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Oblique structure in Thai traditional mural painting during the early
Rattanakosin period: a composition analysis

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บทคัดย่อ

ผลงานวิจัยนี้จัดทำขึ้นเพื่อศึกษาการจัดวางโครงสร้างและองค์ประกอบภาพ ตามแนวเส้นทแยง ที่พบในงานจิตรกรรมไทยสมัยรัตนโกสินทร์ โดยใช้การศึกษาทางด้านประวัติศาสตร์ศิลปะ ในการศึกษาการใช้เส้นทแยงในงานจิตรกรรมไทยแบบเป็นไปตามลำดับเวลา (Chronological Order) และการวิเคราะห์จากองค์ประกอบทางศิลปะ (Formalist Technique) งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งค้นหาเอกลักษณ์ในการใช้เส้นทแยง ที่พบในงานจิตรกรรมไทย โดยทำการเก็บรวบรวมหลักฐานจากแหล่งต่าง ๆ เช่นหลักฐานปฐมภูมิ ได้แก่ตัวอย่างผลงานจิตรกรรมไทยประเพณีสมัยรัตนโกสินทร์ตอนต้น จากวัดต่าง ๆ จำนวน 5 แห่ง ตลอดจนเนื้อหาข้อมูลจากบทความ, ผลงานวิจัยและบันทึกที่เกี่ยวข้อง จากการวิจัยพบว่า การใช้เส้นทแยงเป็นอีกหนึ่งองค์ประกอบที่มีบทบาท ในงานจิตรกรรมไทยประเพณี สามารถสื่อถึงเอกลักษณ์ความเป็นไทยทั้งในแง่ของความงาม และสะท้อนถึงความคิดของช่างไทยในสมัยต้นกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ได้ ผู้วิจัยหวังเป็นอย่างยิ่งว่าผลงานวิจัยนี้จะช่วยส่งเสริมความเข้าใจเพิ่มเติมเกี่ยวกับอีกหนึ่งองค์ประกอบในศิลปะไทยและชี้ให้เห็นถึงความชาญฉลาดของช่างเขียนไทยในอดีต ในการนำเส้นทแยงมาใช้ประกอบงานจิตรกรรม เพื่อประโยชน์ใช้สอยทั้งแง่ความงาม การสื่อสารกับผู้ชม และเป็นการแก้ปัญหาการออกแบบ ทำให้ได้ผลงานจิตรกรรมไทยประเพณีที่เปี่ยมเอกลักษณ์

คำสำคัญ: จิตรกรรมไทยประเพณี เส้นทแยง องค์ประกอบศิลปะ รัตนโกสินทร์ตอนต้น

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the oblique structure in Thai traditional painting during the Early Rattanakosin Period. Using a combination of art historical analysis by analyzing the use of oblique structure in Thai traditional painting by chronological approach and formalist techniques, this study aims to identify and analyze the distinctive features of oblique composition in Thai painting from this period, providing insights that can be utilized by graphic designers seeking to create narratives with a Thai artistic style. The paper draws on a wide range of primary sources, including surviving examples of Early Rattanakosin painting, contemporary texts on Thai art, and relevant historical records. Through its analysis, the study sheds new light on the role of oblique structure in Thai traditional painting, its significance as a formal element in the Early Rattanakosin Period. Ultimately, this research provides a deeper understanding of Thai art history and contributes to the ongoing discourse on the formal and cultural dimensions of oblique structure in painting.

Keywords: Thai Traditional Painting Oblique Composition Early Rattanakosin

Introduction

Thai Traditional Painting

Thai traditional painting is a rich and unique art form that has been passed down through generations. Among its many distinct techniques and styles, the use of guidelines to create balanced and harmonious compositions is an invisible key element. However, while there is a considerable body of literature on visible elements of Thai traditional painting such as colours, lines, characters etc, there is a noticeable gap regarding the use of oblique guidelines in particular. This research aims to investigate the use of oblique guidelines in Thai traditional painting and explore their significance in creating compositions that reflect the cultural and aesthetic values of Thai art.

The Rattanakosin Period

The Rattanakosin Period, also known as the Bangkok Period, began in 1782 when King Rama I moved the capital of Siam (now known as Thailand) to Bangkok. During this period, mural painting became a prominent art form, particularly in the religious and royal contexts. The mural painting of the early Rattanakosin Period is considered "Thai Classic Style" because it represents a distinct artistic style that developed in Thailand during this period. The murals in this period were developed by highly skilled artists who had a deep understanding of the cultural and artistic traditions as they are the same set of artisans who moved from Ayutthaya after its collapsed (Leksukhum, 2012). As a result, they serve as important examples of the style and helped to establish it as a major artistic tradition in Thailand. (Bhirasri, 1892-1962)

The use of oblique guidelines in Thai traditional painting of the early Rattanakosin Period is a fascinating area of study. It is intriguing to see how this unique approach to composition creates a space that suggests Thainess. This study's significance lies in its exploration of the traditional Thai oblique guideline as a primary conceptual structure in graphic design. The scope of the study is the Thai Mural painting, which appears on the window bay panels of the temple in the Rattanakosin Period (A.D. 1782~1851). By investigating this aspect of Thai traditional painting, this study seeks to shed light on the often-overlooked creative thinking behind Thai traditional graphics.

