



THEATRE COSTUME : A CASE STUDY OF COSTUME IN THAI FILM “SURIYOTHAI”

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Abstract

The purpose of the research is to study Theatre costume : A case study of costume in thai film “Suriyothai” aims to study every elements of costumes in term of the designing process which include the hairstyles, jewelry, methods of dressing in the traditional way also the selection of textiles and color scheme.

The result of this research conclude in 71 costumes, the majority shows the coherent with historical evident in the style of Ayudhaya period as seen in mural paintings and sculptures. Still, few details of some hairstyle point out The Lanna style influence, most of the hairdo have been disproportions and solidly constructed than nature.

Jewelries designs have direct influences in form and structure from Buddha image Ayudhaya period style, enhance the characteristics with gold and precious stones. In the motifs design of jewelries, found a free inspiration of Ayudhaya period style mix up with artists own imagination to serve as a jewelries motifs especially design for the film. Also, the amount of ready-made Indian jewelries are used with others jewelries in mix and match only to create the aspect the costumes images without historical fact concerned.

In methods of dressing, even the way of how to dress in traditional style is highly respect but in some points the misunderstanding of the construction, patterns, ideals and esthetics of historical costumes reflect in evident. There are also new creation of costumes styles along with traditional way of dressing.

The selection of textiles base on images of costumes created to corresponds with characters in term of hierarchy. Characters in high class associated with silk and brocade, mostly in golden scheme or glittering looks, sometimes decorated with gold tread. While characters in low class associated with cotton or some matt textiles. But the largely part of textiles have been chosen to create the beauty in character presentation. By the way, there are groups of textiles with motifs newly created from historical research.

The selection of color scheme practice the creation method base on art aspect, such as color and esthetics in film production, to producing mood and tone which can reflect the characters. Anyway, in designing process still lacks of an important parts which present the traditional believes in colors.

The Lanna style costumes in the films also shows the coherent with historical evident in hairstyles, jewelries, the way of dressing, the selection of textiles and colors scheme combine with an imaginary creation.

Keywords : Costume, Thai Film, Suriyothai, Ayudhaya period

Introduction

In the fast-paced world of today, arts and entertainment seem to make life complete. Film is one of the art forms that manifest life through its narration. Theatre or film is a collaborative work of art between the producer, director, assistant director, screen writer, actors, actresses, art director, designer and staffs from all departments who share the same thought and creative ideas.

Pruet Supasetsiri talks about the nature of Theatre and Film:

Many scholars agree that Theatre is a collaborative art. Film, unlike other art forms that are individual creation of the artists, is a kind of arts that results from collaboration between people from different departments. The success of a movie depends on how well these people work together. The consequences of any conflicts among people in the team will affect the success of that movie; whether it is a major or minor damage depends on the kinds of problems they have. (Pruet Supasetsiri, 1995:61)

The 2003 Royal Institute Dictionary gives the definition of the word “film” like this: “It is the moving pictures from the projector (821).”

From the first attempt of finding ways to create moving pictures to the present, the knowledge and development of film making has advanced rapidly. It can be stated that film has become a kind of media that greatly affects human’s learning process, attitude, social behavior, aesthetic dynamics, and ways of living. Film making is a kind of arts that has a firm cultural root as many other kinds of arts. It is a result of combing performing arts with film shooting technology, which continues to evolve with each passing year. The origin of film in Thailand dated back to 1923 when Mr. S. G. Makovski introduced the first film to Thai people. The history of Thai film in the past has affected the present of future of Thai film. Since the year 1997, there has been a dramatic change in Thai film. It could be said that it is the revolutionary year of Thai film industry, especially the historical film, because of the income success and the increasing local and international acceptance. So, this is a big step for Thai film makers to develop and raise the quality of Thai film to the international level. Thai historical film will play a big role in introducing the value of Thai tradition, culture, history and identity to the world.

