51-3.50), high (average 3.51-4.50), and highest (4.51–5.00).

Results of the Study

The History of the Nadoon Nakhon Champasri Votive Tablets

The findings revealed that the Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablets have a history dating back to the 13th Buddhist century, when Dvāravatī culture and Gupta Indian art influenced the tablets, which were created to symbolically represent Buddha images. Traditionally, the creation of the Buddha image as symbol of the Buddha went through representation process of identity creation that the society and culture purposefully selected and adjusted until it became a meaningful representation of the Buddha in respect, faith, or longing for Buddhahood. Indians had originally used other symbols to represent Buddha and Buddha's footprint for the place enlightenment, the Buddha, the Bodhi tree for the place of enlightenment, Dharmachakra for the place where his first sermon was delivered, and the stupa for the place of nirvana. Buddhists who pilgrimaged to the four sanctuaries wished for a reminder of the Buddha. Later, there was an idea to develop a small object, known today as a terracotta votive tablet as a souvenir to meet the needs of the pilgrims to worship and remember the Lord Buddha and a substitute for the four sub-district sanctuaries.

This Gupta-era Indian art culture advanced trade relations and religious propagation with Dvāravatī, Thailand's first ancient state. Buddha images from the Dvāravatī period can be divided into three categories. The first group adopted characteristics of the Gupta period and after. Buddha's image was considered the first model that was close to India during the 12th and 13th Buddhist centuries. The second group was influenced by Amaravati art dating back to the 12th century. Indigenous influences were more varied in this group, demonstrating the craftsmanship of the Dvāravatī craftspeople. This growth of local identity served to express the identity of the artisan group, and at the time, the Dvāravatī society embraced that identity. Lastly, the third group is a mixture of Indian and Amarava art, which was influenced by Khmer art, indicating the end of the Dvāravatī culture.

The votive tablet of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri was influenced by the Dvāravatī culture relating to the Indian arts of the Gupta period (the Mathura craftsmanship) and after the Gupta (the Chang Saranath craftsmanship). As indicated by the analysis of the tablets, the Buddha has a calm face because the artisans designed and built the eyes looking down. The edge of the Buddha's eyes is curved to make it look calm, according to the style of the Gupta period. It is not as aggressive as in the Amaravati era, when the Buddha image looked straight. The standing posture of the Buddha image's standing inclination, known as Triphang, reflects the aesthetics of the Gupta art that influenced Dvāravatī and Champasri.

Each local culture has its own identity. When Buddhist tablets were introduced into the contexts of Nadoon Nakhon Champasri, they developed into new identities that manifested as their own distinct identities that were consistent with the concepts of local cultural identity of the new contexts, as illustrated in the results of RQ 2.

The Relationship between the Votive Tablets and Their Socio-Cultural contexts

The Discovery of the Votive Tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri

Since the end of the Dvāravatī culture, the votive tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri disappeared. It reappeared when the Krunadoon pagoda was discovered in 1979. Since then, the Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablets have been regarded as ancient artifacts, not for religious purposes, i.e., the transmission of Buddhist heritage as in the Dvāravatī period and its origin in Indian art culture of the Gupta period and later. This new identity has changed in response to socially and culturally changing contexts.

In 1979, Mr. Thongdee discovered the Krunadoon votive tablets by chance while attempting to catch field rats that had fallen through holes, so he dove into the holes and discovered clay votive tablets named after the Nadoon District. The tablets were considered unlucky by the locals during the excavation, so they were kept away from home." The local villagers did not bring the tablets home because they believed they would bring bad luck to their families." [Interviewees 1 and 3] "People believed that the tablets belonged to ancient people and should not be brought into their homes. Therefore, they were kept in sacks and placed outside the building where they live, such as in a chicken coop or under the rice mess. [Interviewees 4 and 6]

Later, the tablets became a souvenir for guests visiting the community without any monetary value. Then, it had monetary value when the visitors gave a small amount of compensation for the souvenir. It developed into leasing in 1979 after the rediscovery. People are waiting to rent at the excavation site. The price was approximately 50–80 baht (or 2–3 dollars). "In the past, no one was interested in buying the tablet, and there was only one shop in Maha Sarakham Province. Villagers from the area put the votive tablets in a big basket and sold it all to the shop for 500 baht (13–15 dollars). [Interviewees 7 and 9] Residents and non-residents still have relationships through various activities or operations, such as the tradition of worshiping Phra That Na Dun every year.

