

# Fruits and Vegetable Carving: Development of Carving Patterns for Banquets

## Saibangorn Panprom

The Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Maha Sarakham, Thailand 44000  
Email: saibangorn.pan@gmail.com  
Tel: 66-43-721686, Fax: 66-43-721827

## Klas Somtrakool

The Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Maha Sarakham, Thailand 44000  
Tel: 66-43-721686, Fax: 66-43-721827

## Prirach Tidpad

The Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Maha Sarakham, Thailand 44000  
Tel: 66-43-721686, Fax: 66-43-721827

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### ABSTRACT

Fruits and Vegetable carvings is an indigenous art and a distinct cultural heritage of Thailand which has been passed down since the Sukhothai period and revitalized during the early era of the Chakri Dynasty and has been widely diffused to the general public in the current reign of King Rama IX. The main purpose of fruits and vegetable carvings is to accompany gourmet dishes of palace meals and for religious offerings. The carving patterns are replicas of nature which is simple and pleasant. Most problems are similar issues, issues such as quality of raw materials, design, development patterns, lack of knowledge and creating economic value. A development guideline for fruits and vegetable carvings is the creating a balance between appropriateness of the carvings to the dishes being served and also the occasion and location of the banquet. Patterns and designs mostly utilize the arrangement of the carvings into long boats which provide the feelings of the richness of the meal. The carvings must emphasize hygienic and good taste. The carvings must be designed to be proportionally appropriate with the plate and with the type of plates served. Carving patterns can be further developed by modifying and adapting from traditional patterns with creativity to develop newer patterns and designs. Developed patterns and designs should be practically applied, taught, trained and displayed in banquets during traditional festivals and celebrated activities.

**Keywords:** Fruits, Vegetable, Carving, Thai, Development, Conservation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Many Thai's now often dine out and it is the duty for the managers of the food establishments to cater to the increased demands of customers. This duty encompasses the quality and taste of the food and also the service provided by the staff. The servings of meals are also important where the variety of the menu and also the presentation of the dishes must equally be considered. Menus that provide added value contribute to the recognition and prosperity of the restaurant (Worachinda, 2000). Globalization and technological advancements have affected and altered the Thai economy and society providing opportunities and risks. The future of Thailand will rely on a systematic knowledge management scheme and also knowledge development which will encompass the application of technology that is appropriately integrated with the vigor of Thai society and cultural heritage. Examples of Thai strength include the harmonious integration of technology, indigenous knowledge and culture to create added value to commercial products and services, effective management of patents and protection of intellectual property and include just distribution of benefits to the community. The indigenous knowledge in cooking and decoration of Thai foods is a cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge that should receive increased promotion and development in creating added value to products and services that are important factors in the development of Thailand during the era of global social changes. The lifestyle of Thai's is simple but is rich in art and reflected in every day life where successful large families have many dishes to choose from. Thai food is a cultural heritage passed down from generations to generations and consists of foods served in royal courthouses and food prepared for monarchs and the ruling class which were all delicately cooked and prepared. Deserts and gourmet dishes required a substantial amount of time to prepare and were served to satisfy the appetites and also for adornment. The meals and deserts prepared were delicious, valuable and many were crafted with art such as carvings on fruits and vegetables into decorative intricate patterns and figures.

The discipline and format of Thai food arrangement is a special identity of Thai foods and is directly reflected in the fruits and vegetable carvings that Thai ancestors created for future generations to inherit. The distinct cultural heritage of Thai's is renowned and Thailand regarded as a nation with a prosperous culture (Phaitayawat, 1994). This form of art craft has been passed on since historic times but early on, the craft had been limited to the Thai ethnic and reserved traditionally for royal maids and servants of the royal palace. Lady's received training to decorate fruits and vegetables with care and specialty (Chongchit, 2006). Fruits and vegetable carvings were also traditionally reserved for Buddhist monks and for high ranking officials. Currently the artistic craft of Thai fruits and vegetable carvings has been sophisticatedly developed into a vocational course that is more diverse in Secondary education systems up to college levels. The curriculum has become an important major that emphasizes on hands on training to develop professional skills which can be applied commercially. Currently many hotels favor fruits and vegetable carvings arranged for banquets and seminars and the trend has been adopted by many foreign establishments such as in China and Japan. The fruits and vegetable carvings in Thailand are the most intricate and glamorous and usually on display in social events to demonstrate the talented skills of Thai craftsmanship. The importance of fruits and vegetable carving include the creation of creative art and application for commercial events such as banquets and dining arrangements of prominent and at national

levels but are mostly for commercial purposes only. The extension of the knowledge and education of fruits and vegetable carvings has not been fully explored such as the definition of each carving styles, forms, techniques and standards which is essential in the diffusion and conservation of Thai cultural heritage.

