

Development of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry of Isan in Thailand

Yauwalak Chuathong*

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University Amphur Mueang, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

Niyom Wongpongkham

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University Amphur Mueang, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

Preechawut Apirating

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University Amphur Mueang, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

Abstract

This article is a part of dissertation on the topic of factors influencing development of jewelry in Isan region by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Niyom Wongpongkham and Dr. Preechawut Apirating. This research aimed to study the development of jewelry in Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin, Isan region, Thailand. The study was conducted using qualitative methods. The research instrument included survey, observation, interview, and group discussion. The studied samples included jewelry and the jewelry makers. The concept of cultural ecology was employed in the data analysis. The result showed that the development of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry originated since prehistory period and inherited until today. The development was categorized into 6 areas which were 1) development in patterns; in the past, patterns were imitated from nature without cutting or trimming any parts, while at present, the patterns are partially cut and trimmed to make them more contemporaneous, 2) development in material; in the past, valuable materials such as gold, silver, semi-precious gemstone were used, while gemstones and synthetic sapphire are more commonly used now, 3) development in production; past production was done by melting, molding, trench welding, and polishing which required human labors, whereas the present production involves using machine and technology, 4) development in aesthetic design; the past designs were uniformly outlined, focused on relative geometric patterns, and left-right balanced design, while the present designs has been outlined to one side and trimmed out some parts, 5) development in utility; the jewelry in the past was used as a belief symbol, while at present it has been used as matching ornament for attires 6) development in belief symbolism; in the past, the jewelry was thought of related to amulets, while the present the belief has shifted to zodiac gemstones.

Keywords: Jewelry; Development; Isan; Thailand.



CC BY: [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

1. Introduction

History of Isan and its wisdom of craftsmanship has been passed on for years from generation to generation. (Surapol, 2007) stated that in prehistoric period of Thailand, at least 3,500 years ago, had developed metallurgy. The use of bronze to make equipment and jewelry was particularly more common in this region than others.

Jewelry was a product of wisdom of craftsmanship to create aesthetic objects for body's ornament. This was used as a symbol of social status and valuable art objects, both physically and mentally. The jewelry could connect to and create feelings in the minds of those who wore and saw them. The jewelry has been spread widely in Isan region, but the most well-known jewelry which has been passed down for generations was found in Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin, KhwaoSinarin District, Surin Province. This jewelry has its long history and has been developed to be used as ornaments with various patterns and designs which has been used instead of coins which were used in Isan prehistoric period (Kobkul, 1994).

The jewelry of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin has been continuously produced until the present time. People in the village work as silver craftsmen to produce this jewelry which is known as Takao silverware or silver jewelry carved into Takao flower, and Pra keum or silver beads. These products are traditional handicraft that has been passed down in families from ancestors. The jewelry was originally produced by using gold as material but it was changed to silver, and still become popular until now (SuriyaChoksavasdi, 2008).

As the importance of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry previously mentioned, it can be seen that this jewelry has a remarkable feature in terms of its development and changes. Therefore, it is worth to shed some light on this area in order to provide useful data in this academic field and to those who are interested in this area. This study can also be used as database for future studies.

2. Objectives

- 1) To study development of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry of Isan, Thailand

3. Methodology

The study of Development of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry of Isan, Thailand was a qualitative study with the aim of investigating the development of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry. The study was conducted and arranged into these following steps; 1) conducted data research related to development of jewelry in Isan region, 2) conducted data research about the study site in Isan, 3) studied related research and theory, 4) thoroughly studied document, maps, the study site's environment, 5) visited and collected data from the studied site for further detailed analysis, 6) designed framework and equipment for site survey, 7) coordinated with related personnel for on-site data collection, 8) planned site survey and collected the data on site, 9) analyzed the collected data and concluded result.