The Cultural Identity of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri Votive Tablets

The analysis of the cultural identity of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri votive tablets Grunadun discovered that the terracotta votive tablets of Champasri in the 13th and 14th Buddhist centuries were linked to the form, motto, and belief in the creation of Dvāravatī art and the Indian culture of the Gupta and post-Gupta art periods, as well as some of the Amaravati art period.

The Contents of the Krunadoon Tablets

The contents of Krunadoon votive tablets depict the main story of the Buddha's history, such as the story of the first sermon, the story when the Lord Buddha performed a miracle, and an explanation of the content of the story (namely, the sun and the moon at the top of both corners referring to the passage of time, which is associated with beliefs in Brahmin-Hinduism, the tree representing Sri Maha Bodhi referring to enlightenment, and the throne symbolizing power). Other Indian heritages include the lotus flower or lotus base, symbolizing breaking through desires, and Buddha's Enlightenment, representing purity, peace, enlightenment, rebirth, and fertility. However, the style of the stripped robe of the Krunadoon Buddha image opens and flows to the right while the robe of the Gupta and post-Gupta Buddha is often built as a cloak, and, on the back of the Krunadoon votive tablets, there are post-Pallava letters, ancient Mon language letters, and Yethamme spells, which reflect the conceptual relationship and belief in the ancient Buddha's teachings about the decline of Buddhism.

The purpose of the Krunadoon tablets

The purpose of the Krunadoon tablets was to document the succession of Buddhism under the belief in the creation of 84,000 Dhammakhan scriptures in the Tripitaka, which reflect the relationship and influence of Dvāravatī. which appeared in caves in Ratchaburi and Saraburi, and also reflect the relationship dating back to Buddha, who was carved in the Ajanta Cave of the Gupta art in India with carvings of small Buddha images on the walls of the cave. The symbolic pattern on the Krunadoon votive tablets consists of these main symbols: the sun and the moon, which signify time, which is influenced by the Brahmin-Hindu religion; the incense and the pagoda, which signify the extinguishing place; the Buddha's death and the

Dharma Chakra, which signify the propagation of the Buddhist place of first sermon, and flowers of heaven, which symbolize respect and worship. The soil texture of the Krunadoon votive tablets can be divided into 2 groups: (1) blackened, dense, hard soil, and (2) orange-colored, light, and water-absorbing soil.

The style of the Krunadoon tablets

The analysis of the composition revealed that the Krunadoon votive tablets consist of these postures (namely, Pang Yomaka Miracle, Pang Nang Muang or Paralamphatana, and Phra Pang Prok Pho), as shown in Figure 2.

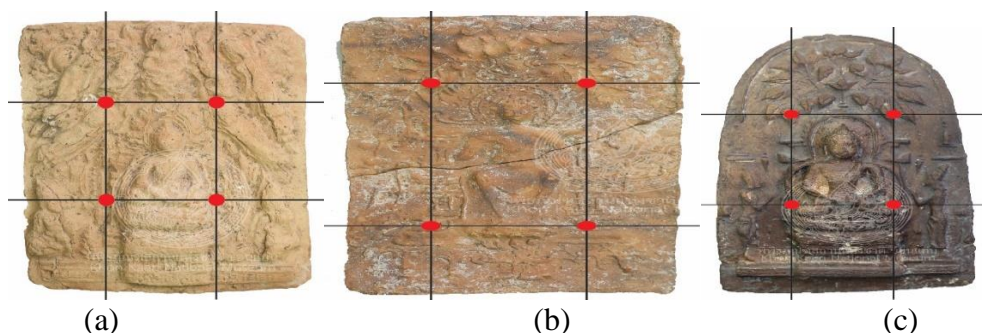


Figure 2 Three postures of the Krunadoon votive tablets at the Fine Arts Office, District 7, Khon Kaen National Museum