Historical Context

The history of Thailand can be classified into four distinct periods, spanning from Sukhothai to the Modern Rattanakosin Period. Thai traditional graphics encompass predominantly Buddhist art and Thai folklore influenced by Hinduism. The practice of mural painting in temples and palaces is a prominent feature of this art form. Over time, Thai painting has been subject to influences from Chinese, Indian, and Khmer cultures, (Bhirasri, 1892-1962) gradually evolving into a refined and sophisticated art form. Given the multifaceted nature of Thai traditional paintings, this research study directs attention to the aspects of composition and narration, which are interrelated in complex ways. Given that Thai art is rooted in the narration of Buddhist stories, it is common to find multiple episodes depicted in mural paintings. This research study is therefore grounded in the exploration of this particular aspect of Thai traditional painting.

The Thai period spans approximately 780 years (in 2018 CE). The periods are as follows: 1) Sukhothai period, which existed from 1238 to 1438 CE (200 years) 2) Ayutthaya period, which existed from 1351 to 1767 CE (416 years) 3) Thonburi period, which existed from 1767 to 1782 CE (15 years) 4) Rattanakosin period, which began in 1782 and continues to the present (236 years as of 2018 CE).

The appearance of the oblique guideline in Thai traditional paintings from past to present can be summarized as follows.

Sukhothai Period (1238 to 1438 CE)

Thai painting can be traced back to a stone carving on the slate panel of the Srichum temple in Sukhothai (figure1), which is believed to have been brought to Thailand by Buddhist monks from India. (Ringis, 1990) However, this stone carving from the Sukhothai era does not prominently feature the use of oblique lines. Instead, different scenes from the story are divided by architectural elements, and depth is conveyed through overlapping forms. This technique differs from the oblique structure, where the distance between two objects is related in a diagonal relation.

Late Ayutthaya Period (1351 to 1767 CE.)

The utilization of oblique guidelines in Thai painting can be traced back to the late Ayutthaya kingdom, as prior works were damaged due to weather conditions. The Thai painting style originated from Indian Buddhist painting through Sri Lanka (Ceylon), but the late Ayutthaya period saw significant adaptations to local thought, needs, and materials. Studies by Akharawatthanakun (2010) reveals that the composition of traditional Thai paintings during this period featured a prominent use of the zig-zag Sin-tao line to separate the painting's space (figure1). The Sin-tao line was utilized to depict near and far distances for foreground and background elements. However, during this period, the Sin-tao line was primarily utilized as a scene-dividing element and not prominently as a guideline.

Early Rattanakosin Period (1782 to 1851 CE.)

The present research focuses on the mural paintings created during the early Rattanakosin Period. Similar to the preceding period, the murals of this period depict scenes from Buddhist mythology and the Jataka tales. These murals represent a revival and flourishing of the artistic style of artisans from the preceding Ayutthaya period. Notably, the Rattanakosin style places a greater emphasis on established customs, resulting in a more stylized feel compared to the comparatively naturalistic Ayutthaya style. This stylistic evolution is exemplified by the prominent use of oblique guidelines in the composition of early Rattanakosin murals, which is not limited to the zig-zag form seen in Ayutthaya, but is utilized extensively in the delineation of both elements and conceptual space within traditional Thai painting. The oblique guideline serves multiple purposes, including separating scenes, creating depth, guiding narration, and highlighting the connections between characters. In essence, it enhances the unique composition and narration that captures the perspective of Thai people in the past. More detailed information regarding this will be provided under the topic: Oblique Guideline in Perspective of Thai Traditional Painting.

Modern Rattanakosin Period (1851 CE.~)

During the Modern Rattanakosin Period, Thailand faced the impact of colonialism and imperialism as European powers sought to expand their influence in the region. Despite this challenge, there were significant changes in Thai society, including the modernization, industrialization, and development of a more democratic political system. There were significant changes in Thai arts as well. Traditional Thai painting saw a transformation with the introduction of Western art influences. From the late period of Rama III reign to the reign of King Rama IV onwards saw a fusion of traditional Thai and Western art styles, where Thai artists began to incorporate the use of perspective, shading, and human anatomy into their work. This shift from using the oblique guide line to perspective had an effect on the composition of paintings. However, the use of the oblique guideline in other forms, such as Sin-tao line (in a more curvy form) or in forms of natural elements, continued. The attempt to tell various stories using perspective and other Western techniques resulted in a unique form of art that while appreciated by many, some scholars might critique for diluting the essence of Thai art. Nonetheless, evidence from the sketching of the temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew) shows that the draft was still drawn in the oblique style.