Historical film is a film genre in which stories are based on *historical* events. It is a combination of historical facts with the art of film

making, emotion and aesthetics. Historical film is a reconstruction of history, a reproduction of a country, a city, and its culture, and a right connection of the past to the present. Therefore, making historical film is not just about recreating historical stories. Important things like factual events and surrounding facts such as costume, culture, and ways of living of the time are to be taken into account. Moreover, since some of the historical evidences and data may be lost or destroyed, the film maker is required to combine what he can gather with his own imagination in order to create a balance between his audiences and the past, and to responsibly present a work that is true to his purpose. (Sunet Chutinaronont, 2001:115-123). However, the wave of criticism from the public and the critics is unavoidable, and the international acclaimed historical movie *Suriyothai* is no exception. To reverse the situation, by approaching it from a more optimistic view, the discussion about this movie is actually raising awareness among Thai people to give more interest and importance to the nation's history and to their knowledge and understanding of it.

From historical evidences, Queen Suriyothai (also known as Somdet Phra Suriyothai, Thai) was King Maha Jakrapat's (Prince Thienraja) queen. He usurped the throne from Ayutthaya former rulers, Lord Worawongsa and Lady Srisudachan. She was known as one of the royal ladies who played an important role in inducing political change to the country, both in the front and behind the curtain. Finally, when King Maha Jakrapat went out to battle with then the Burmese king, King Tabengchaweti, who invaded Ayutthaya, Queen Suriyothai decided to go into battle, in disguise as a man, to support her husband. In the battle, the Queen heroically rode an elephant into battle and died in a valiant effort to save

both her country and her husband's life. Her body was then brought back to Suan Luang Sobsawan Temple for a royal funeral (*Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanupab*, 2006: 230-236; Phra Barommawongthoe Krom Phra Narathip Praphanphong, 1962: 129-145; and Luang Prasert Agsornnit, 1961: 455). From her heroic act of bravery and devotion, along with its symbolic significance, the most important historical movie in the history of this country was created.

The movie *Suriyothai* represents the history of Ayutthaya Kingdom around the year 1526 to 1549 through the eyes of Domingo, a Portuguese mercenary. He lived in Ayutthaya for about 25 years and was *King Chairajathiraj's* bodyguard during 1538-1546. Later, he went back to Portugal and reported his experiences to King Johan III. It was recorded by Portuguese History *Revision Committee* and has become one of the most important records of Thai history. This movie, a combination of historical facts and the director's imagination, presents lives in the royal court, ordinary people's ways of life, and customs and traditions during Ayutthaya Kingdom. All the historical data are gathered from a treasury of historical records and chronicles, such as the one from the Royal Writing Edition, British Museum Edition, Wanwalit's Edition, Luang Prasert Aksoranit's Edition, etc; along with foreign chronicles such as *The Travels of Mendes Pinto* by Fernao Mendes Pinto, *La Lubert Archives*, *Myanmar Chronicles*, *Hor Kaew Hor Luang Chronicles*, etc. *Suriyothai* presents the course of life of Princess Suriyothai from when she was 15. The story involves her love story, the royal wedding, the moving to the palace, her life in the royal court, her attempt to keep her status and royal heritage, the changes caused by the succession to the throne. The film reflects various aspects of human nature such as

strength, weakness, loyalty, ambition, selfishness, and struggle for survival.

The costume and hairstyle in the film replicate the beauty of early Ayutthaya art. During that time, the kingdom was divided into different dynasties: Phra Ruang, *Supannaphoom*, Uthong, and Srithammasokaraj. The costume and jewelry in the film replicate those of Uthong Dynasty, *Supannaphoom* Dynasty, Lanna style, and Angwa period in Myanmar. Their design is based on evidences gathered from chronicles, archives, mural paintings, and stucco works, combining with the imagination and the characterization of the characters in the script to make them as realistic as they can be. Each costume is the result of careful research and multiple samples making. Some of the materials are specifically made for the film. From the educational aspect, the making of Suriyothai has broken the ground of numerous researches that will help developing historical movie production. It leads to the integration of different fields of study: archaeology, history, psychology, ancient royal custom, folklore, arts, etc.

