

THE ARTISTIC IDENTITY OF HISTORICAL SITES IN LOPBURI : A DESIGN APPROACH FOR CONTEMPORARY SOUVENIR JEWELRY

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the artistic identity of the Narai Ratchaniwet Palace in Lopburi Province, Thailand, to develop design principles for contemporary souvenir jewelry that reflects and preserves cultural heritage.

Method: A mixed-methods approach was employed, including semi-structured interviews with five experts in design and cultural heritage, as well as analysis of 19 purposively sampled photographs of architectural motifs and artifacts from the palace. The analysis focused on three dimensions: pattern characteristics and structure, compositional arrangement, and symbolic meaning.

Results: The findings reveal that floral motifs are the most dominant (68.42%), followed by geometric (57.89%) and sacred/religious patterns (52.63%). These motifs are often arranged symmetrically and repetitively, emphasizing balance, divinity, and natural order. Expert interviews confirmed that these artistic features embody Lopburi's cultural richness and suggest their suitability for reinterpretation in contemporary jewelry design.

Conclusion: Narai Ratchaniwet Palace's artistic elements demonstrate a unique fusion of Thai and Western aesthetics that can be translated into meaningful and aesthetically pleasing jewelry designs. These elements embody not only visual beauty but also historical and spiritual significance.

Implication: The research contributes to the field of cultural product development by offering guidelines for translating traditional artistic identity into contemporary design. It also supports cultural tourism and the sustainable use of local heritage by fostering emotional and cultural connection through wearable art.

Keywords: Artistic Identity, Cultural Heritage, Souvenir Jewelry, Contemporary Design, Narai Ratchaniwet Palace

Introduction

Historical sites stand as enduring symbols of the civilizations that once flourished, offering more than just visual remnants of the past—they are vibrant repositories of human wisdom, cultural values, and artistic expressions. These places not only document history but also provide fertile ground for inspiration, particularly in the creative industries. Among the various applications of such inspiration, the development of contemporary design products—ranging from fashion and architecture to jewelry—has gained substantial attention in both academic and design communities. The artistic elements embedded in historical architecture, sculpture, and decorative arts are not merely ornamental; they serve as windows into the ideological, spiritual, and aesthetic values of a society. These elements, when carefully analyzed and synthesized, have the potential to create contemporary products that bridge past and present, preserving cultural identity while appealing to modern tastes.

In the context of Thailand, Lopburi Province represents one of the most culturally and historically rich regions in the country. Among its most significant landmarks is the Narai Ratchaniwet Palace, constructed during the reign of King Narai the Great in the late Ayutthaya period. This palace exemplifies a sophisticated fusion of Thai and Western architectural styles, reflecting King Narai's interest in diplomacy and intercultural exchange. According to the Fine Arts Department (2016), the palace showcases various artistic features—stucco reliefs, arches,

pilasters, floral motifs, and geometric designs—that reflect not only the craftsmanship of the period but also the worldview and aesthetic sensibilities of its builders. These features are not merely relics of the past; they are valuable cultural assets that can be interpreted, adapted, and translated into contemporary design practices, particularly in the creation of jewelry.

Jewelry has long served as more than a decorative accessory. It functions as a medium of communication, social identity, and cultural continuity. As Dormer (1994) argues, jewelry is a potent form of storytelling that conveys symbolic meaning through form, material, and function. This is particularly relevant in today’s design landscape, where consumer expectations extend beyond aesthetics to include emotional resonance, cultural significance, and experiential value. By interpreting the artistic elements of historical sites like Narai Ratchaniwet Palace, contemporary jewelry design can move beyond mere replication of motifs and toward meaningful reinterpretation. For instance, the palace’s ornate floral stucco designs can be abstracted into modern pendant shapes, while its geometric window structures can inspire the framework of rings or brooches. These adaptations allow designers to create products that not only reflect the beauty of the past but also resonate with present-day sensibilities.