The purpose of this research is to 1) Study the history and origin of Thai indigenous knowledge in the Bangkok and surrounding provinces. 2) Study the current obstacles and guidelines for the development and application of fruits and vegetable carvings for banquets in Bangkok and 3) the development of standardized patterns of fruits and vegetable carvings for banquets.

## **2. RESEARCH AREA AND METHODOLOGY**

This research applies Qualitative Research, Participatory Research, Research and Development and In-dept study methodologies. The research data was obtained through document analysis of related research studies, documents and articles and also through field research which was conducted from April 2008 - April 2009 and the research data obtained from studies made at the Shangri-La chain of hotels, The Oriental and Dusit Thani hotels in Bangkok and metropolitan area.

## **3. RESEARCH RESULTS**

### **3.1 The History and Origin of the Indigenous Knowledge of Fruits and Vegetable Carvings of Thai's in Bangkok and Metropolitan Areas**

There are no historical proofs of the origin of Thai fruits and vegetable carvings and there is no conclusive evidence of the origin of the cultural heritage depicted in motifs, murals, statues or historical architectures. The only reference comes from the literature written by *Thao Sichulalak* which refers to the flourishing art of fruits and vegetable carvings from the historic Sukhothai era (1238-1438) of Thailand. It is therefore possible that the origin of Thai decorative food carvings started before that period. Food carving courses and lessons were incorporated in educational curriculum after the change from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1931. This is assumed that the less significant role of the royal family would lead to the decline and eventually the extinction of many forms of indigenous arts and crafts. Conservationist during that time organized a culinary primary school at Krom Luang Chumphon Palace which is currently the Rachamongkol Institute of Technology, Phranakorn College. The instructors and teachers were selected from different provinces and the indigenous knowledge of royal craftsmen were diffused and passed on to the general public. The cultural courses are currently integrated into Thai educational curriculum (Hongwiwat, 2002).

*Yuan Panutud* was the individual responsible for the task of outlining the curriculum and creating the teaching guidelines for the Primary School of Culinary Arts in 1933 which included classes on Food, Kitchen, Tailoring, Stitching, Embroidering, Artificial flowers, Floral arrangements and Fruits and vegetable carvings. Two years later he created the Panuthat School which held classes for regular academic courses together with vocational courses. There were initially more than 2000 students and the school received equivalent status equal to

public educational institutions within several months. The creation of a culinary school for female students eventually transformed other schools and institutions to offer culinary and vocational courses and also contributed to the establishment of many educational institutions such as vocational colleges throughout the country and The Rajamangala University of Technology. The initial curriculum of fruits and vegetable carvings continues to be passed on to newer generations after 69 years (Chanthanaphalin, 2002)

The history of Thai fruits and vegetable carvings can be divided according to each Ratanakosin era (current Chakri dynasty) starting from the reign of King Rama I to King Rama III. This is the period of the restoration of fruits and vegetable carvings which was initiated due to the efforts of artisans and sponsors which and stability of society, economy, politics, culture, and livelihood which was prosperous and benefited the royal palace and ranking officials. The patterns and carving styles during this period were not very exquisite and were a combination of formats from many artisans. During the reign of King Rama II, rose patterns and other floral patterns were integrated into the craft which ushered in more sophisticated patterns. During King Rama III, many artistic art crafts were influenced by China and greatly expanded the popularity of arts and culinary crafts but was still limited to the inner circle of Thai society.

