

Chaotic Phenomena of Communication in Thai Mural Paintings

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to understand the chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural painting by using Chaos Theory, symbols in mural painting, semiotics study, and Jakobson's model of communication as the method to analyze data. This study was a qualitative research using textual analysis to analyze Thai mural paintings that were painted during the reign of King Rama III – King Rama VII which represented the story of Buddha's history relevant to communication of chaotic phenomena under myth through characters and other contents. The result of the study found that chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural painting consisted of two main characteristics as follows; 1) The body color of the Buddha did not follow the method of color usage in Thai mural painting; 2) Contents in mural painting were not relevant to the literature; 3) The modification of the character was different from literature; 4) The appearance of the character was not relevant to the period in the story; 5) The perspective views were real according to science method. The study of chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural paintings was considered the new vision in the field of chaotic phenomena of communication which could be applied to the creation of contents and method creating new innovations which were not based on an old method and style.

Keywords: chaos, communication, Thai mural painting

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อให้เข้าใจถึงปรากฏการณ์ความไร้ระเบียบที่เกิดขึ้นทางการสื่อสารในจิตรกรรมไทย โดยใช้แนวคิดเกี่ยวกับความไร้ระเบียบ (Chaos Theory) สัญลักษณ์ภาพในงานจิตรกรรม แนวทางการศึกษาเชิงสัญชาตศาสตร์ และแบบจำลองการสื่อสารของ Jakobson เป็นแนวทางในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล การวิจัยนี้เป็นการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพโดยการวิเคราะห์ข้อความ (Textual Analysis) งานภาพจิตรกรรมฝาผนังในประเทศไทยที่เขียนขึ้นในช่วงรัชกาลที่ 3-7 ซึ่งนำเสนอเรื่องราวเกี่ยวกับพุทธประวัติ โดยเป็นการวิเคราะห์การสื่อสารที่ไร้ระเบียบภายใต้ปริมาตรที่เกี่ยวข้องวิเคราะห์สัญลักษณ์ภาพที่มีความหมายถึงความไร้ระเบียบที่สะท้อนผ่านภาพตัวละครและบริบทอื่น ๆ ที่ปรากฏในงานภาพจิตรกรรมฝาผนัง ผลจากการวิจัยพบว่า ปรากฏการณ์ความไร้ระเบียบที่เกิดขึ้นทางการสื่อสารในจิตรกรรมไทยมีลักษณะที่สำคัญดังต่อไปนี้ 1) ลักษณะสีกายของพระพุทธเจ้าไม่เป็นไปตามจารีตการใช้สีตามแนวทางจิตรกรรมไทย 2) เนื้อหาที่ปรากฏในงานจิตรกรรมมีลักษณะไม่เป็นไปตามวรรณกรรม 3) การดัดแปลงบุคลิกตัวละครที่แตกต่างจาวรรณกรรม 4) การปรากฏภาพตัวละครที่ไม่สอดคล้องกับเวลาตามท้องเรื่อง 5) ทศนิยมมิติของภาพมีลักษณะ 3 มิติสมจริงตามหลักวิทยาศาสตร์ การศึกษาเรื่องความไร้ระเบียบทางการสื่อสารในจิตรกรรมฝาผนังไทยยังถือเป็นการเปิดโลกทัศน์ในมิติของความไร้กฎเกณฑ์ทางการสื่อสาร ที่สามารถนำไปปรับใช้กับการสร้างสรรค์เนื้อหาและวิธีการสร้างสรรค์งานในนวัตกรรมที่ไม่อิงกับแนวคิดหรือวิธีการแบบเดิม

คำสำคัญ: การสื่อสาร ความไร้ระเบียบ จิตรกรรมไทย

1. Introduction

According to Devid Schuldburg (1999), he suggested, on social paradigm of artwork, chaotic phenomena occurred during the artist's creativity process including the process of awareness, of behavioral skills, learning, developing, acknowledging, and creating psychological process, which caused the process of creation not to be normally understandable. In other words, the creation of artwork did not have fixed process. The process might be changed in compliance with period of time and social circumstances leading chaotic phenomena on the creation to unpredictable, complicated, diverse, and new method as the attractors in artwork.

