

# **The Thao Thep Krasattri and Thao Si Sunthon Memorial: Seen from an Artistic Viewpoint<sup>1</sup>**

*Sopon Supaviriyakorn*<sup>2</sup>

## **Abstract**

This article presents the historic bravery of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon. It focuses on illustrating their wisdom, bravery, ability to lead, charisma and faith that people have had in them. However, the article's primary aim is to analyze the general perception of artistic elements; such as shape, line, direction, balance and emotional experience; meant to create beauty. Analysis has revealed that the elegance of the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thao Si Sunthon Sculpture located in Thalang, Phuket, is contributed by an original pattern and an artist's creativity. The artist appreciated the content, intelligence, folk wisdom and faith which reflect the two heroines' courage. As a result, the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thao Si Sunthon Memorial, to the people of Thalang and all Thais, is not only artistically beautiful but also symbolizes the bravery of the two heroines.

**Keywords:** Thao thep Krasattri, Thao Si Sunthon, Appreciation of Artistic Beauty, History of Phuket, Sculpture

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally written in Thai. It was translated and edited by Sudarat Srirak, Yeohoon Kim and Steven Hryniw

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer, Faculty of International Studies, Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus  
sopon.s@phuket.psu.ac.th

# อนุสาวรีย์ท้าวเทพกษัตรี ท้าวศรีสุนทร มุมมองในเชิงความงามทางศิลปะ

โสภณ ศุภวิริยากร<sup>3</sup>

## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ได้กล่าวถึงความกล้าหาญ ความแข็งแกร่งของท้าวเทพกษัตรี ท้าวศรีสุนทร ตามข้อมูลเชิงประวัติศาสตร์ โดยเน้นที่ความฉลาด ความกล้า ความเป็นผู้นำ ความมีบารมี และความน่าศรัทธา โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อวิเคราะห์ลักษณะของการรับรู้ทั่วไป ไปเกี่ยวกับความงามในแง่ขององค์ประกอบศิลป์ เช่น รูปร่าง รูปทรง เส้น ทิศทาง ความสมดุล และความงามในด้านความรู้สึก เมื่อวิเคราะห์แล้วพบว่าความงามของประติมากรรมท้าวเทพกษัตรี ท้าวศรีสุนทร เกิดขึ้นอย่างมีแบบแผน มีที่มา ประกอบกับความคิดสร้างสรรค์ของผู้สร้าง (ช่าง) ซึ่งเข้าถึงเนื้อหาสาระ สติปัญญา คติ ความเชื่อ และความศรัทธา ที่สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความกล้าหาญของวีรสตรีทั้งสองท่าน ด้วยปัจจัยดังกล่าว อนุสาวรีย์ของท้าวเทพกษัตรีและท้าวศรีสุนทรในมุมมองของชาวกลาง และชาวไทยทุกคนจึงไม่ได้มีเฉพาะความงดงามในเชิงศิลปะเท่านั้น หากแต่ยังสะท้อนถึงความกล้าหาญของวีรสตรีทั้งสองท่านไปพร้อมกันด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** ท้าวเทพกษัตรี ท้าวศรีสุนทร มุมมองในเชิงความงามทางศิลปะ ประวัติศาสตร์ของภูเก็ต ประติมากรรม

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<sup>3</sup> อาจารย์ ประจำคณะวิทยาศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตภูเก็ต

“The Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Memorial: Seen from an Artistic Viewpoint” is an art article focusing on analyzing the memorial’s beauty in terms of art composition consisting of line, shape, proportion, direction and balance. Aesthetic perspectives were used as analysis guidelines. The two heroines’ biography found in a historical record was also used to help illustrate and enhance the analysis.

