

Abstract

Buddhist handcrafts are handcrafts or utensils used in Buddhist ceremonies, both auspicious and inauspicious, with significance as cultural artifacts with the social implication of the community. The aim of this research is to examine the uniqueness, development, as well as belief regarding Buddhist handcrafts of Ubon. The research was conducted with qualitative and empirical methodology on more than **80 temples from 14 districts** in **Ubon Ratchathanee**. The Buddhist handcrafts can be categorized into **1) pulpits, 2) waterspouts, 3) candle rails 4) palm-leaf book stands, 5) Buddha statue houses**. With random sampling, **the results yield that** the uniqueness of the Buddhist handcrafts of Ubon Ratchathanee is present in the class aspect, which is classified into 3 groups: **1) Buddhist handcrafts by enchoric craftsmen** – proficient craftsmen who self-develop from commoner craftsmen, with influence in terms of ideas and craftsmanship from the court, both Bangkok court and Lan Chang (Laotian) court. The predominant uniqueness is lacquerware with gold inlay and mosaic. This style is mostly seen in temples in the urban area or temples with highly accepted or charismatic abbots. **2) Buddhist handcrafts by regional craftsmen**–villagers who are not professionals but have the fairly good level of skill or competence respected among the villagers. Most of the craftsmen are people in the community. The predominant uniqueness is gaudy color or application of local material and nontraditional designs. **3) Buddhist handcrafts by foreign (Vietnamese) craftsmen** – craftsmen from outside culture. These are the Vietnamese who fled to take temporary refuge in Isaan during the Vietnam War. Their style is influenced by Chinese art. The Vietnamese in Ubon Ratchathanee live in the urban and suburban areas. All the three groups still uphold the tradition of using **the dragon as the important symbolic animal in all categories**. Besides, there are other animals such as the **crocodile and the lion** that have great influence on the mythical belief of this kind of handcraft, especially the **naga**, which is a concept derived from the tradition of snake worshipping. This is seen in the way the naga form was used in almost every element of the configuration of every product. This corresponds to the theory that **the naga is a symbol in a cult belief of people in the Khong basin or the god of earth and water and a sign of an animal in support of Buddhism**. The categories of the Buddhist art in this context are: 1. **Pulpits**, which are classified into 2 types: 1) short pulpit, or precept seat and 2) pulpit with an adorned top. These pulpits can be

categorized by material and adornment into 3 types: bricks-and-plaster, wood, and plaster-and-wood, with the bricks-and-plaster and plaster-and-wood types being the distinguished uniqueness of Ubon that cannot be found in any other regions. 2. **Waterspouts**, which are classified into 2 types: 1) common two-legged waterspouts and special waterspouts with animal figures at the bases of the legs and 2) waterspouts with 4 legs, such as lion legs and ordinary legs. The main material is hardwood. These waterspouts has the uniqueness that is not present elsewhere. 3. **Candle rails**, which are classified into 2 types: 1) adorned candle rail and 2) common candle rail. The main material is hardwood, with metallic a rail for holding small candles and symbolic animal ornamentation. 4. **Palm-leaf book stands**, which are classified into 2 types: 1) cross-legged stand and 2) step stand. The main material is hardwood. 5. **Buddha statue houses**, which are classified into 3 types: 1) house of the shadow of Naga, 2) porch house and 3) leaf-shaped house. The material varies. For example, there are wood, stone, or animal parts such as cattle horns or ivory tusk.

Summary and Recommendations: With the adaptation according to the new social structure in Isaan during reign of King Rama III-King Rama V, all these handicrafts have been affected. Moreover, the outside factors, such as the coming of the Vietnamese, played a part in adding color to the handicrafts. Especially in Ubon, which is the religious center of Isaan, the monks were sent to study dharma in Bangkok. The political circumstance in the time of Field *Marshal P. Piboon* Songkram was also a factor. All these greatly influenced changes in **taste and form in the Buddhist handicrafts of Ubon**. Thus, the body of knowledge of these handicrafts should be expanded, and other kinds of Buddhist art, too, in terms of research and publicity for the continual preservation of this kind of craft.

Keywords : Buddhist handicraft/ pulpit/ waterspout/ stand/ candle rail/ Buddha statue house/

Ubon Ratchathanee