

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Every day the passerby, travelers on the streets and those who ride their vehicles around and near the monumental spaces, spontaneously look at the monuments with many recalls on their mind, some with curiosity and some with realizing its past history and reason behind standing there for generations, and bow their head and join hands in a gesture of *wai*. The gallant sculptures made of bronze erected on different pose and gestures make the people to see them with wonder and awe or mesmerize them with respect and gratefulness towards them. Because monuments are memories of past that has been artistically reconstructed and often invented for the sake of the present and the future. Even though the monuments were created on a narrow circle of elites, politicians, and the artists involved, later it represent the nation, property of the people which sanctify the monuments as cult object.

Bronze culture is very much in practice from the pre historic periods to the present. The malleable as well as long lasting strong material like bronze is used and manipulated from the prehistoric period in different form of art works to the decorative and utility objects. Archaeological excavations had revealed many evidences of bronze culture between the historical gaps of Ban Chiang cultures to the early known culture of Thailand. Diffusion of bronze culture results to wide variety of bronze objects to be obtained from the sites of South East Asia and from mainland Asia. It is evident that the technology too was diffused to this area from one place to another. From the beginning of the first century AD new flow of trade and migrations were taking place in this part of Southeast Asia. To what extent the technique was incorporated in Thai traditional casting technique can be seen from the similarity of using the casting materials like cow dung and clay of ant hills.

Until the period of Ayutthaya the techniques of casting was very much in developed stage and the sculptors were the technical masters. The method of bronze casting until this period obtained was the traditional lost wax or casting method which was prevalent from the centuries before. The modern sculptors considers the bronze sculptures of these period have the aesthetic and artistic value which can be seen by depth and texture on them.

On the process of modernization of Thailand bronze statues were the tangible object to express its intangible aspects hidden behind. Under the direct initiative and patronage of the Chakri monarchs like King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh the bronze sculptures and the sculptors of the same were having very important position in the elite circle and of course among the people in general. Before the introduction of modern casting method, until at the period of King Mongkut bronze casting was done in traditional way. With the modernization of Thailand, the elites started to import modern European arts and artists to Thailand which started to introduce new concept in art and technology. The reason to choose European artists was the exposure to the western world at the period when they were having profound change in habit and thought.

Particularly modern art and new technology of bronze casting was introduced by the Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci or known as Silpa Bhirasri with his Thai name and well for his title as "The father of Modern Art" in Thailand. With his entry in the Fine Arts Department in 1924 to his death in 1962, he worked for the department and Silpakorn University during different military government in the constitutional era. Silpa Bhirasri and his team of artists gained their reputation in all kind of government and mastered numerous monumental sculptures. Main focus of his art journey in Thailand was unique national art style, the trend of contemporary art, and the understanding of international art. Silpa Bhirasri's realistic art style was able to draw attention of all the regimes and was very famous in its own way that the Fine Arts department still holds that

legacy at present. He inspired his students to look for new ways of both classical arts and European art.

The foundry of the Fine Arts Department still follow the footsteps Silpa Bhirasri had laid and specialize in the contemporary bronze casting technique which was taught by him. The foundry of The Fine Arts Department in Salaya specializes mainly on contemporary bronze casting technique. The sculptures made in this foundry are monumental and religious. Monumental sculptures are made of the big Thai monarchs and hero personnel as well as elite persons. Item of art mainly sculptures was made for religious purposes or for the royal and national purposes which required highly innovative process requiring great skill, experience and patience.

The traditional bronze casting technology is more or less similar to the ancient technology, only the casting materials varies according to the geographic region, traditional bronze casting technology is a slow and time consuming process. The foundry rarely uses the traditional method to cast bronze. The new generation of casters are very less concerned for the use of traditional casting method which I realized when the traditional casting case study was undergoing that some of the new generations stood away from cow dung and felt disgusted with smell. I suppose they will never dare to touch such things in future too. The essences and importance of these materials only matters to the older generations. They talk very highly of the traditional material and show their passion on the process which they have very little chance to perform these days.