### **Background of the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Memorial**

Prior to creation of the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Memorial, their stories were recorded that Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon are honorary appellations bestowed by King Phra Phutta Yodfa Chulalok the Great or King Rama I of the Chakry Dynasty (Prawat, Mor.Por.Por). These titles were presented to Lady Chan and Lady Mook respectively. According to the history, both ladies were daughters of the Thalang governor called Phya Thalang Jomrang or Phya Thalang Jiadtong (Takian Village) and Mha Sia. It is said that their mother was a descendant of the governor of Sai Buree. Phya Thalang Jomrang and Mha Sia had five children; Lady Chan was the eldest; Lady Mook was the second eldest; the third child was a son named Aaad who became another governor of Thalang; the fourth child was also a son named Reung who became Phra Pon, a deputy governor; and the youngest was a daughter named Mha. Lady Chan was born between 1735-1740 in the reign of King Boromkoat in the late Ayutthya period. Lady Mook was her sister. They were similar ages, separated by only a few years. Lady Chan married Mom Sri Pakdee, a son of Jom Nai Kong, the governor of Takua Tung City. They had two children; the eldest was a daughter named Prang and the youngest was a son named Tian. After her husband passed away, Lady Chan brought her children back to Ban Kian, her hometown. On the other hand, there is no evidence of Lady Mook’s marriage; therefore, it is assumed that she stayed single and lived with her parents at Ban Kian. In 1785, the Nine-Troop-War occurred. Lady Chan and Lady Mook successfully led the city defence, and gained the respect of all the people. King Rama I, thus, bestowed the title ‘Thao Thep Krasattri’ and ‘Thoa Si Sunthon’ upon the two ladies. Both of them lived with Phraya Petchkeereepichaisongkram, the Thalang governor (Tian Prateep Na Thalang), for the rest of their lives.

### **The Construction of the Two Heroines Monument**

After Lady Chan and Lady Mook passed away, history shows that the two heroines’ bravery and prestige has always been in the memory of Thalang villagers and Phuketians. This is proved on the occasion of when King Mongkutklao Chaoyuhua paid a visit to Thalang Precinct and named Thalang Road after the appellation “the Thep Krasattri Road.” The opening ceremony of this road was held on 27 April 1909. This is why the Thalang Road has been called the Thep Krasattri Road until now.

Apart from renaming the road, the King's intent and the Thalang villagers' gratitude to the two ladies contributed to the construction of the monument lead by Mr. Auan Surakun, the governor of Phuket at that time. All of the people sacrificed their money as well as their labour to build the monument as a place of worship. In light of this, The Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Memorial was erected on 24 March 1967. Since then it has represented the Thalang villagers' faith (Chatsaran Rewlerdsirikun, Mor.Por.Por., p. 99). Furthermore, in order to commemorate honor and virtue of the two heroines who defended Thalang against the Burmese during the Nine-Troop War, the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Ceremony is held annually on 13 March. This is to remind people of the victory over the Burmese who were fought out of Thalang on 13 March 1785. In this ceremony, Thalang villagers and Phuketians show their memory of and faith in the two heroines through merit-making and worshiping. They also believe that it is their good fortune living in Thailand (Phuket) as the two ladies will always protect all Thalang residents in Phuket. ("Tao", Mor.Por.Por.).

### **General Characteristics of the The Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Monument**

The statues of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon are larger than a real human form. They are massive enough to fit well on a pedestal, so together they are a perfect match in terms of shape, proportion, balance and direction. The design of the sculptures is to recall to further generations the two heroines' prestige. There are several basic elements that the artist needs to take into consideration in order to make works of art beautiful. Following are those elements.

#### **1) Line**

It's necessary that the artist understands how the line represents length and dimension. There are many different lines such as horizontal lines (indicate peace, silence, politeness), vertical lines (convey security, strength, elegance, faith), diagonal lines (result in instability and movement), curved lines (express gentleness and delicacy). Moreover, lines can form different shapes. In art perspectives, figures and shapes appear from the relationship between optic nerves used to see things around us (the thickness of lines can be either consistent or not consistent; rough and thick lines can express the artist's feelings or they, especially in sculpture, may create depth, shallowness, or protuberance). As well, lines can make any particular shape based on the artist's purposes.

#### **2) Figure, Shape**

In this analysis, there are two features of figures: width and length while there are three dimensions of shape: width, length and volume. Both figures and shape can be created in a geometric form such as circle, oval, square, triangle, cylinder and cone, and can be put into two main categories. The first one is that imitates nature, whereas

the other is that invented by humans as those geometric shapes mentioned above.

### **3) Direction**

When erecting a memorial, it needs to be considered how to create beautiful movement of directions as it will boost the value of the sculpture. The term 'direction' here means visual movement; from which particular angle of the sculpture that is attractive. Or it refers to a particular angle of artwork that has proper movement. Directions consist of movement from left to right, right to left, upper to lower, lower to upper, diagonal upper left to lower right or diagonal upper right to lower left.