The chaotic phenomena of communication of Thai mural painting, especially the bond between Thai mural painting and royal custom, led to the artwork with fixed pattern as well as content that followed literature, and reflected the relationship between ruling class and custom in mural painting. Nevertheless, there was evidence from the temples located far from the capital city where the artists had more freedom in creating artwork that was different from the traditional custom and created the chaotic phenomena of traditional mural painting such as the modification of characters from traditional pattern to irony and humor based on the condition of each community. Those pictures might appear in smaller sizes, and were painted in the inconspicuous positions.

Moreover, when rationalism has been introduced to Thai society since the era of Dan Beach Bradley, M.D. in the reign of King Rama III - King Rama IV, the concept of science as the factor that led to developing country's civilization was widespread. That concept was conveyed through the western perspective in mural painting that focused on realistic matter. The three-dimensional perspective was created. It was different from traditional Thai mural painting consisting of only two-dimensional view.

The changes mentioned above affected the painting pattern in mural painting. The chaotic phenomena had significant role in encouraging artists to create artwork that linked to individual awareness along with technical skills. The creation of artwork consisted of different artist's skills which caused the phenomena to be unsystematic and difficult to predict, which affected the imagination of the viewers and shook the foundation of Thai mural painting custom by creating artwork that was different from the old pattern.

This study presented the chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural painting that was irrelevant to literature, and affected the custom in traditional mural painting regarding the analysis of communication in which the chaotic phenomena occurred from many factors such as social circumstance in each period and cultural circumstance in each community.

Furthermore, the definition of chaotic phenomena in English means orderly disorder, which is said that, when understanding the order roughly, it could lead to new vision in the field of chaotic phenomena of communication that could be applied to the creation of content and method in order to create new innovations inconsistent with traditional concepts and methods.

2. Objectives

To understand the chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural painting

3. Materials and methods

3.1 This study was qualitative research consisting of textual analysis and in-depth interview. The data were collected from two sources as follows:

3.1.1 Thai mural paintings with traditional concept that were painted during nearly the end of King Rama III to the late of King Rama VII which were registered for conservation with the section of mural painting and sculpture, Office of Archaeology, Fine Arts Department in B.E. 2533, and were kept as reference for artistic value and importance to the community from relevant literatures. The data were collected according to the paintings distributed in each geographic area.

3.1.2 Scholars, who were the artists and the produced artwork in both academic area and mural painting concerning Buddhism. The six scholars, who painted mural contemporary painting, were purposely selected for individual in-depth interview.

3.2 The data collection and instrument for recording the mural painting was DSLR digital camera.

3.3 Data analysis was the analysis of the relevant communication of chaotic phenomena about myth and symbolic picture conveying the chaotic phenomena through characters and other contents in mural painting. Moreover, semiology and interpretation of Jakobson's model of communication as well as Chaos Theory were used as the instruments in data analysis.

3.4 The locations for collecting data were the temples in 9 provinces including Bangkok, Saraburi, Suphanburi, Petchaburi, Rachaburi, Phatthalung, Songkhla, Lampang, and Chonburi, where the mural paintings were positioned.

3.5 Thick description was used by the researcher to present the data.

4. Results

The study found that chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural painting consisted of significant characteristics as follows:

4.1 The body color of the Buddha did not follow the method of color usage in Thai mural painting

The topic regarding body color of the Buddha (as in Figure 1 and 2) showed that there was chaotic phenomena of communication. The body of the Buddha was considered to be beautiful according to Mahapurisalakkhana, which consisted of 32 outstanding characteristics. According to Pattarawan Wantonchaisuk (2003), it is said that person who was born with those 32 special characteristics would be significant person, or called "The Buddha", and would be recorded in Tripitaka as "Body as Gold", which could be interpreted that the person who had the body with gold color or bright color as gold.

