



THE TITLE OF THE ARTICLE: THE CREATION OF ANIMAL-SHAPED PAPER SCULPTURES BASED ON THE STUDY OF MYTHICAL BEASTS IN RATTANAKOSIN-ERA PAINTINGS

Rata Aksornthong

Poh-Chang Academy of Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Bangkok, Thailand

Corresponding author E-mail: rata.aks@rmutr.ac.th

Received 24 February 2025; Revised 25 June 2025; Accepted 28 June 2025

Abstract

Background and Objectives: The Himmaphan animals are mythical creatures found in Thai literature and legends. They appear frequently in religious writings, artworks, and stories involving deities and animals in the Himmaphan forest, serving as religious symbols. According to information from the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, the use of animal symbols is an important aspect of Buddhism, reflecting the idea that all living beings possess inherent virtue, power, and wisdom. These symbols carry hidden meanings that are connected to the specific traits of each animal and demonstrate the relationship between Buddhism, nature, compassion, and humanistic values-emphasizing the link between Buddhist theory and practice. The main objectives of this research were to examine the forms of mural paintings of mythical animals in the Rattanakosin period, to explore the significance of these mythical animals in relation to Buddhism and Thai society, and to create a set of contemporary sculptures inspired by the Rattanakosin-era using paper sculptures based on the process of making Khon masks.

Methodology: The study employed a systematic data collection process through on-site empirical observation. The frequency of mythical animal depictions in mural paintings was analyzed statistically. In the creative component, the researcher developed new sculptures using mulberry and recycled paper, drawing on traditional Thai sculpting techniques to blend ancient craftsmanship with modern materials and promote sustainability.

Main Results: The research findings revealed that mythical animals appeared in only 6% of mural paintings from the Rattanakosin-era temples across the studied regions of Bangkok, Ratchaburi, and Samut Songkhram. This rarity might have been the result of the fact that mythical animals typically appeared in the top sections of murals, representing the "Three Worlds," and were not widely recognized by the general public. The researcher selected prominent mythical animals from each province and created sculptures using traditional Thai sculpting techniques, reflecting the artistry of Khon mask making. This process merged traditional knowledge with contemporary artistic approaches.



Involvement to Buddhaddhamma: This study aligns with the concept of "Applied Buddhism," which integrates Buddhist principles with modern contexts to cultivate wisdom and virtue based on the Buddhist doctrine of samsara. Information from the Thailand Foundation indicates that Himmapan creatures frequently appear in Thai religious and royal architecture as symbols of belief and sovereignty. These mythical animals served as visual metaphors for the Buddhist concept of Samsara, referring to the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, death, rebirth, and karmic consequences. Their presence in art encourages self-discipline, self-reflection, compassion, and mindfulness as a means of liberation from suffering.

Conclusions: This research emphasized the social and religious values reflected through the imagery of mythical creatures, with reference to animals in Thai Buddhist art, particularly during the Rattanakosin-era. Although their appearances in murals are limited, their symbolic depth retains cultural and spiritual meaning. By applying traditional and contemporary sculpting practices, the study preserved the essence, beauty, and unique identity of these creatures while making them accessible to modern audiences. Ultimately, the research demonstrates how art can act as a universal language that communicates deep spiritual concepts and supports the practice in Buddhism through visual storytelling.

Keywords: Buddhist Beliefs, Mythical Animals, Ancient Paintings, Rattanakosin, Paper Sculptures

Introduction

Himmapan is a concept in Thai literature and legends, frequently mentioned in writings, art, and stories about gods and animals. Himmapan forests are described as rainforests with special animals and plants that serve as places for meditation (Suwan & Taothong, 2019). Within Buddhist cosmology, the Himmapan Forest occupies a sacred dimension—a place of meditation and spiritual contemplation where the Bodhisattva journeys to gather ancient wisdom and religious insights. As described in classical texts, "beings of the Animal Kingdom do not possess a sense of righteousness, which means there is little or no knowledge of merit and the Dharma" (Ministry of Culture., 2011); (Martin, 2024), highlighting the unique spiritual significance of creatures that inhabit this mystical dimension.