### **4) Balance**

Balance is one of the important aspects since it makes sculpture look firm, graceful and more attractive. The sculpture can be either symmetrical; both right and left sides are balanced; or asymmetric—both sides are not balanced, but lures the viewers perception into believing that they are balanced.

### **5) Proportion**

Proportion refers to relationships between each part of a piece of art.

### **6) Shade of shadow**

When sunlight falls on an object, it causes light and shadows to appear on that object.

### **7) Contrast**

In this article, contrast means the contrast of lines, figures, shapes, light and shadows.

In order to analyze the sculptures of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon, it is necessary to grasp some general understanding of the sculpture. This type of art can be divided into three categories as follows:

1. Low Relief or Bas Relief
2. High Relief
3. Round Relief

**1. Low Relief or Bas Relief** is a sculpture that is attached to the background so that it can be seen only from a frontal part. A coin is an example of this type of sculpture.

**2. High Relief** is a sculpture that is attached to the background but is more projecting than a bas relief so it can be seen from both its front and each side of it. Examples of this sculpture are a wall decoration and a capital of an ordination hall.

**3. Round Relief** is a sculpture standing on a pedestal so that it can be seen from every angle. It has a height, width and depth. A Buddha image and a monument are examples of this type of sculpture.

Considering general characteristics of the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Monument, it is a round relief which is beautiful from all angles. The statues of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon are one and a half human size wearing a Thai sarong and a long-sleeved blouse with drapery hung diagonally. They have short hair and wear flower-like earrings. Their right hands hold swords. Thao Thep Krasattri holds Thoa Si Sunthon's right wrist with her left hand. Both stand gracefully on a five-meter tall base. The monument is situated in Ban Ta Rue, Si Sunthon District (Kon, Mor.Por.Por.).

### **The Sculpture of the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon: Seen from an Artistic Viewpoint**

#### **Aesthetical Analysis**

The Sculpture of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon can be aesthetically analyzed from several aspects as from 1) general perceptions of beauty 2) beauty related to artistic elements such as shape, figure, line, direction and balance and 3) emotional experience of beauty. All these three features are used as a guideline of the analysis which is broken down in to two parts:

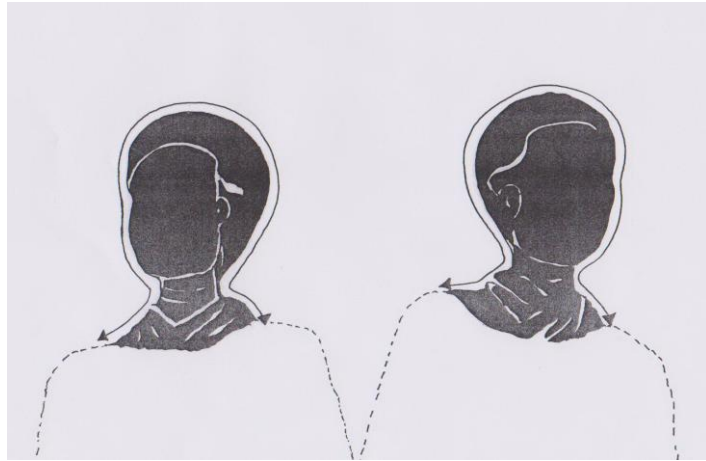
- part 1    Head analysis
- part 2    Body analysis

#### **Part 1    Head analysis: Shape, Figure, Line, Direction**



Picture 1 Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Monument

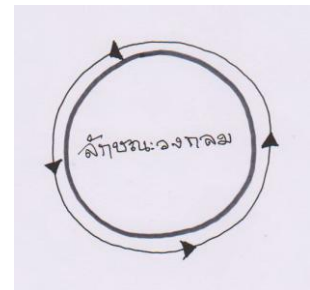
Taken by Sopon Supaviriyakorn on 6 February 2011



Picture 2: Facial shapes of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon

Picture 2 illustrates the oval faces of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon sculptures which indicate idealistic gentleness and beauty. There are several shapes of faces that create different feelings; following are two examples of those.