4. Results

4.1. Development of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry, Mueang District, Surin, Isan Region, Thailand

Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry originated around 270 years ago when a group of Khmer people migrated to Baan Naengmud, Kap Choeng District, Surin Province. Later, some of them had settled down at Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin. These people had brought knowledge of craftsmanship in making gold jewelry and passed this down to their younger generations in Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin and Baan Sador. At present, there are various types of jewelry such as Jarn/ Ta krud or necklace, Pa kum/ Ta kao/ Chanon or earrings. These craftsmen were hired to make the jewelry both in Surin and nearby cities. During 2500 – 2521 B.E. (1957-1978), the jewelry production was temporarily on a halt as people increasingly bought gold jewelry from gold stores due to more convenient transportation. In 2522 B.E. (1979), Mr. Sawat Mutasopa, Mr. Chian Pajonkla, Mr. Puan Jiaothong, Mr. Plon Pajonkla, and Mr. Teen Chingchai had worked together to preserve and lead younger generations to restore this craftsmanship. They changed the material from gold to silver as the price of gold was higher and they called this as local silver craftsmanship. There were 6 development areas including 1) development in patterns, 2) development in material, 3) development in production, 4) development in aesthetic design, 5) development in utility, and 6) development in belief symbolism. Each development is explained in the following section.

Figure -1. Development in patterns of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry



1) Development in patterns: In the past, the jewelry was made with traditional patterns called “Jarn or Takrud” beads and earrings called Ta kao or Chonon. Nowadays, Takao jewelry and Pa keum (silver beads) have still been produced. The Takao jewelry or Rung-hok originally had 13 patterns and has increased to 20 patterns nowadays. Takao jewelry is made in various sizes such as big, medium and small and in various shapes such as geometric shapes and sphere. The shape patterns were imitated natural flowers such as bullet wood, jasmine, water lettuce, and chilli flower. Takao is used as a part for earrings, necklace, bracelet, bangle, ring, or belt. While silver beads or Pakeum came with different geometric shapes such as sphere, flat circle, cylinder, rectangle, triangle, Thai pattern called Tobpak, star fruit, lotus petal, diamond, shape of Thai two-faced drum, pumpkin, funnel, hexagon, bottle gourd, spider's egg, rice grain, etc. Now it was found that there are 25 patterns of silver beads such as Thai traditional silver bag shape, pillow shape, hexagon, funnel, button, Thai two-faced drum, lotus, grid, and Pikul flower. Pakeum is also used as a part of earrings, necklace, bracelet, bangle, or belt.

As can be seen that in the past, the patterns of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin were derived from natural imitation without any shape trimming. There were Ta Kao jewelry and Pa Keum (silver beads), which had various shapes and sizes. The patterns were influenced by nature and surroundings such as flowers, leaves, vines, aquatic animals or local animals like elephant, etc. Nowadays, the patterns of Ta kao and Pa keum are still maintained but the shapes are partially cut or trimmed. For instance, the jewelry in spherical shape was cut into half for contemporaneous look. This development is in accordance to the concept of cultural ecology that humans adapted to their environment and

culture. Moreover, the differences in environments made the means of production, way of life, and culture adaptable to their surrounding nature.

Figure-2. Development in material of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry



2) Development in material: In the past, gold material was used in the production. However, as the price of gold became higher and unaffordable, the material was changed to silver and other additive materials such as colorful stones. At present, the commonly used material is silver and other additive materials such as elephant tail, gems, precious stones, pearls, sapphire, stone beads, colorful stones, and synthetic gemstones for variety of styles.

The development of material for Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry was shifted from using gold as the main material to silver due to raising price of gold. The 92.5 percent silver was used as a substitute material as its cost was cheaper and also easy to find. It also had quality elasticity equally to gold. This change was following cultural ecology which stated that humans had capability to change or adjust resources which results in adapting means of production and selecting material in producing jewelry to the community.