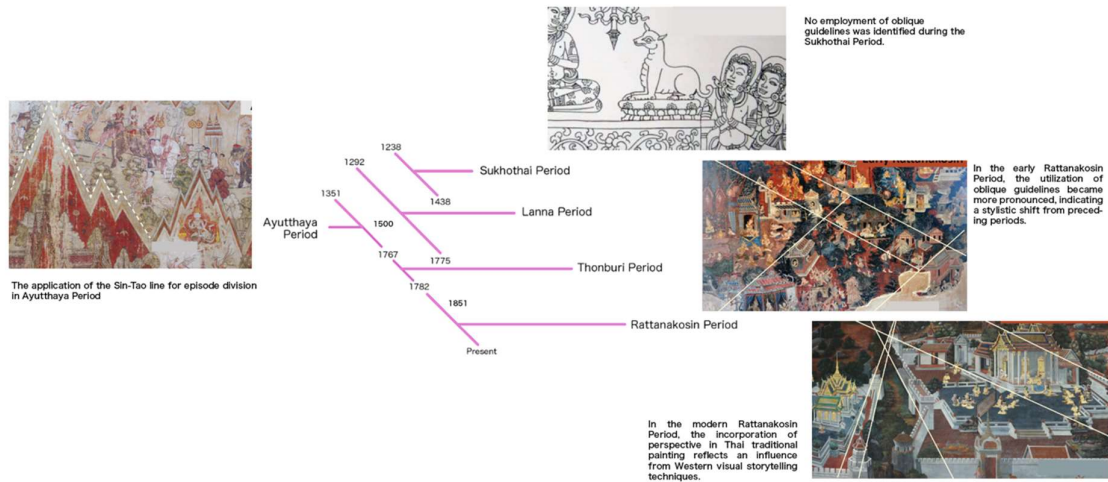


Figure 1. The appearance of oblique guideline in Thai traditional paintings from Sukhothai to Modern Rattanakosin Period
(source : Author)

Composition Analysis

Thai traditional paintings are not only used for their aesthetic qualities; they were also used as a tool to educate people about Buddhism, as not everybody could read and write. Therefore, this study conducts a composition analysis based on both the decorative function and narrative function in the following aspects: overall composition, perspective, line and form, narration, and social. In this study, 87 mural paintings from 5 temples were observed. (Wat Khongkharam, Buddhaisawan Chapel, Wat Dusidaram, Wat Ratchasittharam, Wat Nor Phuthankul) These temples are renowned temples built from the late Ayutthaya to the early Rattanakosin era, all patronized by kings. Thus, the artisans who created them are "royal artisans" who inherited and developed the style that can represent the traditional style of Thailand (Narisara, 1863 – 947). The wall panel on which this research focuses is the window bay panels inside the temple's Vihara as it is the part that consists of lots of details and complex narration. Traditionally, these panels present the life of Prince Siddhartha, who is known thenceforward as Buddha. The second popular theme was the 550 prior lives (Jatakas) of the Buddha.

Oblique Composition in Thai Traditional Painting

The Vihara is a physical simulation of the Buddha's journey towards enlightenment. During the early Rattanakosin period, the Viharas were commonly arranged according to a customary pattern, illustrated in the figure 2. The principal Buddha statue is centrally positioned, and a panel portraying the cosmology (Tribhumi) lies behind the Buddha. Another panel faces the Buddha's altar, depicting the moment when he conquered Mara and attained enlightenment (Maravichaya; Buddha Over Mara). The window bay panels surrounding the Buddha depict the various stages of his life and teachings that he has been through recalled during his moment of enlightenment. Which were integrated into his doctrine. The panels collectively convey a single message of the triumph of good over evil. Additionally, the painting's overall layout is characterized by the prominent use of oblique guidelines to establish balance within the composition.