The significance of using historical art forms in design is further underscored by the growing emphasis on cultural capital and identity in global markets. As noted by Boonsita Sophakanee and Inthaka Piriyaikul (2021), the reinterpretation of traditional Thai motifs in contemporary jewelry is not only a matter of preserving heritage but also a strategy for economic development and brand differentiation. This is especially true in tourism-driven economies like Thailand, where cultural authenticity is a major factor in attracting domestic and international visitors. The transformation of artistic heritage into wearable souvenirs, or “living souvenirs,” offers a compelling way to enhance tourist experiences while promoting local identity. Unlike mass-produced memorabilia, these pieces carry emotional and symbolic significance, enabling wearers to maintain a tangible connection with the places they have visited. Moreover, in the era of experience-based consumption, jewelry that embodies narrative and cultural value holds more appeal than ever. Venkatesh (2018) highlights a shift in consumer behavior toward valuing personal meaning and experiential depth over superficial beauty or utility. In this light, cultural jewelry becomes a powerful conduit for memory, learning, and emotional engagement. For tourists, a ring or pendant that references a specific palace motif becomes a lasting reminder of their journey; for local communities, such products become tools for cultural storytelling and economic empowerment.

Recognizing this potential, the present study titled “Artistic Identity from Ancient Sites in Lopburi Province” sets out to analyze the visual language of Narai Ratchaniwet Palace in terms of its design elements, stylistic features, and cultural meanings. The goal is to synthesize this information into a set of design principles or guidelines that can be applied to contemporary jewelry making. This design-driven approach aligns with sustainable tourism and cultural conservation, fostering collaboration between heritage scholars, designers, and local artisans.

In conclusion, the reinterpretation of historical artistry into modern design—especially in the medium of jewelry—presents a dynamic path for preserving cultural identity, enriching consumer experience, and promoting sustainable creative economies. Lopburi’s Narai Ratchaniwet Palace offers a compelling case study in this regard, where history, art, and innovation intersect. By exploring and adapting its artistic identity, this research contributes not only to academic understanding of cultural aesthetics but also to practical strategies for design and tourism development in Thailand.

Research Objectives

1. To study and analyze the artistic identity found in the historical site of Lopburi Province: Narai Ratchaniwet Palace.
2. To synthesize approaches for applying the artistic identity of the historical site of Lopburi Province: Narai Ratchaniwet Palace to the design of contemporary souvenir jewelry.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore and synthesize the artistic identity of Narai Ratchaniwet Palace in Lopburi Province, aiming to develop guidelines for designing contemporary souvenir jewelry. The research process involved expert interviews and a detailed analysis of architectural decorative patterns and historical artifacts from the palace and its museum.

The population and samples used in this study were selected through purposive sampling. The primary human sample consisted of five experts with extensive knowledge and experience in fields relevant to the study's objectives. These included jewelry designers, product designers, art historians, museum curators, and cultural tourism scholars. The selection criteria emphasized individuals with expertise in Thai art and design, especially in the context of cultural heritage and historical architecture. Their insights were crucial for interpreting traditional artistic elements and evaluating their potential adaptation into contemporary jewelry designs. In addition to the expert participants, the research also analyzed nineteen photographic samples. These photographs were taken during a field survey at Narai Ratchaniwet Palace and included architectural decorations and artifacts housed in the Narai Ratchaniwet Museum. The photographs were carefully chosen based on their representation of key artistic motifs and cultural symbolism present in the palace's architectural heritage. The selected samples served as the basis for analyzing the visual elements and stylistic features that define the artistic identity of the site.

To facilitate the data collection, two main research instruments were employed. First, semi-structured interview forms were designed to gather insights from the selected experts. These interviews allowed for an in-depth understanding of their professional perspectives on the aesthetic, cultural, and symbolic significance of the motifs found in the palace. The interviews also explored recommendations for how such patterns might be translated into meaningful and culturally rich jewelry designs.

Second, the researcher developed an analysis framework to examine the decorative patterns observed in the selected photographs. The analytical approach focused on three key dimensions: (1) the characteristics and structural elements of the patterns, (2) the overall composition and stylistic arrangement, and (3) the content and symbolic meaning of each motif. This tripartite framework provided a systematic method for understanding how each visual element contributes to the identity of the site and its potential for reinterpretation. The data collection process was divided into two parts. The first involved conducting in-depth interviews with the experts, which were scheduled in advance and carried out in person or via telecommunication platforms. These sessions yielded qualitative data concerning the historical and artistic significance of the palace's features, as well as expert insights on design application. The second part consisted of fieldwork at Narai Ratchaniwet Palace. During this phase, the researcher recorded visual data through photography and gathered empirical information regarding the physical context and spatial arrangement of the decorative elements.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis, supported by inductive interpretation. Expert interview data and field survey observations were coded and analyzed to identify emerging themes and insights. The photographic data were also examined using frequency counts and percentage analysis to identify recurring motifs and stylistic trends. The results were synthesized into a descriptive narrative that outlines the essential artistic features of the palace. This synthesis ultimately informed the development of design guidelines for creating souvenir jewelry that meaningfully reflects local cultural identity.