It is clear that costume design is one of the significant elements in filmmaking. Costume designers have to integrate knowledge about the past and the present, as well as the speculation of future trend. They have to have a knowledge and understanding of both the celluloid and real world. From the reasons above, and from the fact that there are not many researches on Theater costume, this dissertation aims to study elements of costume in Suriyothai in terms of the designing process, theatre costume style, and Thai traditional costume. This will be beneficial to further study on theatre costume.

Aims

- This dissertation aims to study elements of costume in Suriyothai in terms of the designing process, theatre costume style, and Thai traditional costume.
- This research will be beneficial to further study on theatre costume.

Material and Method

The sample groups are 71 costumes of the Thai side in Suriyothai. The study focuses on the hairstyle, jewelry, costumes and their dressing method, selection of textile and color scheme.

This study uses Documentary Research method, Interviews, and study of shots from the movie as the method. Then the results are presented using Descriptive Analysis method along with the drawings illustration.

Results

From the study of the characters' costume in the movie, with consideration of social structure at that time, the people in Ayutthaya are divided into two different classes. First is the governing class: the king, the members of the royal family, the governors, and bureaucrats. Second is the governed class: commoners and slaves. There is also another class in between these two classes—that is the clergyman from different religions.

Hairstyle

The time period in the movie extends across the reign of King Rachathibodi II, King Barommaracha Thiraj IV (Nor Phutthangkun), King Rattathiraj, King Chairaja Thirat, King Yod Fa, Lord Worawongsa, until the reign of King Maha Jakrapat. The hairstyle specifies the characters' social status. The actors who play as high class people, such as the king and the royal family

members, tie up their long hair in a bun in the middle of the head. They sometimes wear hair ornaments such as a crown, or a top knot ornament (“Keaw”), depending on their hierarchy. Those who play as bureaucrats, commoners and slaves wear what is called “Phom Peek” (or winged hair). Basically, they shave most of the hair or cut it very shortly, leaving only a patch of hair in the middle of the head, parting in the middle. There are also those who are partly or completely bald. This is because the actors are either naturally bald or they follow the script’s description of the characters. For the female characters who are high class people, they wear a hair style known as “Songkadong” or “Ongkadong.” The hair is either tightly tied up very high in a bun in the middle of the head, with hair ornaments such as “Sanong Klao”, “Mala Hang Hong”, or a top knot ornament “Keaw”, or it can be just regular bun in the middle of the head. For the actresses who play as bureaucrats, commoners and slaves, their bun will either be on the left or right side of the head. This hairstyle is specifically called “Rak Kraeng” or “Noon Yig.” Others might wear “Phom Peek” (or winged hair) like men do.

Jewelry

The jewelry in the movie also specifies the characters’ social status. The king and queen wear a crown or royal crown (“Maha Mongkut”) when going to a royal ceremony or to a throne hall. They also wear other jewelries such as necklace, breast chain (“Sang Wan”), bracelet (“Pahurad”), armband (“Thong Phra Korn”), ring (“Thammarong”), belt (“Pan Neng”) and , royal earrings (“Maha Kunthol”), earrings (“Kunthol”), “Sanong Klao”, “Sian Pes”, “Mala Hang Hong”, top knot ornament (“Keaw”), shoes (“Rong Phra Bath”). The anklet (“Kong Cheung”) is only worn

by King Ratthathiraj’s character in the scene that he was executed.

When compare to historical evidences, the jewelry design shows possible replicas of Ayutthaya design. The jewelries are mostly made of gold, ornamented with different kinds of stones, which is a signature jewelry design during Ayutthaya period. The design of the jewelry’s silhouette in the movie is very close to that of Ayutthaya period while the jewelry’s pattern is a combination of traditional pattern with the designer’s adaptation, which is also based on traditional pattern.