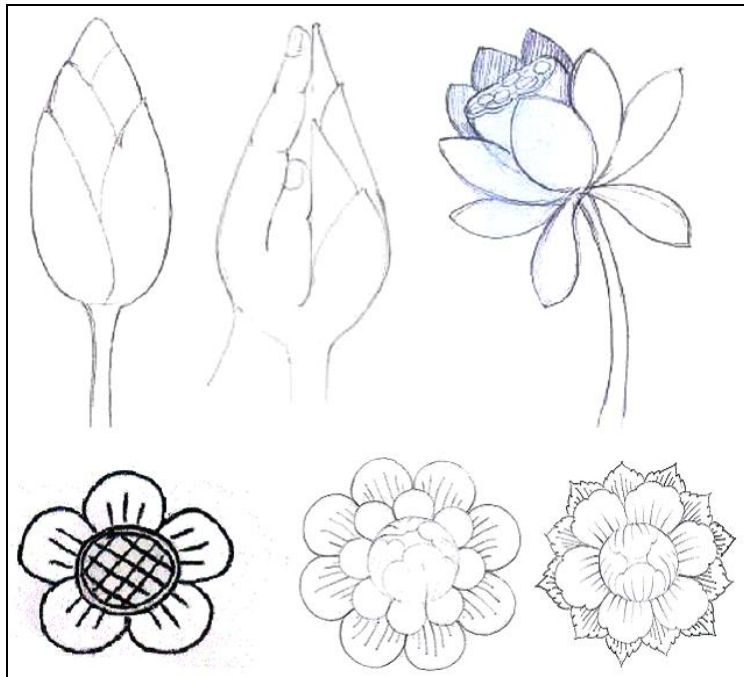
During the reign of King Rama IV to King Rama VII was a period where Thailand was heavily influenced by western culture and the craft of fruits and vegetable carvings were increasingly utilized and adapted to decorating dining arrangements to welcome foreign guests and dignitaries. The role and purpose of Thai fruits and vegetable carvings changed and was applied to larger events and led to the development of groups of female artisans which were needed to support the increase of royal banquets and events. The education of fruits and vegetable carving during this period continued in its traditional format and developments included the creation of the first vocational school for female students and marks the expansion of the craft of fruits and vegetable carvings into the Thai educational system. The Suan Dusit Rajabhat University is regarded as the first public culinary school and continued development, training and revitalization which was initialized during the reign of King Rama VII.

During the reign of King Rama VIII to King Rama IX, fruits and vegetable carvings enjoyed a renaissance and is regarded as the most prominent era where fruits and vegetable carving artisans flourished and their arts and skills employed in royal ceremonies. Students and the general public enjoyed crafts competition which led to new styles of designs and patterns and led to the development of 2 types of patterns. 1) Traditional patterns which were integrated and modified into new patterns. 2) Patterns that were designed by replicating natural patterns and interconnected together into portraits resembling art paintings. Newly developed patterns were larger than traditional formats and emphasized on intricacy, extravagance and adapted to be more contemporary while preserving traditional delicate styles and principles.

The patterns and carving styles that replicated natural flowers and patterns initially started from carvings of water lily's, magnolias, ear of rice patterns and were simple replications of nature where there were only few petals (Figure 1). The carving lines around the petals were small and deep while the pollen was engraved in a checkered pattern. The format of the entire carvings is consistent with Buddhist and Brahmin which influenced and

portrayed art forms that were peaceful, simplistic and insignificant. The principle of portraying religious beliefs and principles in art forms is that fruits and vegetable carvings rely on patience, concentration, mental and intellectual perseverance while simplicity and insignificance resembles wavering detail and subtle.