Historical accounts further emphasize the cultural importance of Himmapan in Thai consciousness. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab's correspondence with Prince Narisara Nuwattiwong illustrates the deep-rooted belief in this mystical forest's reality among Thai people. When Phraya Siritham Borirak claimed to have visited the Himmapan Forest during his journey through the Himalayas, a venerable monk's skeptical response— "only angels and powerful sorcerers who can fly through the air can reach the Himmapan Forest" —reveals the sacred and inaccessible nature attributed to this legendary realm (Plai Noi, 2019). From a survey of contemporary values regarding mural paintings, particularly the representation of the Traiphum (Three Worlds) in the murals of various temples in Thailand during the Rattanakosin period, it was found that most temples with wall paintings feature the Traiphum behind the principal Buddha image, with more than half of the total number of temples that have murals. However, there are relatively few depictions of the



Himmaphan creatures. The inclusion of Himmaphan animals in murals depends on the knowledge of the artists as well as the requests of the temple, as specified when hiring artists to paint the murals.

In Thai belief, the Himmaphan Forest is considered the home of auspicious and special creatures, such as Garuda, Naga, and other beings that often play significant roles in literature, including their duties in protecting or caring for the human world. Additionally, the Himmaphan Forest is also a place where monks or individuals who practice meditation reside. "The Kingdom of Siam is similar to other Southeast Asian countries that had to open up to receive cultural influences from Western powers. However, Siam differs from other countries in that it has managed to preserve its national culture while harmonizing external influences with its traditional culture, thus creating its unique cultural identity (Lek Sukhum, 2005)." Himmaphan creatures are mythical beings that hold significant roles in Thai literature, particularly in narratives related to the Himmaphan Forest. Although the Himmaphan Forest is a product of imagination, ancient scriptures provide a detailed description of the forest. They elaborate on the types of plants found in the Himmaphan Forest, the landscape with rocky outcrops, streams, and various water sources, which are distinct from real forests. The scriptures also describe various creatures within the Himmaphan Forest in great detail, including their appearances, behaviors, and characteristics, ranging from fierce and frightening to cute and harmless. This reflects an ancient society where both good and evil coexist (Ratchawet, 2003), which symbolizes mystery and wonder. These creatures usually possess unique characteristics and are recognized for their distinct behaviors compared to ordinary animals. Nevertheless, Himmaphan creatures represent only a small charm within the murals and are not a central theme or a necessity to be included in the mural paintings, as observed from the survey conducted in this research (Fine Arts Department, 2018).

The problems encountered in this research can be divided into two main aspects: 1) Issues from the Researcher's Experience: The researchers lack experience in conducting this study, resulting in an overly broad scope of exploration. This has led to extensive time requirements for surveying, including visiting sites and consulting with monks regarding the planning and existence of murals in various temples across three provinces. Notably, the survey included temples in Bangkok and Ratchaburi, amounting to a total of 932 temples. This exploration required a significant amount of time and a high level of detail in understanding the context of each artistic work, and 2) Selection of Resources for Analysis: There are challenges in selecting the appropriate temples or murals for analysis and use in creating contemporary paper sculptures. Careful consideration is required in choosing resources in accordance with research objectives, and difficulties may arise due to the diversity of techniques or styles presented, as well as their artistic value. Therefore, the selected works need to be chosen systematically to align with the concepts intended for presentation in the artwork. The Himmaphan Forest is a concept in Thai literature and mythology regarded as a mysterious and beautiful place, referenced in writings, art, and literature related to deities and mythical creatures.



The current survey reveals that murals in Thai temples from the Rattanakosin period commonly feature the Traiphum, yet there are few representations of Himmaman creatures, which depend on the artists' knowledge and the temple's requirements. This reflects beliefs surrounding the Himmaman Forest as the abode of auspicious and special animals (Bankrithong, 2018). Conducting research on this topic is unprecedented, as it involves a broad area of study that requires exploration of multiple temples, leading to an expansive scope of research and significant time investment in studying the murals across the three provinces. This includes understanding the context of the murals that reflect the values associated with mural paintings in the surveyed areas, alongside the challenges of selecting suitable temples or murals for analysis and creating artwork, with careful consideration of artistic techniques and their value.

The integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary artistic practice represents a crucial aspect of cultural preservation in the modern era. Traditional Khon mask-making techniques, with their sophisticated understanding of mythological iconography and symbolic representation, provide an ideal foundation for translating ancient artistic knowledge into contemporary forms. The paperwork techniques used in traditional Thai crafts, particularly the use of mulberry paper (Saa Paper) in religious and artistic contexts, offer sustainable alternatives to modern synthetic materials.