Results

The findings from both the expert interviews and the photographic analysis of Narai Ratchaniwet Palace reveal a rich and layered artistic identity that reflects the cultural, historical, and aesthetic values of the late Ayutthaya period. The study focuses on three analytical dimensions: pattern characteristics and structure, pattern composition, and the content and meaning embedded in those patterns.

Insights from five experts—including designers, art historians, curators, and cultural scholars—revealed that the artistic identity of the decorative motifs at Narai Ratchaniwet Palace is defined by a distinctive fusion of traditional Thai aesthetics and Western influences. Structurally, the palace exhibits several recurring Thai patterns such as the Kanok, lattice, vine, and floral motifs. These are harmoniously integrated with elements inspired by Western architecture, including geometric patterns and Gothic-style arches seen in the doors and windows. This stylistic integration speaks to the cultural openness and diplomatic innovation of King Narai's reign. The motifs are graceful, complex, and meticulously crafted, symbolizing the sophistication of the royal court.

In terms of composition, the patterns are arranged with intentional balance across various architectural elements such as windows, pediments, and walls. Thai motifs often serve as the foundation, upon which Western elements are superimposed at strategic visual points, suggesting a purposeful fusion between Eastern traditions and foreign artistic expressions. The use of symmetry and visual rhythm is prominent, particularly within floral designs and architectural pedestals. This compositional strategy creates an elegant and harmonious aesthetic. Additionally, the artifacts studied—such as pottery, jewelry, and vases—display motifs influenced by Chinese, Lanna, and Persian art, underscoring the palace's historical role as a hub of intercultural exchange.

The content and meaning of these patterns also carry deep cultural and symbolic significance. According to the experts, many of the motifs represent themes central to Thai identity, including Buddhist faith, the prosperity and diplomatic power of King Narai, and the cultural renaissance of the era. Narai Ratchaniwet Palace, as both a political and cultural center, was not only a site of governance but also a beacon of artistic and architectural innovation. It embodied the openness of the Thai court to foreign ideas and styles while preserving a core Thai identity.

From the analysis of 19 photographs of architectural features and artifacts, several key themes were identified across the three analytical dimensions. First, in terms of pattern characteristics and structure, flora patterns featured interwoven curves with symmetrical balance, while geometric motifs displayed consistent repetition through circles, zigzags, ellipses, and parallel lines. Patterns depicting deities and angels were intricately detailed and often framed within ornate pavilions. Other decorative elements—such as pedestals—showed horizontal structuring and floral clusters arranged in radial or circumferential formations.

Second, in pattern composition, several structural principles were observed: symmetrical balance (particularly influenced by Khmer and Ayutthaya traditions), the use of repetition to create rhythm, and the division of space within architectural elements such as windows and pediments. Hierarchical composition was also notable, with central figures like deities placed at focal points and surrounded by supporting patterns like vines and floral elements.

Finally, regarding the content and symbolic meaning of the patterns, floral designs were interpreted as representing vitality and continuity. Symmetrical geometric designs suggested stability and order. Motifs featuring divine or mythical figures conveyed themes of spiritual power, sacred protection, and cultural prestige. Meanwhile, decorations found on royal vessels or utensils reflected opulence and ceremonial significance. The wood carvings and ornamentation throughout the architecture also reflected a nuanced fusion of Eastern and Western artistic expressions, capturing the spirit of cultural exchange that characterized King Narai's era.

These findings demonstrate the richness of the palace's artistic identity and underscore its potential as a source of inspiration for the creation of contemporary jewelry that not only honors cultural heritage but also communicates symbolic meaning and historical depth to modern audiences.

Table 1 The characteristics and structure of the pattern.

The Pattern	Frequency	(%)
Floral patterns (vines, leaves, and overlapping vines)	13	68.42
Geometric patterns	11	57.89
Deities/idols/religious patterns (gods and symbols)	10	52.63
Buddha beads/balls	8	42.11
Ornamental leaf stem patterns	6	31.58
Glass pavilion patterns	5	26.32
Flame patterns	4	21.05

The data presented in Table 1 illustrates the characteristics and structural diversity of patterns found in the architectural decorations and artifacts of Narai Ratchaniwet Palace. The analysis, based on 19 photographic samples, reveals a rich and symbolic array of design elements that highlight the complexity and aesthetic sophistication of the site.