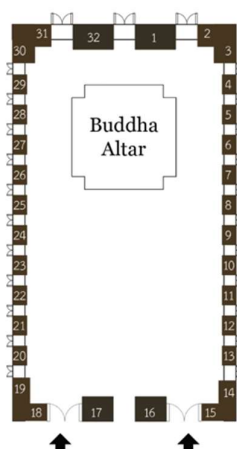


Figure 2. Panel number 31,32,1,2 portraying the cosmology (Tribhumi). Panel number 16,17 depicting the Buddha Over Mara scene (Maravichaya.) Window bay panels, number 3-14, 19-30 depicts the life of Buddha or Jataka.
(source : Author)

Buddhist stories are often depicted on window bay panels that cover entire wall panels in Viharas. These murals are highly detailed and encompass multiple episodes from a specific story, often spanning across multiple panels or sections. For instance, a series of murals portraying the story of the Vessantara Jataka may illustrate key scenes, such as the prince relinquishing his possessions, his banishment from the kingdom, and his reunion with his family, in one panel (figure 3). Explanatory captions or text in Thai script are frequently absent from these murals. In most cases, these key scenes are interlaced with one another harmoniously along an invisible oblique guide line as opposed to being separated by visible lines on a vertical-horizontal grid, which is a rare occurrence. The oblique guide is observed to be a multiple pattern that appears similar to the cracks on a material's surface (figure 4), indicating that there are numerous possibilities for an artisan to create the composition of episodes using this guideline. Moreover, the composition based on various patterns of oblique guides appears more intricate than that on a vertical and horizontal grid line. Artisans skillfully balance the size and position of each episode, where smaller pieces of episodes may be more prominent than larger ones, placed in the middle of the picture. The biggest piece of episode may not necessarily be the most important; it could serve to establish a city, forest, or palace scene, requiring a larger space.

Typically, palace scenes are positioned at the bottom of the wall panel to establish the ground line. Meanwhile, natural scenery such as forests, seas, or skies is usually placed at the top of the wall panel to create a sense of lightness and give a sense of a receding distance. This is done to connect with the uppermost panel of the temple, which always depicts the figure of the deva. In some cases, this contrast between the earthly and heavenly realms is further enhanced by the lower part, which may represent the underworld, whether Naga's world or the image of hell, according to Buddhist cosmology. It is plausible to assume that the artisan exercised consideration for the gravitation when producing the painting, as evidenced by the strategic placement of weighty elements such as architecture towards the lower region.

In greater detail, the utilization of diagonal composition imbues a sense of motion and dynamism in the artwork. The artisan adeptly employs spatial arrangement to achieve this effect, positioning figures and objects within the picture plane. Additionally, it can be observed that the elements within each segment,

divided by oblique guidelines, also slant in accordance with said guidelines. According to Narisara, (1863 – 947), Thai painting characteristically features four categories of creatures, namely Kranok, Nari, Krabi Kacha (which refers to ornaments, humans, inhumans, and animals), portrayed in a diagonal stance derived from dance postures. The upright pose of the female figure, known as Tribhanga or contrapposto, is heavily influenced by Indian art and is a crucial feature in the representation of the human form. The entire figure is organized around oblique axes, lending it an S-shaped rhythm and a flowing line that, in tandem with appropriate hand gestures, communicates a wide range of emotions without relying on facial expressions. Overall, the oblique composition generates a sense of equilibrium and motion within the painting, guiding the viewer's gaze from one section to the next and forging a sense of coherence between the various components of the work.



Figure 3. From left to right: 1.The murals portray the story of the Vessantara Jataka under the oblique guideline. 2.The oblique conceptual space results from the oblique composition. 3.Natural elements such as trees are placed along the oblique guideline and utilized as a scene divider. 4.The depth of architecture is represented by oblique lines. All in all, the oblique line gives rise to a distinctive aesthetic that is characterized not only by its prominent appearance but also by the creation of negative space. The painting, when viewed holistically as both a visual and narrative work, reveals a captivating zig-zag space that is interwoven with the objects depicted in the image. This space is formed by the shapes and forms that emerge along the oblique line and contributes to the mesmerizing and fluid representation of the space.(source : Author)