Contemporary artists worldwide are increasingly turning to traditional materials and techniques as both aesthetic choices and environmental statements. Mulberry paper, with its durability, texture, and cultural significance in Thai Buddhist contexts, provides an ideal medium for creating contemporary interpretations of traditional subjects. When combined with recycled materials, this approach addresses multiple contemporary concerns: Environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and artistic innovation.

The creation of contemporary sculptures based on traditional techniques serves multiple purposes: It makes ancient knowledge accessible to modern audiences, demonstrates the continued relevance of traditional artistic skills, provides a tangible method for preserving cultural memory, and offers practical training opportunities for artisans interested in traditional crafts. This approach aligns with contemporary museum and cultural preservation practices that emphasize the importance of living traditions rather than static historical artifacts.

Objectives

The main objectives of this research were to examine the forms of mural paintings of mythical animals in the Rattanakosin period, to explore the significance of these mythical animals in relation to Buddhism and Thai society, and to create a set of contemporary sculptures inspired by the Rattanakosin-era using paper sculptures based on the process of making Khon masks.

Methodology

The research on the creation of paper sculptures in the form of mythical animals, based on the study of mythical animal representations in Rattanakosin-era mural paintings, explores



the artistic forms of mythical animal murals from the Rattanakosin-era. The goal was to create contemporary paper sculptures of these mythical beings as a continuation of the creative works derived from the research study. The study involved reviewing relevant documents and conducting field data collection of mural paintings from temples featuring Rattanakosin-era murals located in Bangkok, Ratchaburi, and Samut Songkhram. For the mural art analysis and creative artistic endeavors, the researcher conducted the following research processes.

1. Method of Sampling, Population, and Sample Group

The study of Rattanakosin period mural paintings was based on information gathered from sources such as the National Library, the College of Fine Arts Library, and the Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin Library, as well as the Silpakorn University Library. This was conducted to determine how many temples were located in Bangkok, Ratchaburi, and Samut Songkhram that required investigation to obtain comprehensive data necessary for the study. The target population consisted of temples in the three provinces to be studied: Bangkok, Samut Songkhram, and Ratchaburi.

2. Research Instruments

The research instrument used in this study was a survey table for mural paintings in all temples across the three provinces. Fieldwork involved collecting images of mythical animal murals from temples featuring Rattanakosin-era paintings in Bangkok, Ratchaburi, and Samut Songkhram. Two research tables were designed to compile the data.

Table 1 Temple mural survey checklist

| Temple Name | Type of Temple | Rattanakosin Period Mural Paintings | Has Mythical Animals | Year Created |
|-------------|----------------|--|-------------------------|--------------|
| AAA | AAA | / | / | 1800 |

Table 1 was designed for the temples in the three provinces, aimed at determining whether each temple had murals depicting mythical animals. This table consisted of five columns. The first column listed the temple names, the second column indicated the type of temple or its location, the third column included checkmarks for temples that had murals painted during the Rattanakosin period, the fourth column had checkmarks to indicate whether the temple had mythical animal depictions, and the fifth column recorded the year the murals were painted.

Table 2 Types of mythical beings shown in temple murals

| Temple Name | Asura with a Wind Face | Garuda | Kinnara | Deva Paksi | Naga | Swan | Chinese Swan | Elephant Bird | Peacock | Peacock with a Flute |
|----------------|---------------------------------|--------|---------|---------------|------|------|-----------------|------------------|---------|----------------------------|
| A | | | | | | | | | | / |

Table 2 was used to examine how mythical animals were depicted in mural paintings that featured mythical creatures in each area. This table was desgined to explore the values associated with these mythical beings. The names of all mythical animals were sourced from the "Manual of Mythical Animals from the Black Thai Manuscript of the Rattanakosin Period (Ministry of Culture, 2011)."

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Once the survey of the temples in Bangkok, Ratchaburi, and Samut Songkhram was completed, the collected data were analyzed using the formula to calculate the averages.

Percentage = $\left(\frac{\text{Desired Value}}{\text{Total Value}}\right) \times 100$

This led to further data analysis for use in creating contemporary sculptures.

4. Creating Paper Sculptures in the Form of Mythical Animals

This was achieved using paper-making techniques.