Figure 1. Traditional fruits and vegetable carving patterns



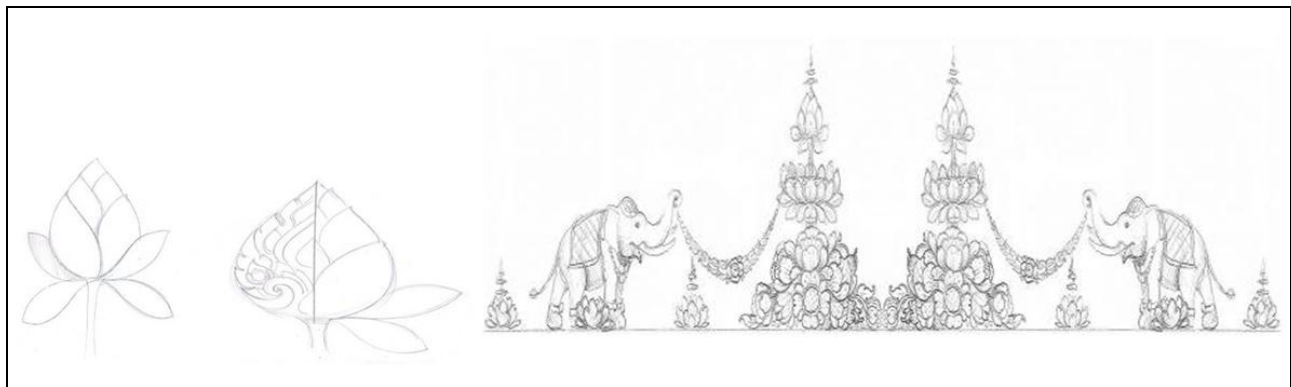
### 3.2 Obstacles of Fruits and Vegetable Carvings for Banquets

The major obstacles of fruits and vegetable carvings in Thailand include the lack of quality raw materials, pattern designers, engravers, pattern developers, transmission of knowledge and creating added value. Quality and fresh fruits and vegetables are needed so that the finished carvings can be kept and displayed longer which also depends on the atmosphere and time period where the carvings will be displayed. Fruits and vegetable engravers lack experience and consistency in their art forms where there must be a consistent balance in the lines, patterns, shapes, weight, color and texture. The lack of understanding these factors result in underdeveloped carvings and development of patterns. Engravers lack experience because there are numerous occasions where their crafts are needed and there is limited time to prepare and design and so they have to compromise between quality and quantity. The limited time available to prepare the carvings has limited the designs and patterns for each venue. The transmission of knowledge between artisans is still limited due to the closure and unwilling transfer of knowledge from senior artisans. The limited transfer of knowledge and skills due to competing attitudes of modern society has led to in-efficient development of fruits and vegetable carvings and lack of apprentices.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

During the period of King Rama I – King Rama III, the inheritance of indigenous knowledge and Thai heritage was flourishing and was specific. Fruits and vegetable carvings skills and knowledge were diffused and transmitted from the royal palace to the general public. The patterns of the impressions of the period are theorized to be simple where the patterns of floral petals had only several levels and the outline of the pollen was small and profound. The vegetables used were also dyed to a white color for use in religious events and also for royal offerings. During the reign of King Rama IV to King Rama VII, the national revolution and development of the country transformed the livelihood of Thais and ushered in western culture which also affected the arts and crafts of Thai fruits and vegetable carvings. Noticeable changes include newly developed styles of patterns that were more complicated such as overlapping patterns and layers, applications in larger events, larger set pieces and were applied to other royal activities within the palace. The contemporary period starts from the reign of King Rama VII to the current reign of King Rama IX, is considered to be the definitive period of revitalization, conservation and promotion of Thai arts and crafts. New patterns and designs for fruits and vegetable carvings were created and can be distinctively separated into 2 types, 1) carrying over and mixing of traditional patterns to create a new one (Figure 2) and 2) imitating natural patterns but modifying their sizes to be larger, emphasize extravagance, beauty, visual value and material richness. This is consistent with the Aesthetics theory of Sanyaviwat (1992), where nature is valuable to the sciences, especially to natural and artificial beauty created by humans.

Figure 2.



The Shangri-la chain of hotels, Oriental and Dusit Thani hotels in Bangkok have developed new patterns and new styles of fruits and vegetable carvings that are appropriate for their hotels which must be suitable for the size of events that are arranged internally at their hotels. The developed pieces or sculptures are small, conveniently arranged on plates or as decorative plate rims or edible art pieces that can create valuable aesthetics and impression (Figure 3). Hotels must develop fruits and vegetable carvings and organize demonstrations, exhibitions, presentations and events where the fruits and vegetable sculptures can also be consumed, arrange competitions at national and international levels so



that local hotels have the opportunity to display their talent and services (Figure 4). The size of these competitive events or exhibitions must be quite large and requires many artisans which limits the events to only once or twice per year. This is consistent with the Design and Development Theory of Nimsamoe (1987), where the science of designing creates the phenomena of problem solving, creates creativity based on principles of knowledge and art which is utilized to create beauty and usefulness. The developed carving patterns therefore must also be appropriate and serve their purpose as decorations and art pieces. The fruits and vegetable carvings are considered as indigenous knowledge which has been obtained through professional experiences and through the application or replication of nature for use in their daily livelihood (Punnothok, 1983).