Figure-3. Development in production of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry



3) Development in production: In the past, the production of Ta kao jewelry was made by using small silver strips and bending the strips into different shapes and patterns such as sphere, Thai two-faced drum shape, earthen jar, and square, etc. Pa keum production started with weighing pure silver beads and melting them before molding into silver sticks. Then, the silver sticks were flatted into thin sheets with the thickness around 4 millimeters, and cut into desirable sizes. The pieces were rolled into beads, embellished edges with small curved silver pieces and applied resin to stretch and tighten the surface. The silver pieces were engraved, applied niello, and polished. The final step was to use hot iron stick and punched through the resin to make a hole, cleaned and gone through niello process to bring out patterns. The finished beads were used in making jewelry. The beads had various sizes with the smallest size of 0.5 centimeter diameter and the largest size of 2.5-3 centimeter diameter. The present production is still conducted in traditional way with some modern equipment.

Overall, the past production was conducted by using metal forming or molding method. The silver beads were produced by rolling, stretching, bending silver, welding with liquid chemical, hot blowing, engraving and applying niello, assembling with additive gemstones, painting, and polishing surface. These production process required

human labors. However, nowadays, machines and modern technology have been included in the production which is more convenient and silver bead production is becoming popular. This development is in line with concept of cultural ecology that humans needed technology to adapt to the environment. It was stated that evolution of society is dependent on utility of resource. Culture with low evolution was the culture that rely on human labors, while culture with higher evolution was the culture that was able to utilize natural resources effectively in order to balance natural resources and the environment. Human had to keep developing new technology, therefore the production always adjusted to technology change.

Figure-4. Development in aesthetic design of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry



4) Development in aesthetic design: The aesthetic design in the past was done using unity composition. The focus of the pattern was at the center of Ta kao and spreading outwardly. The petals were designed with the pointing tips, curvy surface imitating flowers, which this was very detailed and neat design. However, in the last 3 years, the design has been torn and cut down on some details. For instance, the design has shifted from full circle to half circle, and employed unbalanced composition for contemporary look. Most silver beads are black baked to make the pattern clearer and shinier.

The development in aesthetic design of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry was employed unity composition with relative patterns and left-right balance design. The patterns and design concept were influenced by nature and surrounding environment. In contrast, in the last 3 years there has been designed using unbalanced concept by shifting the composition to one side and trimming some parts off, for example, changing circle to half circle, leaving out some details for contemporary style, and focusing more on artistic design. This concept of composition was in accordance with cultural ecology in creating art work, which was a tool for human to adapt to the environment and to create beauty. Beauty was considered as an important and substantial element, especially in art objects as the beauty created values in production and patterns development in human's perception.

Figure-5. Development in utility design of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry



5) Development in utility: The study found that silver beads were used as amulets and component for female adornment such as jangles, bead necklaces, earrings, and rings. These adornments were worn for showing social class and decorating for rituals. Comparing to the present, Ta kao jewelry and Pa keum (silver beads) are used for

beautiful decorative purpose for body's adornment, wearing in religious and traditional ceremony, showing social class and economic condition.

It can be summarized that Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry was originally used for the purpose of belief, rituals, symbol of preventing danger, social and economic symbolic status. The current purpose of wearing the jewelry has been changed to be decorative items for beauty, and collective items. There is still the use of jewelry as lucky amulets as well. This showed a close relationship between culture and environment that had an influence on each other, according to the cultural ecology concept. It was stated that human had capability to utilize adornments in daily life by creating social acceptance that focused more on patterns than its substance. While some patterns and traditions were able to remain and inherit which can be seen through expression of local culture.

Figure-6. Development in belief symbolism of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's Jewelry



6) Development in belief symbolism: Ta kao jewelry and Pa keum (silver beads) were considered as sacred objects which got an influence from Khmer culture. Pa keum craftsmen had to perform ceremony to show respect to teachers or Yuk Kru along with sacrificial offering which consisted of rice whisky, flowers, offering of 5 items, a set of joss sticks and candle, and money 20 baht or as required. The craftsmen were taught after the ceremony was performed. The patterns of Pa keum was originated from beliefs. For example, lotus petal pattern came from the belief of worship or sacred symbols, star gooseberry pattern came from symbol of being favorable, Pikul flower pattern came from ritual worship symbols. Fishnet pattern came from protective symbol against demons, and inscribed pattern came from protective symbol using incantation. These beliefs have been less common in the present time but there are some group of people who still wear this silver beads as a symbol of bringing luck.

Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry was produced as there was a belief in wearing amulets by using valuable material like gold to make preventive objects, but the material has been changed to silver later in the present days. The reason for material shifting was due to religious influence. Majority of people in the past were inherited from Khmer nationality which their belief was influenced by Brahman-Hindu, but people were later influenced by Buddhism. There has been a mix between these two beliefs as well as a belief in wearing different types of zodiac gemstones. From the concept of cultural ecology which stated that beliefs, traditions, and rituals were cultural means of balancing the people and the environment. This could be used to explain the blending of production and technology which was shaped by cultural beliefs of particular culture.

The result of the study showed that there were 6 areas of development in Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry following cultural ecology concept by Amara Pongsapich. The jewelry developments were affected by surrounding environment and nature. There were also adjustments to the environment in patterns, materials, production, aesthetic design, utility, and belief. The patterns were adjusted by leaving out some details from nature and environment. The material was shifted from high cost material to lower cost. The production was also changed from employing human labors to the use of technology in the production. The aesthetic design was adjusted by reducing some details from nature and environment to create contemporaneous design. The jewelry utility was adjusted to be properly used in daily life. And the belief was adjusted according to their culture.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Isan Jewelry, Thailand

The study showed that the development of Jewelry at Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin, KhwaoSinarin District, Surin Province, can be divided into 6 areas which were 1) the development in jewelry patterns; the patterns were derived from surrounding nature such as flowers but some details were left out nowadays in order to modernize the style, 2) the development in jewelry material; it was shifted by adjusting resources to the community from using gold to 92.5 percent silver due to the higher price of gold, 3) the development in production; the traditional production of using human labors was adjusted to use machines and technology in the production, which was a balancing between

natural resources and human's environment that led to constant development of production technology, 4) the development in aesthetic design; unity pattern, connected lines and shapes, left-right balancing composition, and natural concept were employed in the traditional design while the modern design has been changed to unbalanced composition with the focus only on one side and trimming some parts, 5) the development in jewelry utility; the jewelry was used for the purpose of belief symbols in the past, but now the purpose has been changed to symbolic expression for local culture and adornments, 6) the development in jewelry symbol of belief; the jewelry was based on the traditional belief of amulets, but in the present period, the belief has been influenced by zodiac signs and their symbolic gemstones in each particular culture. The six developments of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry of Isan, Thailand were influenced by surrounding environment and nature which was in accordance with Cultural Ecology Concept that humans adapted to the environment and continuously developed from past to present.