Results and Discussion

Results of the survey analysis of the Rattanakosin period temples:

The survey revealed that not all temples from the Rattanakosin period contained mural paintings. Most mural paintings were found in royal and large temples, while smaller temples typically featured mural paintings created by local artisans. It can be observed that the creation or depiction of peace in mural paintings was not particularly common. The survey findings indicate that out of 100 temples examined, only 5-10 temples contained the Himmapan paintings, accounting for only 5-10% of the total.

Table 3 Types of Temples in Bangkok

| Temple Type | Rattanakosin Mural Paintings | Himmapan Creatures | Buddha's Life | Deities | Way of Life | Falling Flowers |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------|----------------|--------------------|
| Special Class Royal Monasteries | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 |
| First-Class Royal Monasteries | 4 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| Second-Class Royal Monasteries | 13 | 8 | 2 | 3 | | |
| Third-Class Royal Monasteries | 15 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| Common Type | 13 | 1 | 9 | 3 | | |



Table 4 Theravada Buddhist Monasteries in Bangkok (Thammayut Sect)

| Temple Type | Rattanakosin Mural Paintings | Himmaphan Creatures | Buddha's Life | Deities | Way of Life | Falling Flowers |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|---------|----------------|--------------------|
| First-Class Royal Monasteries | 2 | | 2 | | | |
| Second-Class Royal Monasteries | 4 | 1 | 4 | | | |
| Third-Class Royal Monasteries | 4 | | 4 | | | |
| Common Type | 1 | 1 | | | | |

Table 5 Public Temples in Bangkok

| Temple Type | Rattanakosin Mural Paintings | Himmaphan Creatures | Buddha's Life | Deities | Way of Life | Falling Flowers |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|---------|----------------|--------------------|
| Mahayana (Klongtoey District) | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Mahayana (Khleng San District) | 2 | | 2 | | | |
| Mahayana (Klong Samwa District) | 3 | | 3 | | | |
| Mahayana (Khan Na Yao District) | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Mahayana (Chom Thong District) | 9 | 2 | 6 | | 1 | |
| Mahayana (Don Mueang District) | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | |
| Mahayana (Din Daeng District) | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Mahayana (Dusit District) | 9 | 6 | 2 | 1 | | 1 |
| Mahayana (Taling Chan District) | 9 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | |
| Mahayana (Thawi Watthana District) | 2 | | 1 | 1 | | |
| Mahayana (Thung Khru District) | 3 | 1 | 2 | | | |
| Mahayana (Thonburi District) | 2 | | 2 | | | |
| Mahayana (Bangkok Noi District) | 7 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | 1 |

Table 5 Public Temples in Bangkok (Continued)

| Temple Type | Rattanakosin Mural Paintings | Himmaphan Creatures | Buddha's Life | Deities | Way of Life | Falling Flowers |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|---------|----------------|--------------------|
| Mahayana (Bangkok Yai District) | 3 | | 2 | 1 | | |
| Mahayana (Bang Kapi District) | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Mahayana (Bang Khun Thien District) | 4 | | 3 | | 1 | |
| Mahayana (Bang Khao Lem District) | 2 | | 2 | | | |
| Mahayana (Bang Khaek District) | 2 | | 1 | | | |
| Mahayana (Nong Khaem District) | 2 | | 2 | | | |
| Mahayana (Huai Khwang District) | 1 | | 1 | | | |

According to the survey, there are a total of 450 temples in Bangkok. Of these, 123 temples have mural paintings, with the majority featuring popular themes. The survey also found that only 34 temples depict Himmaphan animals, accounting for 7.65% of the total number of temples in Bangkok.

Table 6 Survey of Murals in Ratchaburi Province

| Area | Rattanakosin Mural Paintings | Himmaphan Creatures | Buddha's Life | Deities | Way of Life | Falling Flowers |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|---------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Mueang Ratchaburi District | 8 | 1 | 8 | | | |
| Chom Bueng District | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | |
| Suan Phueng District | 3 | | 3 | | | |
| Damnoen Saduak District | 3 | | 2 | 1 | | |
| Ban Pong District | 6 | 2 | 5 | 1 | | |
| Bang Phap District | 3 | 1 | 3 | | | |
| Photharam District | 5 | 2 | 5 | | | |
| Pak Tho District | 2 | | 2 | | | |
| Wat Phleng District | 1 | | 1 | | | |

In Ratchaburi Province, there are 370 temples in total. Among these, 33 temples have mural paintings, representing 8.91% of all temples. Only 7 temples feature painted Himmaphan animals, accounting for 1.89% of all temples.