Costume and Dressing Methods

The costume in Suriyothai is a combination of the imitation and adaptation from historical evidences with the designer’s creation based on artistic paradigm and film aesthetics. In terms of the imitation and adaptation from historical evidences, since the evidences of costume from Ayutthaya period are very limited, the designing team has to do a comparative study by comparing data from similar culture, archives, and data from neighboring countries during the same period. Both primary and secondary evidences are studied. The primary evidences are considered the best type of evidences since they give accurate historical data. The secondary evidences such as sketches, drawing, or paintings need some discretion since they could be influenced by the artists’ imagination and creation, which, not only would they make the evidences unreliable, they also affect the costume making process. In terms of the designer’s original creation of the costume, the design is nevertheless combined with elements from Ayutthaya period’s costume. An obvious evidence would be the costume in the war scene, which induces a lot of argument when compare to

historical evidences.

The pattern, style, and dressing methods of the kings', queens', bureaucrats', commoners' and slaves' costumes are influenced by the drawings in Trai-phoom Drawing Book (Ayutthaya edition), and artistic works from Ayutthaya and neighboring countries in the same period. Moreover, the dress code for the king and royal family members in the royal family law also determines the costume design. All of these affect the dressing method and the making process of the costumes. Therefore, the costumes are tried out many times for historical accuracy and realization of the characters' characterization,

The female costumes are influenced by many factors. If relying on historical evidences and interpretation, the women, both upper-class and lower-class, have to go topless. However, because of the censorship law and social concern, the actresses' top parts are wrapped around ("kian") by a strip of cloth instead. This is actually an influence from Lanna female's dressing style. Another factor that affects the costume design is the lineage of each character. In Phra Ruang Dynasty, where Queen Suriyothai descended from, the women usually wrap their top parts with a long strip of cloth, throw the tail over their left shoulder, and pleat the part of the cloth above their left breast in a shape of a fan. For the hip wrapper or the wrap-around skirt, they use more than one strip of cloth, tying them together in a pleated shape on both their left and right front, looking like bows. The women in Uthong Dynasty wear their top similarly. However, they have their own unique style of wearing the skirt. The long strip of cloth is wound around the hip and tucked in the front in pleated shape, with the tail drawn on the left side. This is an influence from Khmer culture during Bayon Period.

The women in Suphannaphum Dynasty also wear their top in the same way but the skirt is influenced by Central Thai or Ayutthaya culture. The skirt is a long strip of cloth wrapped around the hip, with top edge folded over and pleated in the front in a shape of a pocket. The clothes during Srithammasokkaraj Dynasty receive an influence from the southern part of the country—Malaysia, Kelantan, Terengganu, Saiburi, Perlis, Java, Sumatra, and Bali.

For the male costumes, the king and the upper-class mostly wear shirts while the commoners and slaves go topless. The making of the king's shirt is an attempt to copy the models from historical data by using contemporary methods. It shows the lack of understanding in the traditional pattern and tailoring. This results in the changes in the style and details of the costumes, for example, the seaming of the sleeves of king's shirt or the pattern of neckline of the bureaucrats' shirt, which seems more of a modern work of dressmaking rather than the old way of fabric only one piece. Another example is the dressing Prince Thienraja and Princess Suriyothai in Lao Song Dam's or Lao Song's clothes when they are the descendants of Suphannaphum Dynasty. Another uniqueness of male clothing during Ayutthaya Period is the use of a cloth girdle or belt which can be worn in several ways.

For the bottom half of the male costume, the king, the royal family members and the bureaucrats tend to wear a long hip wrapper in dhoti fashion or pleated wrapper, and with or without the pants under it. The commoners and the slaves wear plain hip wrapper in dhoti fashion, either in a long or short style. This style of wearing a cloth girdle with a dhoti-style hip wrapper on top of the pants is also used in the designing of the war costumes. However, the male costumes

of the period did not have as much role in showing the hereditary origins or the period uniqueness as the female costumes did.