Figure 2 illustrates (a) Pang Yomaka Miracle, (b) Pang Nang Muang, and (c) Phra Pang

Prok Pho is displayed at the Fine Arts Office, District 7, Khon Kaen National Museum. All depict the history of the Buddha, especially the first sermon, which was made into a Buddha image. The average composition of all tablets occupies an area of 2/3 vertically, with the main image as a large body, with a focus on the center of the image and emphasis on a large image in the middle to characterize the symmetrical balance composition. Pang Yomaka Miracle is arranged in 3 horizontal divisions (namely, the upper part depicting the story of heaven, the middle section depicting the main content of the tablet, and the lower part depicting a secular story). These key Buddha-related episodes affect Buddhists' perceptions. It is noted that these episodes express the uniqueness of the Buddha, so it may be the creators' expectation that these important episodes will influence the next generation to turn back to Buddhism when their religion has deteriorated as predicted in Pang Nang Muang or Panchamanthanadhana.

Artworks were created using all of the data presented above, as shown in the section.

Development and production of the art works

Developing prototypes

The prototypes were sketched and developed to illustrate ideas and essential details (e.g., content, composition, meaning, and symbols on the work pieces) as shown in Figure 3.

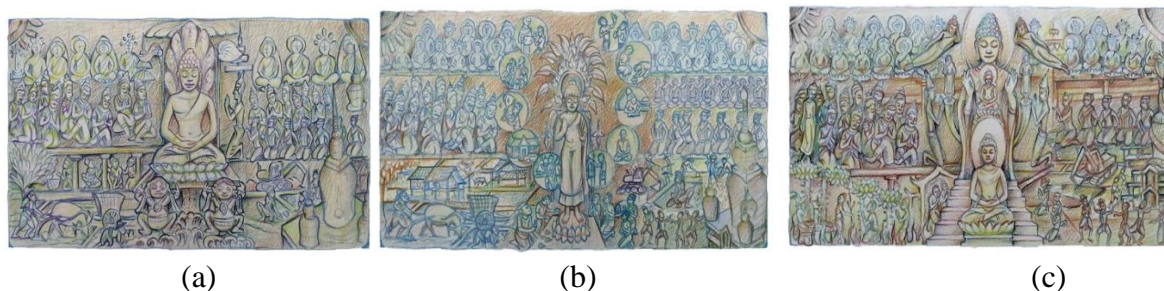


Figure 3 *Drafts of the developed prototypes*

Figure 3 illustrates prototypes that were developed. All prototypes were designed for interior and exterior decorations. First, prototype (a), entitled "protection," borrowed the concept of protection from the history of the Buddha when the Naga Phraya Nakmujalin transformed his body into a coil and spread a wand to protect the Buddha while enjoying liberation after enlightenment from the weather conditions in his residence. Other contents include ancient community ways of life, faces, and costumes representing the Dvāravatī cultural society. Faces and dress partly represent Dvāravatī culture and partly symbolize the murals in the area. The new Buddha pagoda built in the area was also depicted in order to communicate with the current society and culture. Second, prototype (b), entitled "blessings," was influenced by the concept of "giving and blessings." The standing Lord Buddha's hand gestures represent Vitrakamudra dharma and the 38 auspicious spells surrounding him. The sun on the left of the picture and the moon on the right of the picture symbolize the passage of time and seasons. The composition follows the art of Dvāravatī's symmetry balance. Lastly, prototype (c), entitled "miracle," embraced the Krunadun terracotta votive tablets of "Pang Samati under the Bodhi Tree," commonly known among collectors as "Pim Pok Pho Yai," which depict a Buddha image sitting cross-legged on the throne under the Bodhi tree with an angel standing with his hands folded in respect, facing the main Buddha image. The composition follows the art of Dvāravatī's symmetry balance.

The drafts of the prototypes were then assessed by the residents and non-residents. The results are shown in the next part.