Table 7 Survey of Mural Paintings in Samut Songkhram Province

| Area | Rattanakosin Period Paintings | Mythical Animals | Buddha Stories | Deities | Way of Life | Dropping Flowers |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|
| Royal Temple, Maha Nikaya | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Maha Nikaya, Bang Khonthi District | 9 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 1 | |
| Maha Nikaya, Samut Songkhram City | 5 | 1 | 5 | | | |
| Maha Nikaya, Amphawa District | 9 | 6 | 9 | | | |

In Samut Songkhram Province, there are 112 temples in total. Of these, 24 temples have mural paintings, accounting for 21.43% of the total number of temples. Additionally, 8 temples display Himmaman mural paintings, making up 7.14% of the total number of temples.

Based on the comprehensive data survey results for this research, the findings revealed the values associated with mythical animals in Thailand during the Rattanakosin period. These values are not widespread, as the survey indicated that the number of temples featuring mural paintings was relatively small, from the early Rattanakosin-era to the present.

From the cumulative data of the surveyed temples across the three provinces, there are a total of 180 temples with murals; However, only 49 temples feature mythical animals, accounting for 27.22% of temples with mural paintings. Those who had influence in depicting mythical animals in mural paintings could be divided into two groups.

1. Artists possess knowledge about mythical animals and incorporate these representations into mural paintings by depicting them in small sections beneath the realms of the cosmos or by distributing them throughout scenes of the Buddha's life. This brings a refreshing charm to the artwork, serving both as moral riddles and filling gaps in the imagery to enhance its completeness.

2. Financiers of the mural paintings, whether they are temples abbots or patrons providing monetary support, are the individuals who pay the artists. Often, artists consult the financiers beforehand to understand their preferences regarding which stories they would like incorporated into the murals.

The creation of mural paintings does not solely enhance the aesthetic value of temple walls but also reflects knowledge, values, culture, and lifestyle. These factors influence the narratives and styles of painting during different periods. Creating mural paintings is essentially a document of the circumstances of the time. Sometimes, artists intentionally or unintentionally embed various stories into their works, but it is the society of that era that shapes the imagination, allowing it to be expressed through mural paintings. After all, art is the world's first language.



Results of the experiment on the creation of contemporary Himmapan paper sculptures.

All the data analyzed from Table 2, which served as a research tool regarding the known mythical animals in each area, were used by the researcher to create a total of 9 pieces of artwork. These works can be divided into 4 sets.

Completed Work Set 1

The first set (Figure 1 and 2) serves as a central collection of symbols representing mythical animals. The Singha is a creature widely recognized and valued by most Thais, featured in mural art wherever mythical animals are depicted. In this collection, there is only one Singha statue, named "Siam Rattan." The researcher has designated this piece as white, as white is the color of the king of Singhas, who rules over all Singhas according to the legend of the Traiphum Phra Ruang.

The Singha is a mythical creature and a symbol of protection, representing power. Many temples have Singha statues placed at entrance gates to guard against malevolent forces. In addition to being a sculpture, the Singha often appears in various settings, such as in mural paintings depicting mythical animals, typically located behind the principal Buddha image. This is based on the belief that the principal Buddha faces the mara (Evil) while turning his back on the Traiphum, reflecting a concept of the Buddha's choice to confront challenges rather than seek comfort. The Traiphum symbolizes comfort, which the Buddha turned away from, thus resulting in mythical creatures being consistently positioned behind the principal Buddha image, as the land of Himmapan serves as the base of Mount Meru and the seven other mountain ranges. This is a common practice among Thai artisans, who frequently depict mythical creatures in their paintings behind the principal Buddha image (Laosunthon & Samran, 2016).

Set 1



Figure 1 Prototype of the Singh

Source: Page 114 of the book "Mural Paintings of Mythical Animals at the Main Hall of Wat Suthat Thep Wararam." Royal Vihara, Wat Suthat Thepwararam. (2018)



Figure 2 Singha 1

Title: Siam Rattan

Size: 13x34x31 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023

Completed Work Set 2

Set 2 (Figure 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) features an animal that represented Bangkok, using the creature known as "Takhro" or "Koshasi," which was often depicted in many temples, commonly found in the context of battling mara (Evil). This set draws inspiration from the mythical animals depicted at Wat Suthat Thep Wararam, specifically the Takhro. The mural painting portrays a scene of four Takhro running, leading to the creation of four sculptures extracted from the mural set in golden frames on the window within the temple hall of Wat Suthat Thep Wararam.