The Selection of Fabrics and Color Scheme

The selection of fabrics and color scheme in Suriyothai can be divided into two groups. The kings', queens', royal family members', bureaucrats' costumes are made of different kinds of fabric such as silk, gold-painted cloth, gold-woven Indian silk, printed cloth, etc. The lower-rank soldiers', the commoners', and the slaves' costumes are mostly made of cotton. Woven fabrics are also used. This is consistent with the regulations in the royal law concerning the use of fabrics among people from different ranks or title, their social status, and the occasion. It is also consistent with the data gathered from Ayutthaya's and other neighboring countries' art works during the same period.

Concerning the fabric patterns and texture of the costume in the movie, the design does not accurately follow the historical data during Ayutthaya period. This may depend on the limitation of finding the correct fabrics. So, to solve the problem, most fabrics in the movie are reconstruction with less detail on pattern and texture. The kings', queens', royal family members', bureaucrats' costumes are made of glossy, gold-woven or partly embroidered fabrics. The lower-rank soldiers', the commoners', and the slaves' costumes are mostly made of coarse woven fabric like cotton. Moreover, even though the Ayutthaya people had imported fabrics from countries like China, Japan, Portugal, Europe, India, etc., most fabrics chosen to be used in the movie are Indian fabrics or Sari. The use of varieties of fabrics and patterns depend on the characters' social status and personality.

From the historical documents, Thai people wore specific color for each day of the week for luck. This was mentioned in one of the poems in Sunthorn Phu's *Sawasdiraksa*: red on Sunday; eggshell white on Monday; purple on Tuesday; orange on Wednesday; green on Thursday; blue on Friday; and black on Saturday. However, the costume's color scheme in the movie emphasizes more on the combining components of the color of costumes with the setting, and lighting. Mostly, the color scheme is pastel or earth tone. For the kings, the combination of the color of jewelries and fabric with the costume design represents their status as living gods. The gold color is also used since their costume design in the scene where the kings are sitting on their throne or in a royal ceremony is influenced from attired Buddha image. The red color is used in the design of the kings', queens', and royal family members' costumes, following the regulations in the royal law. These are the results of the combination between costume design creativity and color scheme selection with the attempt to conform to historical data. Moreover, color is used as a psychological means to stimulate emotional responses.

The Lanna style costume in the movie is seen in the scene where Mahatevi Jiraprapa, Queen of Chiangmai, presents her tribute to King Chairaja. This is consistent to the historical record. Her jewelry is a combination of Lanna or Chiangmai style with a new design. There is, however, an argument about the costume designer's inspiration for her top part of the costume, which is like a gold armor with perforated design. Some think the design is influenced by the painting of a group of "Gin non," a half-human half-bird mythical creature, in which the higher rank ones cover their top part of the body instead of being topless.

However, the pattern detail of her top attire, the pattern of either petal or lotus, and the showing of Lanna style's delicate handicraft may also be the inspiration for the designer. The bottom part of Mahatevi Jirapapa's costume is a traditional tube skirt with horizontal pattern, which is Lanna style. The bottom edge of the skirt is an intricate woven border sewn to the bottom of the dress. The selection of silk for her costume might be the designer's own inspiration from the belief that the material used for making the ruling class's dress must be of the best since people in that area believed that killing animal, in this case the silk worm, is a sin. For the commoners' and slaves' costume—hairstyle, jewelry, and color scheme—they are consistent with historical records.

The color scheme is also seen by some scholar as showing aesthetics in film production.

Results and Discussion

Hairstyle

After comparing with the historical evidences such as drawings, sculptures, and historical documents, the hairstyle in *Suriyothai* is consistent to the hairstyle of the period. However, the shape and proportion of the hair maybe unrealistic considering that, in real life, the hair cannot be well-groomed or equally-shaped all the time. Also, the proportion of the bun on the head are not quite accurate when compare to historical evidences. This lessens the beauty and aesthetics of the film production.