Assessment of the prototypes

The results of the assessment are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *The results of the assessment of the developed prototypes*

| | Mean scores of assessment | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Prototype 1 | Prototype 2 | Prototype 3 |
| 1. Overall satisfaction of the work | 4.25 | 4.38 | 4.31 |
| 2. The work reflects the origin of the cultural society in the area. | 4.44 | 4.31 | 4.25 |
| 3. The work has beauty and perfection in artistic elements. | 4.27 | 4.33 | 4.13 |
| 4. The works create an emotional impact and raise awareness of local arts. | 4.13 | 4.27 | 4.13 |
| 5. Symbols in the work lead to an understanding of the concept or content of the creation. | 4.20 | 4.13 | 4.19 |
| 6. The concept is interesting and clearly reflects the content of the story. | 4.00 | 4.27 | 4.29 |
| 7. The work reflects the character of the locality that is related. | 4.07 | 4.07 | 4.20 |
| 8. The work reflects the faith of the community and reminds of Champasri history and local art. | 4.13 | 4.13 | 4.13 |
| Total | 4.18 | 4.18 | 4.20 |

Table 1 shows the mean scores of the assessments of the five developed prototypes. The results of the assessments are arranged from the most to the least as follows: prototype 3 (

$\bar{X} = 4.20$), prototypes 1 and 2 ($\bar{X} = 4.18$), respectively. This indicates that the respondents were highly satisfied with all five developed prototypes.

Then, the prototypes were developed into art works, and the process of development and production could be shown below.

Production of prototypes

These steps were followed during the prototype production process.

Molding and etching the prototypes

The prototypes were molded and etched as shown in Figure 4.

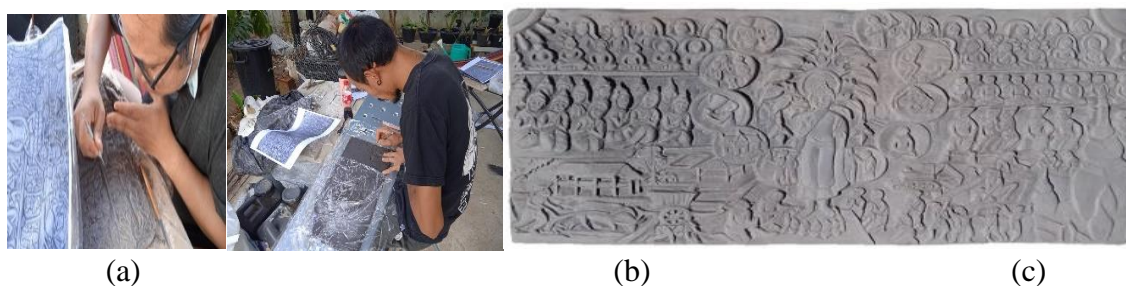


Figure 4 *Molding and etching clay prototypes*

Figure 4 depicts the etching and molding of the clay prototypes. The researcher selected stoneware clay for this creation because its fine soil quality can be carved into a piece of detail as shown in (a) and (b). The works are low relief sculptures, with a size of 25 x 60 centimeters, about 1.5-2 centimeters thick.

Making of plaster prototypes

The plaster prototypes were made as shown in Figure 5.

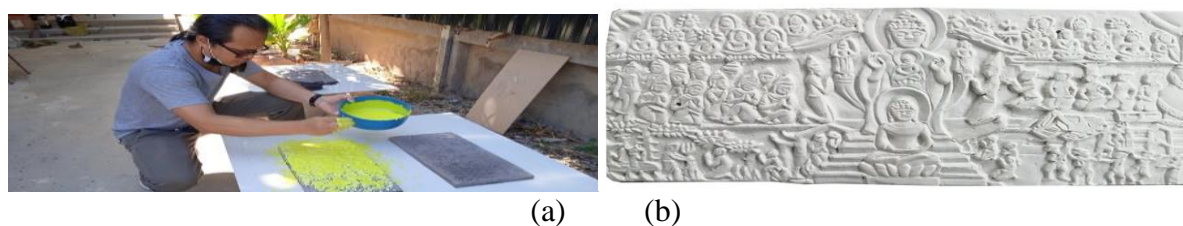


Figure 5 *Making of plaster prototypes*

Figure 5 depicts the creation of the clay prototypes. The reason for using a stamping mold to make prototypes was that casting molds for use required strong prototypes that could be smashed with force while unpacking or removing from the print, as shown in (a) and the finished plaster prototypes (b-d).