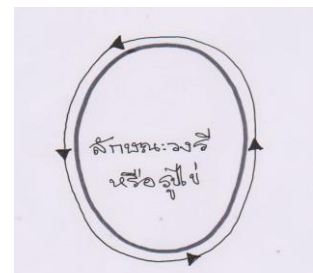
**1. A round face:** a circular shape is used to make a movement and a direction, so a viewer feels that it can be moved from any direction (picture 3).



Picture 3: A round shape

**2. An oval face:** an oval line is used to create a feeling that a movement direction is gently fixed with a pattern. It creates sweetness and tenderness as well as a strength (picture 4).

Facial shapes of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon images are oval resulting in a feeling that there is a movement with gentle and regular directions. This is in accordance with an art element theory that a curved line, a line direction, and a shape create artistic beauty. Moreover, facial expression of the two heroines' images demonstrates calmness and gracefulness.



Picture 4: An oval shape



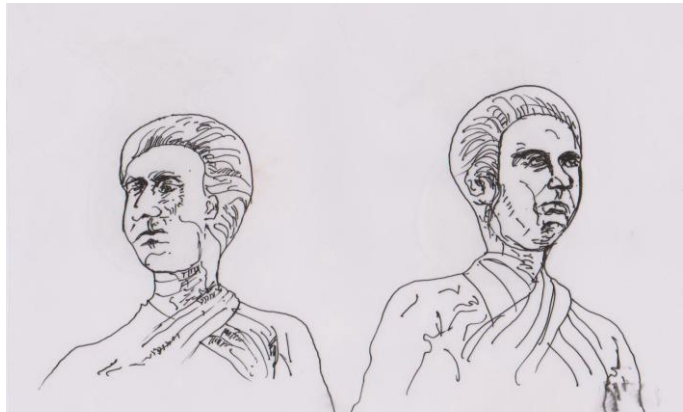
Picture 5: Facial shapes of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon

Based on picture 5, it can be seen that Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon statues have oval faces that are made from appropriate proportions in terms of a ratio, a regular line, a light and a shadow occurring when sunlight shines on the faces. These also produce different depth and height. A beautiful shape is a composite of a light and a shadow reflecting on an object which initiates dimensions and beautiful and clear shapes. According to this principal, it can be concluded that the facial shapes of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Statues are beautiful and prominent. Regarding the feeling, the images' faces express calmness and gracefulness as mentioned by Sommai Pinputthasin (Sommai Pinputthasin, 2007) that "Lady Chan (Thao Thep Krasattri) stands gracefully and calmly. Her face shows her delight from the victory; her right hand raises a round-ended sword to declare triumph and touches Lady Mook's left hand... Enough, my sister. We don't have to chase them to Burma. Yee Woon will not dare to return..... Lady Mook (Thoa Si Sunthon) stands elegantly and determinedly. She wants to pursue Yee Woon and defeat him even in Burma. She raises a pointed-ended sword to the furthest of her arm length in order to proclaim victory...I'll go to beat Yee Woon to his homeland."

Picture 6 illustrates lined figures of faces and hairstyles which relate to each other. The sculptor indicates a relationship between the faces and the hairstyles of the two heroines' images which results in beauty emerged from a contrast. The hairstyles comprise of curved lines which create deep, high, and low marks echoing a prominence of the faces.



This produces beauty and a clear separation of facial elements: eyebrows, eyes, noses, mouths, and ears: from hair. Based on the artistic composition, the beauty of these sculptures originates from the contrast.



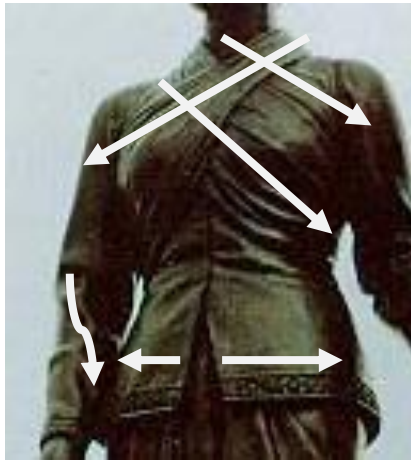
Picture 6: Facial lines of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon

## **Part 2 Body analysis: Analyzing shapes, figures, lines, directions, and balance**



Picture 7 Figures of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon

According to picture 7, Figures of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon are artistically beautiful. The silhouettes (see Picture 7) express the figures' beauty. The outlines (see the arrows) are very clear. The sculptor used curved lines to create the figures which make them look very gentle.