The researcher chose the Takhro because it resembles the Koshasi, possessing great power and a unique story. The Takhro is not widely recognized because it closely resembles the Koshasi, but differs in that its face is smaller and it does not wear elaborate regalia. The Takhro also represents a mythical animal from the Rattanakosin period, and the researcher selected it to raise awareness and interest in the Takhro among the public. The goal is to present the art of mural paintings depicting mythical animals from the Rattanakosin-era.

In creating the work, the researcher utilized basic materials for making traditional masks, adapting the use of mulberry paper to include recycled paper as a substitute in the creative process. The recycled paper was analyzed to find methods of incorporating it into the creation of durable masks. By mixing the paper with glue until it formed a pulp, the researcher was able to create sculptures of mythical animals that are safe, strong, lightweight, beautiful, and suitable for those creating Thai art.

When the mythical animal sculptures are completed, allowing the paper to dry results in a strong yet lightweight form. After drying, paint can be applied to enhance the dimensionality and aesthetics of the sculptures (Laosunthon & Samran, 2016).

Set 2



Figure 3 Prototype of the Takro

Source: Page 264 of the book "Mural Paintings of Mythical Animals at the Main Hall of Wat Suthat Thep Wararam." Royal Vihara, Wat Suthat Thepwararam. (2018)



Figure 4 Suthas Rattan 1

Title: Suthas Rattan 1

Size: 13x36x41 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023



Figure 5 Suthas Rattan 2

Title: Suthas Rattan 2

Size: 13x37x40 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023



Figure 6 Suthas Rattan 3

Title: Suthas Rattan 3

Size: 16x26x34 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023



Figure 7 Suthas Rattan 4

Title: Suthas Rattan 4

Size: 11x33x40 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023

Completed Work Set 3

Set 3 (Figure 8, 9, and 10) is titled "Raj Rattan," inspired by the seahorse depicted in the mural from Wat Kongkaram in Ratchaburi Province. The name "Raj Rattan" combines the words Ratchaburi and Rattanakosin, a name created by the researchers to reflect the fusion of Rattanakosin artistic styles with the mural paintings from Wat Kongkaram, created during the reign of King Rama IV of the Rattanakosin-era. This can be considered a form of ancient Thai art or a traditional style reminiscent of the Ayutthaya period, as evidenced by the use of colors that closely resemble the late Ayutthaya style with minimal development. However, it remains interesting in its narrative elements.

The seahorse figure is located in the Mahanathi Si Thanda, behind the principal Buddha image, and serves as a small detail that brings vibrancy to the scene, as there are usually many fish present, such as the Anon fish, mudfish, catfish, and pike. Fish are rarely seen combined with other mythical creatures. The term "mythical animal" not only refers to adorned animals but also includes those combined with fish. Thus, the researcher chose the seahorse, which is a lesser-known and intriguing element. The researcher created a freestanding sculpture because most fish are found underwater and typically only show their heads, tails, or fins. The seahorse was considered a good choice to create a sculpture that captures the entirety of the creature while still maintaining the grace and movements of swimming (Adulyapichet, 2013).



Prototype of Set 3



Figure 8 Seahorse from Wat Suthat

Source: Aphiwan Adulyapichet. (2013). Wall Paintings of Wat Kongkaram. Page 178.



Figure 9 Raj Rattan 1

Title: Raj Rattan 1

Size: 13x44x21 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023



Figure 10 Raj Rattan 2

Title: Raj Rattan 2

Size: 13x44x21 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023

Completed Work Set 4

Set 4 (Figure 11, 12, and 13) is dedicated to Wat Getkaram, with the title "Kes Rattan." This title combines the name of Wat Getkaram with Rattanakosin. Wat Getkaram, located in Samut Songkhram Province, features a wealth of mural paintings of mythical animals, making it the temple with the most such artworks in the province. It also showcases beautiful and distinct depictions of the Traiphum Phra Ruang. Although its murals may not have been painted for



hundreds of years like those in other temples, they are notable and clearly exhibit contemporary elements.