Creating a plaster mold

The plaster molds were made as shown in Figure 6.

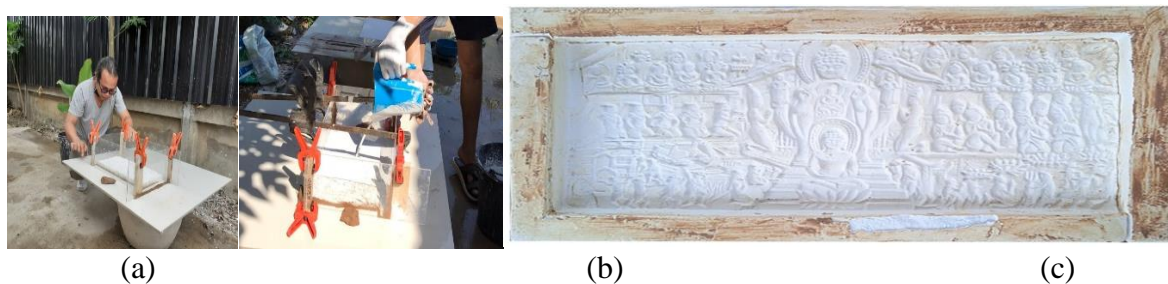


Figure 6 *The plaster molds created*

Figure 6 illustrates the making of the plaster. The molds (a and b) and a sample finished plaster mold (c) were shown.

The plaster molds were then developed into clay production prototype molds as shown in Step 4.

Compression production

The process of compacting the clay onto the molds is shown in Figure 7.

As shown in Step 4, the plaster molds were then used to make clay prototype molds.

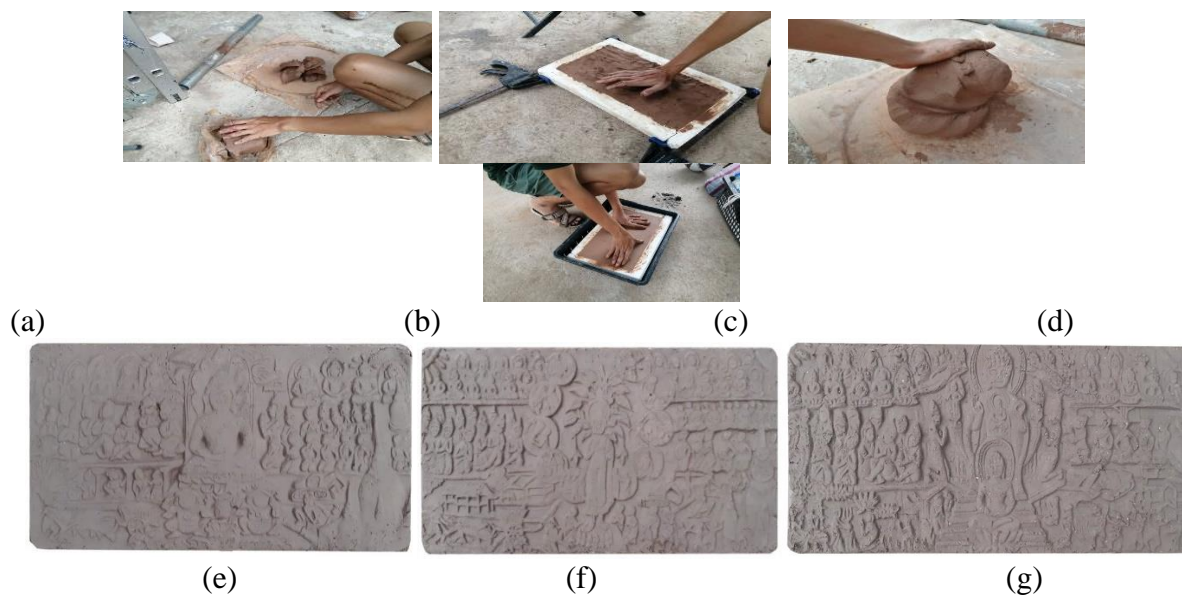


Figure 7 *Compression production*

Figure 7 illustrates compression production. The pieces were obtained by pressing the clay into the mold, as shown in (a)–(d). This is one of the methods of producing pottery products with no complicated steps. The finished products are shown in (e)–(g).