The most frequently observed patterns were floral motifs, including vines, leaves, and overlapping vine designs, which appeared in 13 instances, accounting for 68.42% of the total samples. These organic patterns emphasize natural elegance and fluidity and are strongly associated with traditional Thai decorative arts. They are also interpreted as representing prosperity, growth, and the continuation of life. Geometric patterns followed closely, occurring 11 times or in 57.89% of the cases. These designs typically consist of symmetrical and repetitive shapes such as circles, ellipses, and linear forms. Their presence reflects structural order and balance, and they frequently appear in architectural elements like windows, pediments, and wall panels. The prominence of geometric design reflects the influence of Western aesthetics that had

been integrated into Thai art during King Narai's reign. Deities, idols, and religious symbols were observed in 10 instances (52.63%). These motifs include images of gods, mythological beings, and sacred emblems. Their inclusion reflects the spiritual and protective functions embedded in the palace's decorative program, symbolizing divine authority, sanctity, and the centrality of religion in the cultural life of the period. Buddha beads or ball-shaped patterns, often used in repetitive sequences or bordering elements, were found in 8 cases (42.11%). These bead-like motifs are commonly used in Thai religious and ceremonial art and serve both decorative and symbolic purposes, often signifying unity and spiritual continuity. Ornamental leaf stem patterns, with curling stems and stylized foliage, appeared 6 times (31.58%). These are often intertwined with other floral or natural elements and contribute to the palace's lush decorative rhythm. Glass pavilion patterns, characterized by the framing of religious or symbolic images within an architectural miniature pavilion form, were recorded in 5 cases (26.32%). These structures may symbolize sacred enclosures or spiritual sanctuaries and are often linked to divine or ceremonial imagery. Lastly, flame motifs, appearing in 4 instances (21.05%), were among the least common. These patterns are typically used in the depiction of sacred fire or energy, often surrounding divine figures, and serve to amplify a sense of movement and transcendence.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the architectural and artifact designs at Narai Ratchaniwet Palace are a sophisticated blend of natural, geometric, and religious motifs. Each pattern category contributes to the layered aesthetic language of the site, combining traditional Thai artistic heritage with cross-cultural influences to create a distinctive and enduring visual identity.

Table 2 The composition of the pattern.

The composition of the pattern.	Frequency	(%)
Symmetrical arrangement	13	68.42
Continuous repetition	11	57.89
Division of space into sections	10	52.63
Emphasizing central axis	6	31.58
Gradual patterning	5	26.32

Table 2 presents the compositional styles of decorative patterns found in the architectural and artistic elements of Narai Ratchaniwet Palace. The results reflect the principles of classical Thai art as well as influences from foreign cultures, particularly in how patterns are arranged, repeated, and emphasized within a design framework.

The most prevalent compositional feature is symmetrical arrangement, which appears in 13 out of 19 samples or 68.42%. This form of balance—where the left and right sides of the pattern mirror each other—is fundamental in traditional Thai aesthetics. It provides a sense of harmony, order, and formal beauty, often used in significant elements such as door frames, windows, and pediments to create a grand and refined visual impact. The second most common compositional method is continuous repetition, observed in 11 instances or 57.89%. This technique is often applied to floral and geometric patterns to create rhythm and visual continuity along horizontal or

vertical surfaces. The repetition helps unify architectural features and provides a decorative flow that guides the viewer's gaze.

Division of space into sections was found in 10 cases, accounting for 52.63%. This approach involves segmenting areas such as pediments, archways, pillars, and walls into clearly defined parts, each containing its own motif or design element. This method allows for variety within structure, enabling multiple artistic ideas to coexist within a single framework while maintaining overall cohesion. Emphasizing a central axis is another significant compositional style, present in 6 instances or 31.58%. This technique is commonly seen in religious or royal designs, where a central figure (such as a deity or a royal emblem) is placed at the heart of the pattern, surrounded by complementary motifs. This form of hierarchy enhances visual importance and reinforces cultural or spiritual symbolism. Finally, gradual patterning, observed in 5 samples or 26.32%, involves the use of motifs that increase or decrease in size or complexity to suggest movement, depth, or narrative progression. This technique is often used in pedestal designs or transitional architectural features, helping to lead the eye naturally from one element to another.

In summary, the compositional strategies identified in the patterns of Narai Ratchaniwet Palace reflect a blend of meticulous craftsmanship and cultural symbolism. Symmetry and repetition dominate the visual language, while spatial division, axial emphasis, and gradation add layers of meaning and sophistication to the palace's decorative elements. These principles not only showcase artistic mastery but also underscore the site's role as a symbol of royal authority and cross-cultural exchange.