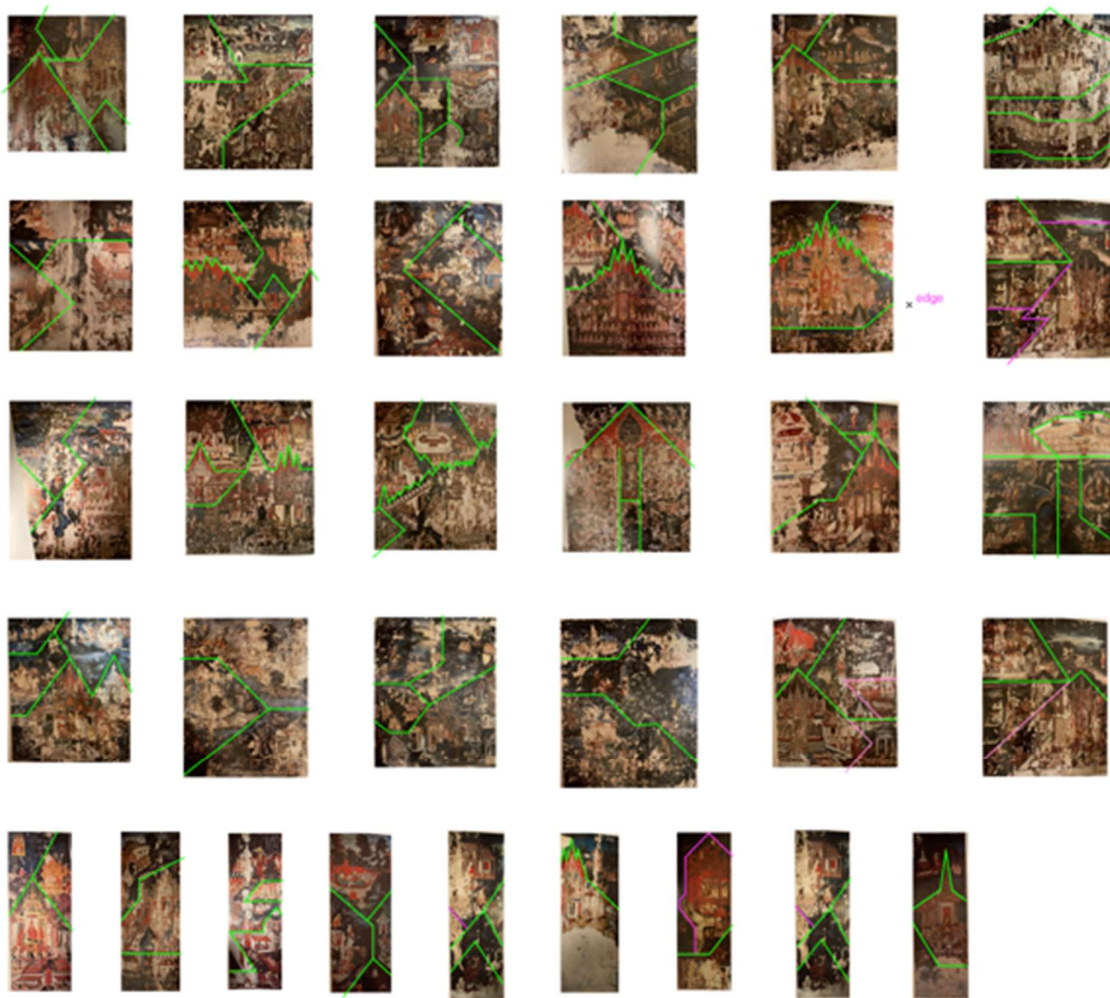


Figure 4. The green lines traced along the border of each scenes in one panel shows that the oblique guides create multiple patterns that resemble cracks on a material's surface, offering many options for artisans to compose their work. These patterns result in a more intricate composition than using vertical or horizontal grid lines.

(source : Author)

Forms and Elements of Oblique Guidelines in Thai Traditional Painting

As previously mentioned, Thai traditional painting is renowned for its elaborate and meticulous representations of the life of Buddha and the scenes from Buddha's Ten Birth Tales (Jataka). The division of scenes within Thai traditional painting constitutes a crucial element in organizing and presenting the artwork in a visually harmonious and coherent manner. Typically, each wall panel of Thai traditional painting comprises numerous scenes or episodes, with the division of scenes being accomplished through the utilization of oblique guidelines.

This study explores the utilization of oblique in lines and shapes in Thai traditional painting to generate an overall visual impression, including positive and negative space. Artisans aim to establish a sense of balance and harmony in Thai traditional painting by incorporating such guidelines in their works. The use of oblique lines and forms is evident in several components of the painting. The Sin-Tao line is the most

conspicuous oblique line that functions as a scene-divider, similar to comic blocks. Multiple paintings imply that this line and the forms contained within it are interconnected. For instance, the Sin-tao line aligns with the palace rooftop's slope or the deva's halo, while in other instances, the elements are deliberately composed to fit the oblique space created by the Sin-tao line.

The artisan also employs a conceptual oblique line as a means of indirectly separating each scene, while utilizing natural graphical elements, such as walls, trees, rivers, rocks, and roads, to create borders between each scene. This approach ensures the seamless flow of the narrative for the audience. These elements are meticulously drawn in oblique shapes that harmoniously interlace with each other along the oblique guide line, allowing for sharing with other scenes or episodes. The use of natural elements to divide the scene results in a softer and smoother overall picture that is not merely decorative but capable of creating mesmerizing space. Indeed, viewers can imagine characters walking from one place to another through the woods, entering a wall through an open door, and progressing to the next scene. These oblique elements imbue the painting with a sense of movement and energy, uniting the overall composition. Although the oblique lines may appear randomly crisscrossed in the big picture, a closer examination reveals that they are connected to other parts of the image, (figure 5). This demonstrates that the artisan carefully planned the overall space of the picture in accordance with the story before embarking on the actual drawing. The use of these elements not only separates scenes or episodes of a story, but also arranges them in a specific order to tell a complete narrative, which will be further elaborated in the topic "Oblique Guideline in Thai Traditional Painting : Enhancing Visual Narrative."