Then the prototypes were brought into the burning process as shown in Step 5.

Prototype product burning

The process of burning prototype products is shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8 *Burning of prototype products*

Figure 8 illustrates the burning of prototype products. The kiln (a) was used for an oxidation firing process in which the soil reacted with carbon and soot and gave it an orange color (b).

The prototype products after oxidation firing process are shown in Figure 9.

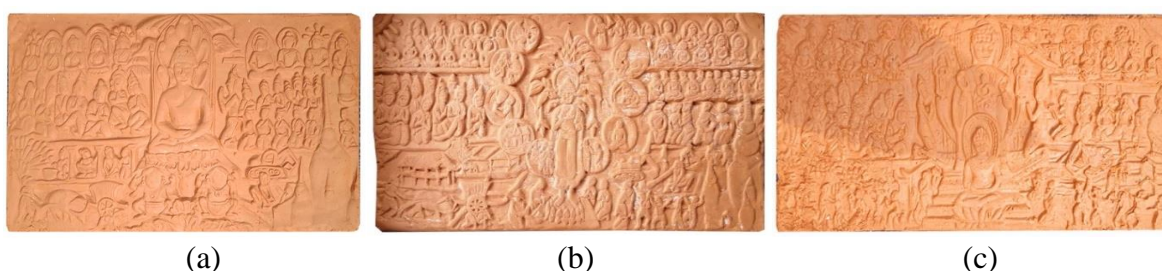


Figure 9 *Prototype products*

Figure 9 depicts the prototype products following the oxidation firing process. Three prototypes are shown in (a)–(c), consisting of (a) "protection," (b) "blessings," and (c) "miracle."

The developed prototypes were then assessed as shown in the next section.

Assessment of the prototypes

The results of the assessment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 *Expert assessment of the developed prototypes*

| Item of Assessment | Mean scores of assessment | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Prototype 1 | Prototype 2 | Prototype 3 |
| 1. Overall satisfaction of the work | 5.00 | 4.33 | 5.00 |
| 2. The work reflects the origin of the cultural society in the area. | 4.67 | 4.33 | 5.00 |
| 3. The work has beauty and perfection in artistic elements. | 4.67 | 4.33 | 5.00 |
| 4. The works create an emotional impact and raise awareness of local arts. | 4.67 | 4.67 | 4.67 |
| 5. Symbols in the work lead to an understanding of the concept or content of the creation. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 4.67 |
| 6. The concept is interesting. and clearly reflect the content of the story | 5.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 |
| 7. The work shows the local character that has a clear relationship with the past. | 4.67 | 4.67 | 4.67 |
| 8. The work reflects the faith of the community and reminds of Champasri history and local art. | 4.33 | 5.00 | 5.00 |
| 9. The possibility of use | 4.67 | 4.67 | 5.00 |
| 10. Materials and production processes are suitable. | 4.67 | 4.67 | 4.67 |
| Total | 4.73 | 4.70 | 4.87 |

Table 2 shows the mean scores of the experts' assessments of the three developed prototypes. The results of the assessments are arranged from the most to the least as follows: prototype 3 ($\bar{X} = 4.87$), prototype 1 ($\bar{X} = 4.73$), and prototype 2 ($\bar{X} = 4.70$) respectively. This

means that the experts were satisfied with all three of the developed prototypes at the highest level.

Conclusion and discussion

This final section summarizes the conclusion of the research results, discussions, limitations, and implications of the study.

Conclusion

Three conclusions could be drawn in response to the RQs. First, historically, the artistic influences on the votive tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri could be traced back to the Gupta period and later, in combination with the Dvāravatī period in terms of beliefs, patterns, religious relationships, and purposes and a mixture of Indian and Amarava art, which was influenced by Khmer art.