Figure 3.



Figure 4. Fruits and Vegetable carving competition.



The development of fruits and vegetable carvings for banquets is a continuing process and artisans have successfully relied on the integration of traditional patterns and formats with contemporary artistic styles. The successful integration of traditional and contemporary styles provides the basis for the success of Thai fruits and vegetable carvings in modern Thai society but must continue to be developed where other aspects should also be considered such as the inclusion of other Thai national identities, fresh flowers or banana leaves which will help elevate and create added value to the carvings. Exhibitions and live demonstrations of carvings should also be considered as a part of the event which will provide entertainment and awareness besides being decorative. The most important aspect of development is consistency of training in traditional, contemporary and fusion of artistic formats which must always be considered accordingly to each event, tradition, custom and occasion.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Fruits and Vegetable carvings is an indigenous art and heritage of Thailand which has been passed down since the Sukhothai period and revitalized during the Chakri Dynasty and has been widely diffused to the general public in the current reign of King Rama IX. The main purpose of fruits and vegetable carvings is to accompany gourmet dishes of palace meals and for religious offerings. The carving patterns are replicas of nature which is simple and pleasant. Development guideline for fruits and vegetable carvings relies on the appropriateness of the carvings to the dishes being served and also must be consistent with the occasion and location of the banquet. Patterns and designs mostly utilize the arrangement of the carvings into long boats which emphasize the value and richness of the meal. Carving patterns can be further developed by modifying and adapting from traditional patterns with creativity to develop newer patterns and designs. Developed patterns and designs should be practically applied, taught, trained and displayed in banquets during traditional festivals and celebrated activities.

## **6. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Thai fruits and vegetable carvings is a cultural heritage of Thailand and is currently sponsored and promoted by private and government organizations which realize the importance and have been developing current and future generations of artists. Government agencies that are directly promoting the indigenous heritage should increase their efforts in the promotion of fruits and vegetable carvings on as many occasions as possible. The feature of Thai indigenous knowledge in traditional and festive events will promote cultural awareness and pride. The support of fruits and vegetable carvings should be expanded into the curriculums of all educational levels and also extended to external educational services. Thai fruits and vegetable carvings should also be promoted as a vocational profession and receive recognition as a national cultural artists.

There are still many obstacles than hinder the development of Thai fruits and vegetable carvings and solutions should be pursued in every aspect such as the support and promotion of growing quality fresh fruits and vegetables which can be used as quality raw



materials for carvings and also provide more quality wholesome foods. The inheritance of the arts and crafts of fruits and vegetable carvings should be promoted and endorsed by public and private groups so that the conservation and diffusion of cultural knowledge is consistent and passed on to future generations. This can be accomplished by promoting the indigenous knowledge in daily livelihood and also commercial applications in foods and events at hotels, restaurants and in national and international tourism events. Experts and skilled renowned artisans should be recognized and persuaded to provide their full expertise and knowledge in teaching apprentices and diffusion of their knowledge interested individuals and groups. Further development of Thai fruits and vegetable carvings should also be extended to incorporate natural flowers and banana leaves to create added value to commercial products and services.

Research results also indicate that Thai fruits and vegetable carvings should be developed based on Thai traditional art patterns and utilize natural raw materials and use fruits and vegetables that are seasonally available. The design and organization of carvings should be appropriate to the event and location of the banquet. The use of materials outside of these principles should only be considered when necessary and not too overdone but must always be consistent with nature. Future research studies related to Thai fruits and vegetable carvings should include topics of creating an educational guideline for the development of learning fruits and vegetable carving as a self study course where students are capable of learning the arts and skills through self training. Topics that should also be included in future research studies should include the study of the demand and prospects of Thai fruits and vegetable carving profession so that the research data can be utilized in the development of human resources for commercial benefit and cultural preservation through the investment of cultural capital.

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