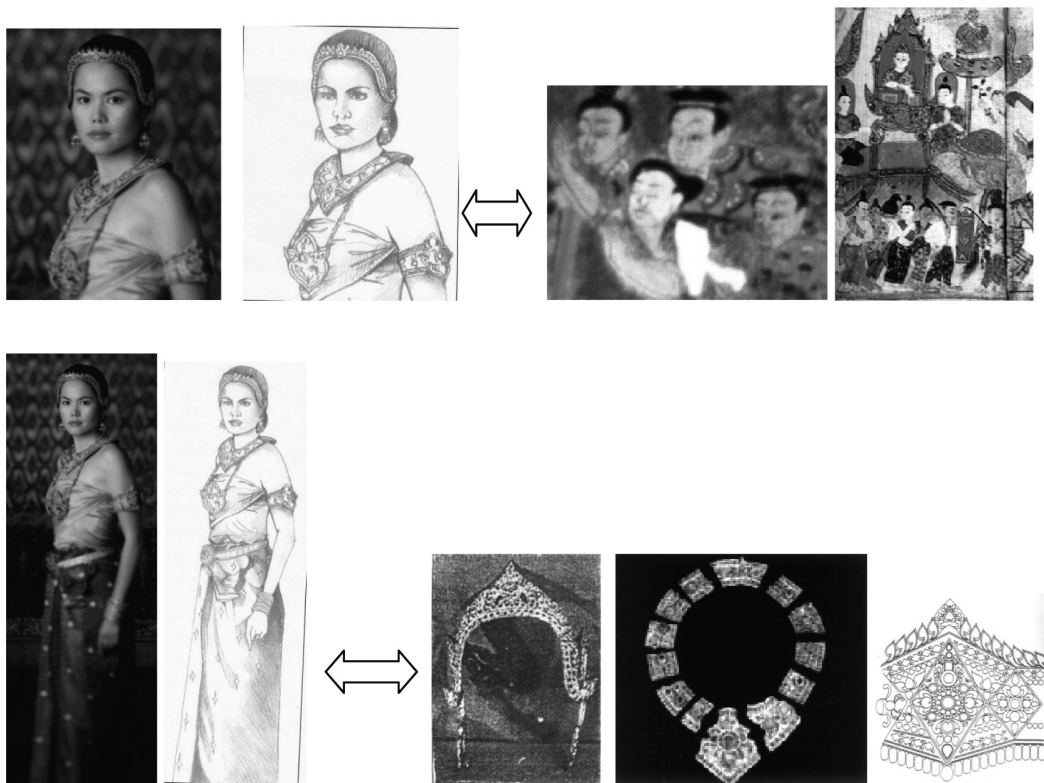
Jewelry

The jewelry design in *Suriyothai* is generally consistent with the historical records, both from documents and from art works. Jewelries are only worn among people in ruling class which is seen

as living gods. So their jewelry design is inspired by the attired Buddha image. However, only the framework of jewelry design is consistent with the design of the period. The detailed pattern of the jewelry is a combination between the designer's own inspiration within Thai Traditional pattern design frame and the reproduction of Ayutthaya's jewelry style. The motif of the design emphasizes on drawing the attention to the centre of the design with the size differences and the repeating pattern.

Costume, Dressing Methods, Selection of Fabrics and Color Scheme

Generally, the costume, dressing methods, selection of fabrics and color scheme in *Suriyothai* is consistent with the historical records. However, when looking into the details, there is an evidence of the designer's misunderstanding of how the costume pattern in the old days was constructed. In many scenes, the costume reflects the unfamiliarity with the dressing method, the philosophy behind the design and the aesthetic aspect of the dress during that period. The fabric selection depends on the social rank of the characters and the scene atmospheres. However, though being based on historical records, its detail is trimmed down. The association of the costumes with the different dynasties is shown more in the female costumes than in the male costumes. The color scheme in the movie is a combination between artistic aspect, realistic aspect, film production aesthetics, and traditional belief. For the Lanna style costume in the movie, it is the combination of a realistic reproduction from historical records and designer's imagination.



Picture 1 : Suriyothai

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