The myth regarding the body color of the Buddha reflected the belief or the ideology of Buddha's miracle. Therefore, the style of mural painting, especially concerning the body color, reflected the value of Buddha's body as nobleness, goodness of the great man.



Figure 1 The Picture of "Life of the Buddha The Interruption of Evil" Mural Painting in Wang Temple, Phatthalung Province



Figure 2 The picture of "Life of the Buddha: The Interruption of Evil" Mural Painting in Suntharawas Temple, Phattalung Province

From Figure 1 and 2, the values of the body color of the Buddha were obviously different. The body color of the Buddha in Figure 1, which was the mural painting in Wang Temple, was painted in the

light tone, whereas the body color of the Buddha in Figure 2, which was the mural painting in Suntharawas Temple, was painted in the dark tone.

4.2 Contents in mural painting irrelevant to the literature.

Santi Leksukhum (2005) said that the story in literature is a myth that was written after the death of the Buddha. It is the story based on belief and faith in dharmic principles. The popular literature is the life story of the Buddha when there are many miracles in which the myth reflected through characters. Therefore, the mural painting was based on myth and reality in body, shape, manner, and cloth which can be called the reality according to the myth. The communication in mural painting was based on myth; however, chaotic phenomena still occurred.

From Figure 3 and 4, they were the paintings telling the story of Chandakumara, which was one of 10 of Buddha's life. Sontiwon Intaralib (1993) mentioned the Indra God in one episode of the story of Chandakumara that the Buddha Sakayakodom was born into Chandakumara. One night, the King Aekarach dreamt about the land of heaven. When he woke up, he wished to travel to that place. Kantahala Priest informed the king to make a sacrificial ceremony in order to visit the heaven. In the beginning of the ceremony, the Queen Chantrataewee, Chandakumara's wife, had prayed in order to help Chandakumara. Indra God heard her pray, and carried the metal ax with fire to threaten the King Aekarach; therefore, the ceremony was cancelled.



Figure 3 The Picture of Indra God Destroying Sacrificial Ceremony Mural Painting in Kongkaram Temple, Rachaburi Province



Figure 4 The Picture of Indra God Destroying Sacrificial Ceremony Mural Painting in Wat Yai Intharam Temple, Chonburi Province

From Figure 3 and 4, they showed that the body of Indra God was green, and it portrayed the action of destroying sacrificial ceremony. According to Figure 3, Indra God used the hammer to destroy the sacrificial ceremony, which was literally consistent with the myth from the story of Chandakumara, whereas Figure 4, Indra God held the sword on his left hand, which showed that the artist did not paint in keeping with the myth, and did not follow the custom of literature regarding the significant weapon used by Indra God when destroying sacrificial ceremony.

4.3 The modification of the characters that were different from the literature

Uthai Sinthusarn (1977) mentioned the story of the goddess Mani Mekkhala and the thunder giant. Mani Mekkhala was the goddess, who protected the ocean and used the glass ball to seduce the thunder giant by throwing the ax and create thunder. The goddess had her own glass ball. The thunder giant wanted the glass ball and fell in love with the goddess. Therefore, he chased the goddess up to the sky, and threw the ax at her, resulting in natural phenomena as thunder before raining as shown in Figure 5 and 6



Figure 5 The Picture of the Goddess Mani Mekhala and the Thunder Giant Mural Painting in Suntharawas Temple, Phatthalung Province



Figure 6 The Picture of the Goddess Mani Mekhala and the Thunder Giant Mural Painting in Pratoosan Temple, Suphanburi Province