An enlarge picture of directions



Picture 8 Figures of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon

Taken by Sopon Supaviriyakorn 6 February 2011

Picture 8 shows that the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Monument is beautiful when it is touched by the sunlight. According to the art composition theory, a beautiful figure is a composite of a light, a shadow and a volume. In other words, it must have depth, shallowness, width and length. The clothes worn by Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon Statues show deep and shallow folds which the sculptor produced from curved lines. All the long-sleeved blouses, drapery and sarongs have folds that look gentle. This makes the monument outstanding and elegant.

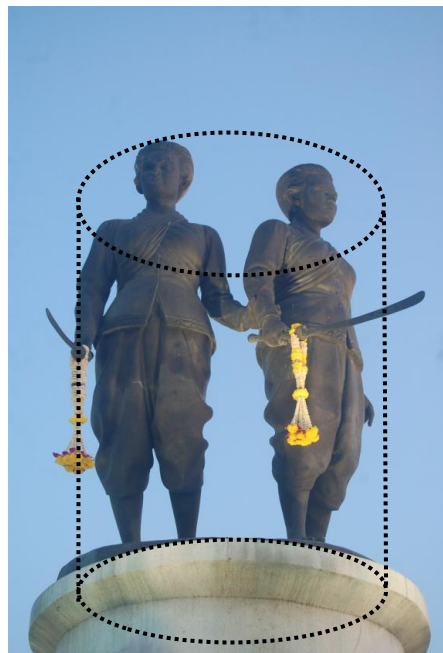
Furthermore, directions of curved lines of the clothes are harmonious. This can be seen from the drapery worn on the necks down to the waists from the upper to the lower and from the left to the right (from the left and right shoulders to the right and left lower parts). Horizontal lines (blouse flaps) are used to contrast with the upper parts of the drapery to make fluidity. Therefore, the curved lines give rise to the sculpture's sweetness and gentleness.

It can be considered from the picture that the figures of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thoa Si Sunthon are distinct in terms of weight, depth and shallowness. They also have dimensions and a clear light and shadow. These, including curved lines and horizontal lines of folds of the clothes, contribute to the beauty of the statues.



Picture 9: Balance Figures of Thao Thep Krasattri and Thao Si Sunthon

From picture 9, Thao Thep Krasattri image stands at the right of Thao Si Sunthon. This, from a basis of the art composition, shows that the sculptor was capable of creating the balance and appropriate proportions of both statues. Thao Thep Krasattri holds a sword in her right hand and touches Thao Si Sunthon's right wrist with her left hand. Thao Si Suntho also uses a right hand to hold a sword as well. Overall, the art composition of the statues of Thao Thep Krasattri and of Thao Si Sunthon is of a cylindrical shape with a pedestal as showed in picture 10.



Picture 10: An art composition of a cylindrical shape

In addition, the artist took the story of courage, wisdom, and fighting ability of the two heroines into account. These are expressed through producing the statues holding swords to defend their homeland. The figures portray brave, calm and very beautiful ladies whose faces express great delight from the defeat. This is described in a song written by Prasithi Chinnakarn and composed melody by Prapan Timtet (Sommai Pinputthasin, 2008) as follows:

Named great ladies of Thalang Thao Thep Krasattri and Si Sunthon

Goddesses and models of virtuous women whose spirit should be honored

Fought the brutal enemy with fearlessness, never gave up

The great Thais who determinedly fought back so that the country would never be  
defeated

Kept fighting till their last breath for the freedom of their descendants

As brave as men, they wanted to win the battle and they were never be discouraged

The two heroines terrified the enemy

(woman) A beautiful, fragrant Chankapor flower is adored by Thais

(man) A flawless and valuable pearl remains memorable in Thailand

## Conclusion

From perspectives of the art elements, the beauty of the Thao Thep Krasattri and Thao Si Sunthon Memorial originates from some patterns and creativity of the artist whose understanding of the story, wisdom, belief and faith helped him to portray the two heroines' courage. This makes not only their bravery, but their beauty, remain.

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