6. Discussion

6.1. Discussion of Isan Jewelry Development in Thailand

The development in patterns of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry was initially influenced by geometric shapes and natures, which included Ta kao jewelry and Pa keum (silver beads). These jewelry has been developed in designs by reducing some details for contemporaneous style. According to Bunditying (2011), this differentiation in design of Pa keum from the past, by mixing contemporaneous design and local wisdom, provided more market opportunity and increase product's value. This pattern development was also in accordance to Thanakit (2013), that silver crafts of Mien Tribe derived the pattern concept from nature and environment, especially from plants and animals, and geometric drawing with reduced or expanded patterns. According to the concept of cultural ecology (Amara, 2003), stated that humans need to adapt to the environment and allow that environment to shape cultural objects from the nature which increase potential in changing or adjusting the environment. The development in material of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin's jewelry was changed due to economic factor, which silver was used instead of gold as it was cheaper, easy to find, and safe to use. This material concept was in line with Wannarat (1983), that material did not need to be expensive as the value is lied in the relative component of that particular product, even cheap material could create value with outstanding beauty. Furthermore, the development in production of the jewelry has maintained traditional means of silver craftsmanship which created production value for younger generation. However, the silversmiths has adjusted the production by using modern machines and technology. This adjustment in production was in accordance to the concept of cultural ecology by Amara (2003). It was stated that humans need to adjust to the environment at the time where there was low development of technology. Consequently, the environment was the factor that shaped the way of culture. However, when the technology was advanced, humans would also have capability to change or adjust the environment. The development in aesthetic design showed that the ancestors of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin had learned to use symbols to express meaningful messages for a long time which can be seen from the jewelry's shapes and patterns in different regions. The beauty of aesthetic design was adapted from nature and environment, and was torn down some details as the time passed to add some modern and new appearance of the jewelry. Chommanad (2003), stated about the aesthetic design that beauty is in the aesthetic aspect of an object including fineness, newness, and extraordinariness following cognitive and behavioral aesthetics which created the figurative and spiritual meaning for the jewelry. There was also the development in the utility of the jewelry which was previously used as symbols for belief and social status until its purpose has been changed to beauty adornments, as a symbol for expression of local culture, collective items, and amulets. This development was in line with a study by Worawit (2012), who studied form and pattern design of the golden ornaments of the crypt of the Main Prang, Wat Ratchaburana in Ayutthaya province. The golden ornaments were used in the ruling class to express their social status. The last development area to be discussed was in the jewelry belief. The majority of the population were inherited with Khmer nationality which had mixed beliefs in ghosts, Brahman, and Buddhist. There was a belief in making amulets as protective objects using precious material, which was later changed to silver. While nowadays, the jewelry has been worn as there is belief about zodiac symbolic gemstones. This belief was in accordance to a study of Bowondech Prahun (2015), who stated that decorative objects were found in Esan-Tai ethnic group as decorative jewelry and ritual jewelry which their thoughts and beliefs had been conveyed by using luck symbols or other symbols in the craftwork. Moreover, this belief concept was found to be in accordance to Ari Thongkaew (1994), who stated that Surin silverwares has been originated for a long time from their ancestors with the belief of luck and amulets. The silversmiths conduct ceremony to show respect every year, for example, ceremony to show respect for their career equipment. In summary, there has been a constant development in the jewelry of Baan ChokKhwaoSinarin from time to time and it has been passed on from generation to generation.

References

- Amara, P. (2003). *Human and culture. Society and culture*. 8th edn Chulalongkorn University Press. 167.
- Ari Thongkaew (1994). *Elephants ritual of suay people of surin, tha tum district, surin province*. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Surin Rajabhat University: Surin Province.
- Bowondech Prahun (2015). Decorative objects of the esan-tai ethnic group. *Institute of Culture and Arts Journal*, 17(1): 91-98. Available: <https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jica/article/view/80456>
- Bunditying, P. (2011). *A study of contemporary jewelry: A case study of pakeum in surin province*. Master's Thesis. Graduate School. Srinakharinwirot University.
- Chommanad, K. (2003). *Aesthetic of life*. Semathum Publisher: Bangkok.

- Kobkul, C. (1994). *Silverware pa keum craftwork career, khwaosinarin sub-district, mueang district, surin*. Master's Thesis: Master of Arts Program in Thai. Mahasarakham: Graduate School of Srinakharinwirot University, Mahasarakhma.
- Surapol, N. (2007). *History of thai ancestor: Development in pre-history culture*. Matichon: Bangkok.
- SuriyaChoksavasdi (2008). *Brass handicraft of Ban Pa-Ao; Cultural heritage from ancient wisdom*. Ubol Ratchathani University: Ubol Ratchathani.
- Thanakit, J. (2013). *Contemporary silver jewelry design and development based on identity of mien hill tribe people for increasing value: a case study of Ban Pa Klang Pua District*. Graduate School. Srinakharinwirot University: Nan Province.
- Wannarat, T. (1983). *Artistic jewelry pimluck printing*. 1st edn: Visual art: Bangkok.
- Worawit, S. (2012). *Form and pattern design of the goldenornaments from the crypt of main prang, wat ratchaburana, ayutthaya*. Silpakorn University: Nakhon Prathom.