Three Nakprateap (1977) explained about the characters of the Goddess of ocean, Mani Mekhala and the Thunder Giant that Mani Mekhala was the goddess of Srimekmor Ocean, and owned the special glass ball. In the story of Mahajanaka, Mani Mekhala helped protect the pure living from the shipwreck. The thunder giant was the very powerful giant god, who had green body, and the diamond ax as a weapon. The thunder giant lived in Catummaharajika heaven. He did not have his own palace ;therefore, he lived among the cloud, and was reputed to tease and annoy people. According to Figure 5, the Goddess Mani Mekhala and the Thunder Giant had beautiful body shapes according to the myth, whereas in Figure 6, it was seen that the portrait of the Goddess Mani Mekhala was changed to pleasant appearance with improper dress, and the portrait of the thunder giant was changed into a big Chinese guy with Chinese hairstyle. Conflicting with the custom of the body shape in Figure 6 was the destruction of traditional characters although both two paintings were Thai mural painting during the reign of King Rama III.

4.4 The appearance of the characters that were not relevant to the period of the story

The creation of the story concerning Buddhism always contains the life story of the Buddha and “Chadok”, the story concerning the former life of the Buddha. According to Chadok, the last life of the Buddha is the story of Vessantara. Sontiwan Intaralib (1993) described the story depicted in the mural painting of Vessantara in Suwannaram Temple as in Figure 7, in the episode of giving the Prince Chalee and the Princess Kanha to old Chu Chok. Vessantara was sitting in the temple, and surrounded by the servants. His left hand moved forward to Cho Chuk, who was sitting in front of him in the lower position.



Figure 7 The Temple of Vessantara Mural Painting in Suwannaram Temple, Bangkok



Figure 8 The Temple of Vessantara Mural Painting in Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple, Petchaburi Province

According to Figure 8, the mural painting in Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple showed that there were chaotic phenomena in the area close to the temple of Vessantara. There were the characters irrelevant to the period in the story. The mural painting was painted in order to tell the life story of the Buddha, yet the characters appeared from the wrong period of time because the characters dressed as if they lived during the reign of King Rama V – King Rama VII. The woman dressed in a Sarong and a shirt, while the man dressed in a loincloth, a Raja Pattern, and wore a hat and shoes, and another character, who looked like a foreigner, dressed in a suit, and wore a western style hat. The appearance of those characters represented the inaccuracy of time between the reign of the Buddha and the reign of King Rama VII

4.5 The perspective of 3 dimensional view that was real according to scientific method.

Displaying the normal style of mural painting, the artist used bright color and drew the line with two-dimensional view providing only width and length perspectives as in Figure 9 showing the mural painting in Wat Yai Intraram Temple, Chonburi Province. Somchat Maneechot (1986) described the representation of distance in Thai mural painting. He explained that the artist would set the ratio in the painting without concerning the realistic view. There was no distance revealed, yet the artist solved the problem by using step-by-step method, which showed the closest distance in the front side, and the farther object behind. The size of the farther object would not be reduced.

However, the chaotic phenomena regarding perspective view according to western painting (Figure 10) were found in mural painting in Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple, Petchaburi Province.



Figure 9 The Picture of the City Mural Painting in Wat Yai Intharam, Chonburi Province



Figure 10 The Picture of the City Mural Painting in Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple, Petchaburi Province

Figure 10 showed the near object with bigger size and the far object with smaller perspective view as the western painting showed, which created dimension that was realistic for the viewers.

5. Discussion

5.1 The chaotic phenomena was found in the communication with no fixed pattern from the body color of the Buddha in Figure 2, the researcher agreed that when comparing the dark tone in body color of the Buddha with light tone in body color of God, it related to Chaos Theory, which supported Devid Schuldburg (1999) pointing out that the chaotic phenomena in the creation of artwork occurred while artists created the artwork. In general, it can be concluded that the process of awareness or the skills such as presenting, learning, developing, acknowledging, and creating psychological process, which caused the creation of artwork not to have fixed process. The process might be changed according to period of time, which caused the phenomena regarding the creation to be unpredictable and led to the chaotic phenomena that were complicated, varied, and unique, and also created new attractor in artwork, which could not be found in other paintings. However, the dark tone of the Buddha's body was one of the significant techniques

that emphasized the picture of the Buddha, and created attractor, which made the story outstanding without destroying the image of the Buddha that was precious and good.