Oblique Guideline in Perspective Representation of Thai Traditional Painting

Thai traditional painting represents the artist's beliefs, values, and aspirations, and aims to convey a spiritual message to the viewer. It is an art form that is "inside out" and transcends nature by expressing the artist's innermost thoughts and feelings through the use of symbolic and meaningful colors, lines, and forms. Although oblique guidelines are not widely discussed, they play a significant role in the perspective representation of Thai traditional painting. Like many oriental art forms of the same period, Thai traditional painting often employs oblique techniques to create a sense of depth and three-dimensionality in the painting. Rather than being constrained to a fixed vanishing point, the artist can create an organic sense of space that reflects the movement and energy of the depicted scene. Through the use of oblique techniques, an artisan can portray multiple scenes from various times and places within a single image, without being limited by size or distance. Objects in the foreground and background are of equal size and placed on the same plane, creating a sense of harmony and balance in the composition. Notably, the oblique representation in Thai traditional painting is not strictly based on the oblique theory. At times, the artisan creates an illusion of depth and space by presenting multiple views of the same object.

Thai traditional paintings of Modern Rattanakosin Period, underwent a shift in artistic styles and techniques. Thai artists began to incorporate Western perspective into their work. However, while Western perspective was adopted into Thai traditional painting during this era, it was modified to suit the unique aesthetic of Thai art. The use of perspective in Thai traditional painting was often more subtle than in Western art, and was employed to create a sense of depth and space, rather than to achieve a completely realistic depiction. Figure 1: lower right, displays the Ramayana painting on the balcony of the Jade Buddha Temple, which is considered to be the world's longest mural painting. Numerous episodes of the story were arranged next to one another on a continuous wall panel to create a panoramic view. However, narrating various episodes of the story on one panel using perspective methods did not enhance the realism of the scene, as there were numerous points of view in the picture. Even though they were all drawn on one

continuous panel, the disconnection between the scenes could be easily seen, as compared to the paintings in the early Rattanakosin Period that were drawn on oblique guidelines which allowed for a more flexible composition and the depiction of multiple stories in one painting without compromising the overall harmony of the work. It is clearly seen that the perspective, which emphasizes the illusion of depth, made it difficult to depict multiple stories simultaneously in a single painting. As objects in the background appeared smaller and could be blocked by objects in the foreground, making it harder for the viewer to discern multiple stories in one painting. However, it is interesting to note that the draft of this wall painting on Thai manuscript, shows that even though the end product was represented in perspective, the artisan drew it according to oblique guidelines. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. As the area of drawing is large, the story consists of various episodes, and many artisans are involved, planning is important. This draft shows that even though there is no evidence or theory written about oblique guidelines in Thai traditional painting, or how much the western influences Thai art, the oblique guideline is a tool that artisans keep in mind first and use as a basis to create Thai art.

(source : https://www.matichon.co.th/education/news_346565)

Oblique Guidelines in Thai Traditional Painting: Enhancing Visual Narrative

In consideration of the characteristics of Thai traditional painting, which often encompasses multiple narrative episodes on a single panel, the oblique guideline serves as a fundamental element that not only contributes to the compositional structure but also plays a pivotal role in communicating the underlying story of the artwork. The oblique guideline serves to direct the viewer's gaze through the piece by organizing the spatial relationships between the visual elements and the narrative. Additionally, it imparts a sense of motion and depth, thereby amplifying the storytelling aspect of the artwork.

Thai art has been strongly influenced by Indian art. Dehejia, (1990) categorized the narration modes of Buddhist painting in the Ajanta caves into seven modes. This present research founds that Thai traditional painting shares many aspects with those found in the Ajanta caves, especially the Synoptic Narration mode, which involves the depiction of multiple episodes from a story within a single frame, without clear communication of their temporal sequence. The representation of multiple episodes typically includes the repeated figure of the protagonist, as seen in Thai mural paintings such as the example of Vessantara Jataka (Figure 6), where the protagonist (Prince Vessantara) and other main characters, such as his family and the evil Brahmin Jujuka, are shown in multiple scenes within a single frame. However, the order of events is not communicated, leaving the viewer to infer the relationships between them. Different episodes are perceived simultaneously by the viewer, which undermines the chronology of the story, and the outcome is already visible from the outset. In other words, the viewer already knows the basic facts of the story, and the purpose of the synoptic visual narrative is to convey a deeper message about the victory of good over evil.