Second, when the Buddhist tablets were brought to Nadoon Nakhon Champasri, they took on new identities that were in line with the ideas of local cultural identity and indigenous craftsmanship. They went from being used as religious reminders of Buddha to being used as souvenirs, national treasures, and for commercial purposes. The Buddha's life, especially the most important events, were depicted on the Krunadoon votive tablets.

Lastly, drawing upon historical, social, and cultural data, three prototypes of art works designed for interior and exterior decorations were developed. The first prototype was named "protection," taking from the Buddha's history when the Naga Phraya Nakmujalin changed his body into a coil and spread a wand to protect him from the weather in his abode after enlightenment. The second one is labeled "blessings" and depicts Lord Buddha's hand motions representing Vitrakamudra dharma with 38 auspicious spells encircling him. The last one, titled "miracle," embraces the Krunadun terracotta votive tablets of "Pang Samati under the Bodhi Tree," commonly known as "Pim Pok Pho Yai," which depict a Buddha image sitting cross-legged on the throne under the Bodhi tree with an angel standing with his hands folded, facing the main Buddha image. The assessment of the+ prototypes revealed that the experts were satisfied with all three developed prototypes at the highest level.

Discussion

This study's findings support previous research that Thai art is closely related to Gupta Buddhist art (Chirapravati, 2009; Miksic & Yian, 2016; Skilling, 1997). The tablets in this study could be traced back to the advent of Gupta Buddhist art in Thailand in Dvāravatī era through the act of pilgrimage (Olsen, 2021; Coleman, 2022; Higgins & Hamilton, 2020).

Several approaches, similar to the previous study, were effective for studying Buddhist art. Several scholars (Ray, 2017; Woodward, 1988) have researched the historical dissemination of Buddhist art. Like the study of Murphy (2013, 2021) which used historical ecology to study early Buddhism in the Khorat Plateau during the Dvāravatī period, this present study employed a historical approach to investigate the Buddhist votive tablets of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri in the same region. However, this study adopted a cultural approach with a focus on socio-cultural ecology or the contexts of Krunadoon Nakhon Champasri. The findings of this study were consistent with the findings of Ghosh (2017) that cultural interactions formed shared cultural markers and the findings of Sen (2014) that religious institutions, practices, and rituals play a crucial role in local material culture. Also, like the integrated approach in several studies (e.g., Revire, 2016; Wolters & Wolters, 1999; Evans et

al., 2016), the approach was helpful for the local cultural and physical environment. This study looked at the tablets in relation to their social and cultural settings using an integrated method.

This study's findings supported previous research (Chirapravati, 1994, 2018; Cdès, 1927; Ghosh, 2014) that votive tablets were evidence of the evolution of Buddhist traditions in peninsular Thailand as cultural heritage (Wisudthiluck & Sangsnit, 2013) of Dvrat votive tablets (Woodward, 2009). In addition, this study lends support to the findings that Buddhist clay tablets from Dvāravatī vary geographically. Like Ghosh (2017) who found that crafting the tablets was a type of merit-making, religious practice, or meditation, this study found that the Krunadon Nakhon Champasri tablets were created for religious purposes to remind people of Buddha, so the tablets depict Buddha's story and Buddha image. However, unlike Ghosh (2017), the tablets in this study had their own unique styles as local identities were integrated into the creations of the tablets, which corresponded to their contemporary socio-cultural contexts and indigenous craftsmanship. These tablets also had new identities in the new temporal contexts, developing from religious purposes as reminders of Buddha to souvenirs, national treasures, and commercial purposes, respectively.

Limitation of the study

This study had planned to include the local people's participation in the design of the products so that the people could develop the products for commercial purposes on their own in the future, but the participation was cancelled due to COVID 19.

Implications of the study

This study has numerous implications. Commercially, this study revealed that the Krunadon votive tablets can be turned into decorations, which implied a variety of details that can be used to create graphic works to be sold through the micro-stock system, such as souvenirs, vector style work, and digital art. Socially and culturally, the research findings can be used for further development in the creation of knowledge sets related to the learning of local culture and history in order to create awareness and foster a sustainable good conscience among local residents and those nearby. Academically, future research should focus on product design with the incorporation of cultural capital to meet the needs of diverse consumers, as suggested by the study.

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