There is similarity between the moldings processes of replacing wax from other places of South East Asia. The local indigenous knowledge for selecting natural material in locality by applying animal dung, soil, termite hill, and paddy husk in mould producing process in the north eastern region still conserves the ancient producing process. Similar process is found from south India and Nepal at present. This testifies the

technique spread from one place to other. Since these kinds of materials had replaced with modern materials which is easily available in market, attraction towards the traditional materials is very less. Although some of the process like the process of making model and technique certainly differs from one place to another which is demonstrated by the modeling method of Nepal. The difference itself is a unique character in its own ways.

The finding of the study differentiated some of the issues like raw materials, time factor, quality, technique and cost comparing with contemporary and traditional bronze casting method. The materials are easy available now a day which makes easy to perform contemporary casting than the traditional. The wonderful material like the Gypsum plaster is used entirely through the whole process of mould making. The Gypsum plaster is very useful because of its fast drying capability and strong enough to hold the mould. Another wonderful material is the silicone rubber which makes easy to take out detail of the sculpture and enable to make several pieces of sculpture where as the traditional casting method cannot produce several pieces from the same mould. Although the contemporary process is bit complicated than the traditional process each step of mould making takes short time to dry and proceed to another process where as in traditional process the mould takes many days to dry and the coat of the mould have to be applied several times for several days which have to perform with patience. The traditional process materials are very cheap compared to the contemporary; although because of the availability of the materials contemporary process is very famous in the foundry of the Fine Arts Department.

Bronze sculptures placed on the public spaces and the rituals attached to them reflect the Thai society. Whatever may be the intentions of the builders, the monuments made of bronze transcend its aesthetic value to the people. The makers who make the sculptures can be considered as the pioneers because of them it is still possible to transcend that value to the public and sustain the tradition of art field which was

established during the patronage of the modern Kings like King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn, King Vajiravudh, present King Bhumibol and the art pioneers like Prince Naris and Corrado Feroci to the present artists like Boonsong Nootnomboon, Somkuan oumtrakul, Nikorn Koehapong, Paradron Cherdchoo Pongpan Chantanamattha etc. are handling the tradition in a very decent manner. Present artists and sculptors are trying to introduce new techniques in their art to give more realistic feature on the sculptures. The sculptures they are making compete with the sculptures which were made at the time of Feroci. Each sculpture they produce is the masterpieces of the present generation.

Initially I found out there is very different views between younger and older generation of artists. Similarity is both generations of artists never consider themselves as a perfect artist. They are always in the process of learning and experimental and always want to make a perfect piece of art as far as possible. Difference is the idea behind the veneration and belief upon the king's statues. Most of them respect the Kings and the heroic figures but very few believe in worship of such figures to fulfill their wishes. Yet they feel very proud to be able to make such sculptures.

The workers, artists and sculptors in the foundry are genuinely happy, proud and satisfied when they create sculptures and they wish if they had done better. They usually perform their duty with a feeling of personal value which enables them to make sculptures to perfection. They put in extra efforts and concentration (*samadhi*) especially when they make statues of past Kings mainly due to the reason that they worship these statues, as the majority of other Thai nationals who also worship the statues of past Kings. However some of the issues rose in the foundry like the job security, safety, privacy, space, and training opportunities for the artists and the workers must be heard by the government agencies. All these issues heard can sustain the profession and the skill for the future generation. The sculptors, artists and designers of the monuments might get justice if the sculptures and the monuments are conserved and preserved periodically to last long for the generation to come to show and preserve its heritage value.

At the past traditional workmanship used to depend on the family tradition, which with the lack of interest of the younger generation many skill and technology cease to exist and put in danger the traditional profession. The establishment of the universities in arts and fine arts can regenerate new individual professionals with new innovative ideas. An artist does not take an art profession without his passion on art which is the real motivation to take out a work of art from a person.