Figure 6. Vessantara Jataka: Buddhist tale of Prince Vessantara, who gave away everything to those in need, including his wife and children, before eventually regaining all and becoming a Buddha in the later life. In most of the panels, the narration does not follow chronological order. The artisan placed each scene next to the other by geological order. The palace is on the top left, the village scenes in the middle and the forest scenes are placed on the right side.

(source : Fine Arts Department. (2005). Mural Paintings, Suphan Buri Province [Local publication].
Nonthaburi: Cyber Rock Agency Group Co., Ltd.)

In the Vihara, worshippers are required to walk clockwise as they perform the prescribed rite of circumambulation. This clockwise movement affects the order of the episodes that begin from the top left side of the President Buddha (as shown in Figure 2). For instance, if the theme is the life of Buddha, the first scene would start here and move chronologically clockwise. In the case the theme is Jataka, each story from the life before Buddha is arranged in chronological order, with the first story at the top left corner. The Vessantara Jataka, which is the last life before becoming Buddha, is mostly arranged on the opposite side. However, each panel comprises various scenes arranged along an oblique line. The viewer is able to view the story from various positions, including high to low, and can follow the narrative from left to right, top, or bottom across the images. To reduce confusion, Thai art employs diagonal arrangements of rocks, trees, and city walls, as well as Sin-tao lines to separate the different stories. This narrative structure allows artisans to design stories in a flexible way while still providing an enjoyable experience for the audience. In the past, mural painting was considered a form of mass media that reached a large audience, particularly those who were close to temples. As a result, most viewers would have been familiar with the stories that were depicted, which were typically those preached by monks. Discontinuous scenes in the murals are interconnected with oblique guidelines, which forces the audience to actively participate in the storytelling process. This approach to visual narrative is the opposite of the way stories are usually heard or read, where elements are pieced together to form a complete story. The use of oblique guidelines is critical in enabling viewers to understand and unravel the synoptic visual narrative. This mode of narration can be found in a more complex form in the Ajanta caves in India. For example, in one panel, each scene contains multiple narrative elements that are connected as a series, making it impossible to know where to start or end if one is unfamiliar with the story.

The similarity between Thai traditional painting and painting in Ajanta cave is that, in most of the panels, the narration does not follow a chronological order. For example, in Figure 6, the story of Vessantara Jataka, which the artisan generally breaks down into 12 scenes, has a complex narration. The story starts from the left side of the panel, then moves upwards and downwards. From scene 6, which is in the middle, the viewer's eye has to jump across to the farthest right, then take another loop to the left. The last scene ends up right next to the beginning, and the viewer's eyes track along the oblique guideline. There is no text written, making it seem impossible for the viewer with no prior knowledge to understand this story. One of the implications of this representation method is that the artist relied on a knowing viewer who was familiar with the story being depicted. In the Vihara which presents the enlightenment moment of Buddha to people, telling of the story is more important than the revealing of the facts. In other words, the viewer already knows the basic facts of the story, but the experience of hearing the story told or retelling it to oneself is what is significant. This is because the telling of the story is part of a larger teleological scheme, or end game, that is meant to convey a deeper message: the ultimate truth of "good over evil."

Synoptic Narration is a powerful technique that allows artists to convey multiple episodes of a story within a single frame, creating a complex visual narrative. However, in Thai traditional painting, the use of an oblique structure is more evident. Artisans use this technique to provide hints that aid the audience's enlightenment of the story's deeper message. Also, while both traditions share some similarities in terms of subject matter, Thai traditional painting may also feature different levels of reality, such as the earthly realm and the realm of the gods, which are depicted simultaneously in the same image and divided by a Sin-tao line. Different artists may use different techniques to convey narrative, yet the basic arrangement of the story across the wall panels can be seen as following a geographical relationship. From figure 6, the stories that take place in the palace, town, and forest are grouped to each other, and the narration follows the order of the events arranged on the narrative guideline.

Oblique Guidelines in Thai Traditional Painting : Reflection of Culture, Religion and Society

Thai traditional painting is a reflection of the cultural and religious values that have shaped Thai society for centuries. Buddhism plays an important role in traditional Thai painting, as it reinforces the image of the king as a virtuous and enlightened leader. The painting associates the king with the god and depicts him as a devout Buddhist, reinforcing the idea that the king is a benevolent ruler deserving of respect and loyalty from his subjects.

In the past, Western perspectives on Thai art were not popular in Siam until the Modern Rattanakosin era. Western sources such as *Du Royaume de Siam* (Simon de la Loubère, 1691) and *Histoire naturelle et politique du Royaume de Siam* (Gervaise, 1690) reflect the point of view of Westerners towards Thai art, often depicting it as 'unpleasant' and difficult to understand. This may be because Thai art prefers to represent art in an idealistic way rather than a realistic one.