5.2 The content appearing in mural painting did not match with the literature, for instance from Figure 4 showing Indra God with the sword to destroy sacrificial ceremony. According to Chaos Theory, it can be said that the artist destroyed the rule of painting regarding the Buddha according to the traditional pattern. This phenomena was relevant to the destructive concept that destroyed the way of painting Thai traditional mural painting, which was considered to be the creation of artwork that was not based on the old custom. Thus, the new painting was created with the quality that was different from the old pattern. Furthermore, the change relevant to the theory of Jakobson (1987) described the selection instead of substitution such as selecting sword instead of hammer. However, the poetic function of communication still remains.

5.3 The modification of the characters that was different from the literature. The characters of both Mani Mekhala and the thunder giant were changed as in Figure 5 and 6. According to the Chaos Theory, it was said that the artist broke the rules for painting Mani Mekhala and the thunder giant as traditional mural painting. This phenomena were relevant to the concept of destruction since the phenomena destroyed the Thai traditional mural painting, and changed the characters of Mani Mekhala and the thunder giant in order to satirize and parody Chinese people living in Suphanburi area. This was relevant to the concept of strange attractor, which created new attraction with no fixed pattern in mural painting. The painting might still follow the story from the literature, yet the way of presentation was changed. However, the changing of the characters, Mani Mekhala and the thunder giant, must have been considered that their value as the goddess and the great giant should not be humorously displayed. Thus, the artist destroyed the concept regarding their value by changing them to pleasant appearance and Chinese person so that the characters could do anything they wanted. Even though their action might not be proper, it could be implied that the artists did not want those characters to be outstanding, considering the position of those characters that were hidden behind the Buddha statue. Nevertheless, the artist still portrayed the value of Chinese people's character in that period through the painting.

5.4 The appearance of the un-existing characters in Figure 8 is the change of the character that existed in the wrong period of time. In the picture, the characters wore the dress in the reign of King Rama V - King Rama VII, and also dressed as western foreigners, which was wrong regarding the period of time. It did not follow the traditional custom in mural painting that was meant to be painted to tell the story during the life of the Buddha. The appearance of those characters related to the theory of Jakobson (1987) and the study of semiology, which described the code of Metalingual Function implying that, during the period, Thailand traded with the western countries; therefore, the dressing style of western countries influenced Thai people.

5.5 The perspective of 3 dimensional view of the painting was realistic according to scientific method Figure 5 was related to the theory of Jakobson (1987) regarding poetic function that described the beauty of realistic painting and created the perspective view according to human's perception. The viewers could sense the perspective view of distance in the painting, and felt as if they were in the painting themselves. Moreover, this phenomena were also relevant to the concept of destruction regarding the social discontinuity, which changed from Thai traditional mural painting to perspective painting as western country. The realistic painting led to the reduction of painting's rule and the use of scientific process into mural painting due to rationalism introduced to Thai society since the era of Doctor Bradley during the reign of King Rama III - King Rama IV. The translation of idea concerning science that could lead to the development of country's civilization was introduced and reflected through the western perspective painting, which focused on realistic matters and three-dimensional view.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to understand the chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural painting. This study was qualitative research using textual analysis towards Thai mural paintings, which had been painted during the reign of King Rama III - King Rama VII. It was found that chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural painting could lead to the difference from traditional mural painting. The process of creation did not follow the custom and had no fixed pattern. The mentioned process is the phenomena regarding the creation that cannot be predicted and lead to the change in pattern because of the complication and diversity resulting in the difficulty in understanding the meaning, and it also creates visual communication regarding Chaos Theory. The new method can create strange attraction in Thai mural painting.

The study of chaotic phenomena of communication in Thai mural painting was considered the new vision in the field of chaotic phenomena of communication, which could be applied to the creation of contents and method creating new innovations which were not based on an old method and style.

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