The painting style incorporates coloring techniques and linework that blend vibrant colors, lending a more modern and delicate appearance rather than relying entirely on traditional colors. For the creative process, the researcher chose to depict the "Hara," an amphibious creature embodying a wide range of colors, making it more contemporary than traditional works. The colors within the Hara, such as turquoise, pink, and green, contribute to its modernity.

Set 4



Figure 11 Prototype of the Hara

Source: Information from the researcher.



Figure 12 Kes Rattan 1

Title: Kes Rattan 1

Size: 13x53x30 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023

Figure 13 Kes Rattan 2

Title: Kes Rattan 2

Size: 13x40x25 cm

Technique: Thai Mixed Media Sculpture

Year Created: 2023



Originality and Body of Knowledge

The Himmapan beings are closely linked to the principles of Buddhism in several ways, particularly in terms of symbolism and meanings that promote religious practices, as shown in Figure 14.

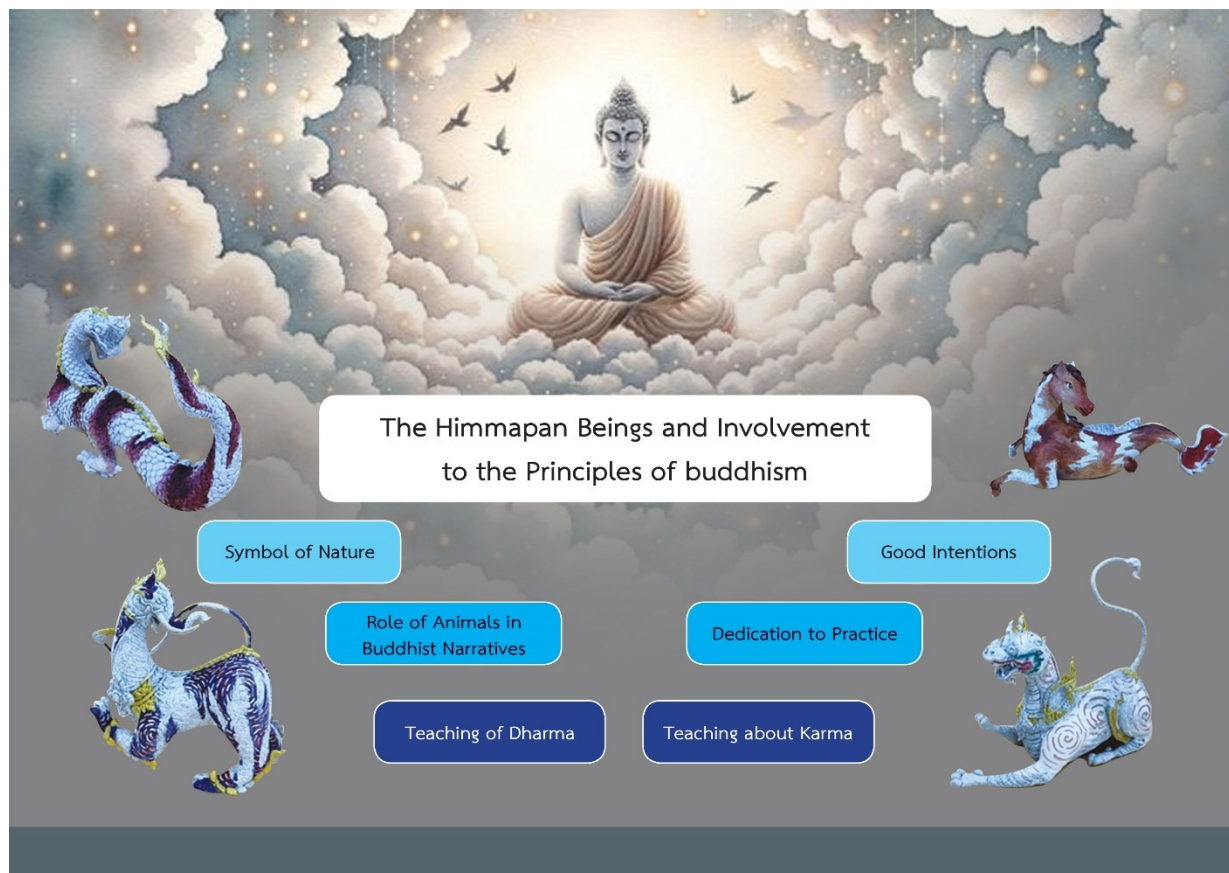


Figure 14 The Himmapan Beings and Involvement with the Principles of Buddhism

Figure 14 illustrates the following:

1. **Symbol of Nature:** Celestial beings are often used as symbols representing the diversity and beauty of nature, which can inspire people to escape from the chaos of daily life and look inward to explore themselves.
2. **Role of Animals in Buddhist Narratives:** Many celestial beings appear in stories related to Bodhisattvas, exemplifying acts of kindness, moral virtues, and the journey towards enlightenment.
3. **Teaching of Dharma:** The core teachings in Buddhism, such as the importance of having a calm mind and avoiding greed, anger, and delusion, are often conveyed through the symbolism of these beings in various narratives.
4. **Teaching about Karma:** Various celestial beings, such as Garuda and Naga, are utilized as tools to teach about karma and its consequences, illustrating how our actions impact our present and future lives.



5. Dedication to Practice: The celestial forest is a place where Bodhisattvas, or practitioners go to cultivate their minds and reach true understanding, with the celestial beings often viewed as protectors or representations of knowledge in the Dharma.

6. Good Intentions: The creatures in the celestial forest often embody virtues such as kindness, patience, and doing good deeds, aligning with the teachings of the Buddha.

Studying celestial beings is not only about understanding the stories but also about gaining spiritual insight.

The celestial beings are interconnected with the concept of Samsara in Buddhism. Matt Stefon, former Encyclopedia Britannica editor, described how the range of Samsara stretches from insects and sometimes vegetables and minerals to the generative god Brahma. The rank of one's birth in the hierarchy of life depends on the quality of the previous life. A variety of explanations of the workings of the karmic process within Samsara have been proposed. According to several interpretations, the soul after death first goes to a heaven or hell until it has consumed most of its good or bad karma.

Inspiration for Practice: Seeing celestial beings in art and literature inspires individuals to practice diligently and cultivate their minds to escape the cycles of Samsara. Thus, celestial beings play an essential role in conveying concepts related to Samsara in Buddhism, enabling people to grasp the core teachings.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Research on Thai paintings depicting Himmaman creatures in Buddhist temples during the Rattanakosin period was conducted in three provinces: Bangkok, Ratchaburi, and Samut Songkhram. The research found that the depiction of Himmaman creatures in Rattanakosin-era paintings was not common, with only 6.34% of temples featuring these creatures in their mural paintings. It can be inferred that the representation of these creatures in mural art may not have been popular because they are often subtly integrated into the tripartite images behind the principal Buddha figures, which may not be widely recognized. Furthermore, artisans may not have studied Himmaman creatures in depth and may not have included them in their mural work. The anatomical representation of these creatures is also complex, which may have deterred ancient craftsmen from including them frequently. The survey covered over 932 temples, identifying only 59 that confirmed the presence of these creatures in their artwork. The study analyzed different types of creatures found in temple mural arts and aimed to create unique paper sculptures by blending traditional Thai sculpture techniques, traditional Thai painting, and fine arts, all while maintaining the unique identity derived from the study of ancient artistic works. The research also produced contemporary mixed media sculptures based on ancient mural paintings, reflecting a continuation of original art forms and providing a direction for the preservation, continuation, and promotion of Thai art and culture, while documenting mural painting information across various temples from the Rattanakosin-era. The study of Thai paintings depicting Himmaman creatures in Rattanakosin-era temples reveals significant insights



into the artistic practices of the time. Notably, the representation of these mythical beings was limited primarily to royal artisans or highly skilled craftsmen, indicating a specialized and possibly exclusive approach to their depiction. Furthermore, the findings highlight that Himmaman creatures were not widely recognized among the general populace, with only a few types achieving familiarity. This suggests that the cultural significance of these figures may have been confined to specific contexts or audiences, which warrants further exploration into the reasons behind their selective representation in art.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin as the funding source for allocating the budget from the income fund under the research grant category for the fiscal year 2022 in the strategic research and innovation development plan (The Project to Support Research, Inventions, Innovations, and Creative Works). This research project is entitled 'The Creation of Animal-Shaped Paper Sculptures Based on the Study of Mythical Beasts in Rattanakosin-Era Paintings' with project code: C58/2565.

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