The absence of perspective in traditional Thai painting is a deliberate choice, reflecting the focus on creating a harmonious composition rather than achieving a realistic depiction of space and depth. Thai traditional painting also uses oblique lines to represent not only physical movement but also spiritual or social connections between figures in the scene. Characters are often positioned in a hierarchical order based on their status, reinforcing the hierarchical social structure of Thai society. The use of a triangular structure composed of two oblique lines facing each other suggests harmony and can create a sense of balance and stability. Additionally, the use of oblique guidelines to interlace different scenes in Thai traditional painting reflects the concept of Thailand as a land of diverse cultures and races living in harmony under an invisible guideline.

Conclusion

Oblique structure in Thai traditional mural painting during the early Rattanakosin period plays a significant role in the composition and narrative techniques of the artwork. The use of oblique guidelines in Thai painting allows for the division of scenes and episodes, creating visually harmonious and coherent compositions. These oblique elements not only separate the scenes but also arrange them in a specific order to tell a complete narrative. The oblique structure interconnected with other parts of the image, demonstrating careful planning by the artisans. The use of natural elements, such as walls, trees, and rivers, as borders between scenes adds a sense of movement and energy to the overall picture. The oblique structure in Thai traditional painting reflects the artist's beliefs, values, and aspirations, conveying a spiritual message to the viewer. The culmination of this research, along with two previous studies by the author, "Exploring the Layout Design of Tribhumigatha: Analyzing the Uniqueness of Thai Heritage Manuscript" (Charoenkijajorn, 2023) and "Continuity Across Horizons: Graphical Analysis of the Tribhumigatha Manuscript Rear Side" (Charoenkijajorn, 2024), will be synthesized in the chapter on "Narrative in Thai Illustration" in the author's PhD dissertation. This synthesis will provide a comprehensive analysis of the narrative structures found in Thai illustration, focusing specifically on the vertical, horizontal, and oblique orientations. The findings of these studies can serve as a resource for graphic designers seeking to infuse their narratives with an authentic Thai artistic style, offering insights and guidelines for the creative processes of art and design ideation and production.

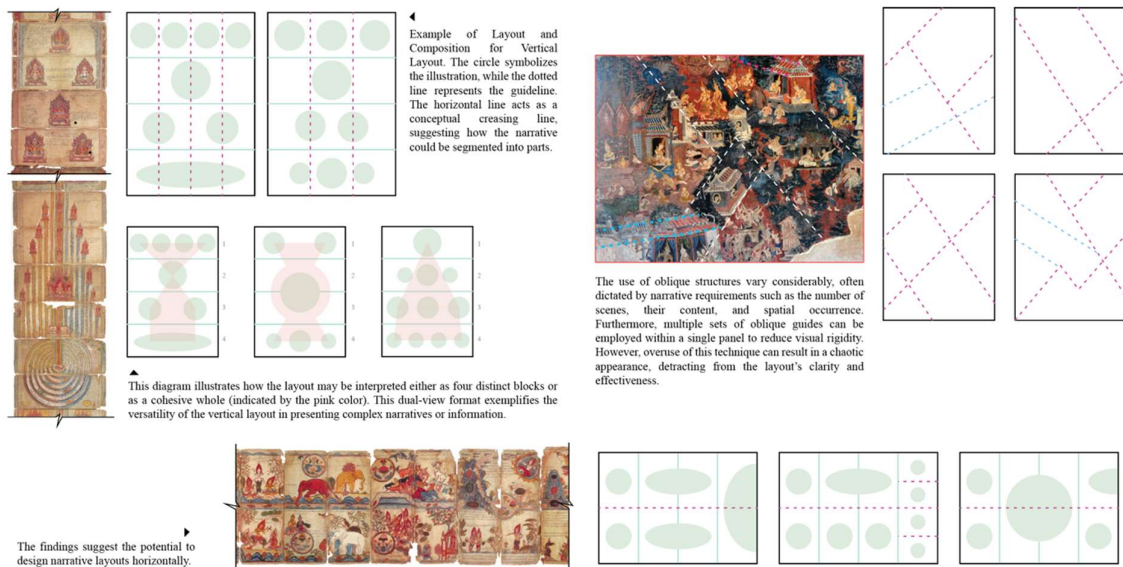


Figure 7. Visual Narratives Unveiled: An In-Depth Exploration of Thai Illustration Structures Through Visual Analysis." This figure offers insights and guidelines for the creative processes involved in art and design ideation and production that represents Thai visual narratives.

(source : author)

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