Table 3 The content and pattern.

The content and pattern.	Frequency	(%)
Sacredness and divinity	10	52.63
Prosperity and nature	9	47.37
Balance and order	8	42.11
Power and class	6	31.58
Artistic value and refinement	5	26.32

Table 3 highlights the thematic content and symbolic meanings embedded in the patterns of Narai Ratchaniwet Palace. The analysis reveals that the patterns are not only decorative but also deeply reflective of cultural values, spirituality, and social hierarchies of the period.

The most frequently observed theme is sacredness and divinity, which appears in 10 out of 19 samples or 52.63%. This theme is expressed through motifs of deities, celestial beings, and sacred symbols, which underscore the palace's spiritual importance and its connection to religious beliefs. These patterns often serve to evoke reverence and divine protection, reflecting the central role of Buddhism and spiritual traditions during King Narai's reign. The second most common theme is prosperity and nature, found in 9 instances or 47.37%. This theme is typically represented by floral and vine motifs, symbolizing abundance, fertility, and the continuity of life. The presence of these patterns reflects the harmony between human creativity and the natural world, a

characteristic feature of Thai decorative arts. Balance and order emerges as another key theme, observed in 8 cases or 42.11%. This concept is particularly evident in geometric motifs and symmetrical arrangements that emphasize discipline, harmony, and stability. Such patterns are often associated with architectural elements like doors, windows, and pediments, where structural balance is critical to both aesthetic and symbolic purposes. The theme of power and class, present in 6 samples or 31.58%, is conveyed through the use of motifs on royal artifacts and ceremonial objects. These patterns highlight the authority and grandeur of the monarchy, symbolizing the wealth, sophistication, and elite status of the royal court during the late Ayutthaya period. Finally, artistic value and refinement, which appears in 5 instances or 26.32%, is represented by the intricate craftsmanship and complex detailing of the designs. This theme emphasizes the mastery of artisans who created these motifs, reflecting both the cultural sophistication and aesthetic ideals of the era.

In summary, the findings show that the decorative patterns at Narai Ratchaniwet Palace carry rich symbolic meaning that transcends mere ornamentation. They embody a cultural narrative that intertwines spirituality, prosperity, social hierarchy, and artistic excellence, making the palace not just an architectural masterpiece but also a cultural statement of the late Ayutthaya kingdom's values and worldview.

Discussion

The research findings demonstrate that the artistic motifs of the Narai Ratchaniwet Palace are a valuable source of cultural information and can be applied as guidelines for the design of contemporary commemorative jewelry. The key characteristics of these motifs can be divided into three main groups:

1) Floral Motifs: These motifs are commonly found in architectural elements such as pediments, archways, and wood carvings. They are characterized by graceful curves, rhythmic patterns of leaves, petals, and vines, all of which exude gentleness and symbolic power. These motifs align with contemporary jewelry design trends that emphasize fluidity and connection with nature, particularly the "nature-inspired aesthetics." This aligns with Huang's (2023) work, which argues that reinterpreting historical botanical motifs for contemporary design creates profound aesthetic value. It also promotes a connection to cultural roots, a quality that modern consumers value.

2) Geometric Symmetry: Another distinctive feature found in the designs of the Narai Ratchaniwet Palace is the use of basic geometric shapes such as circles, triangles, and squares, arranged in a balanced and repeated pattern in archways, windows, and the edges of various architectural frames. This "symmetrical" and "continuously repeated" arrangement creates a sense of calm, stability, and rhythm, contributing to a unique aesthetic. This design style can be applied to minimalist or modern jewelry, which emphasize simple yet profound structures. This aligns with the study of Lee (2007), which indicated that the minimalist trend in contemporary jewelry often uses geometric shapes as the basis of the design to create "powerful stillness."

3) Sacred/Deity Motifs: This group of motifs includes carved lintels depicting the reclining Narayana, angels, and deities, which often express beliefs, sacredness, and supernatural powers. This reflects the fact that the art in this palace is not merely decorative but also serves as a "media" connecting the material and spiritual worlds. These patterns have high potential to be transformed into symbolic jewelry design, which not only enhances beauty but also communicates the identity

and culture of the wearer. This is consistent with the research of Satpathy (2017) who stated that jewelry is an important tool in communicating cultural beliefs and values and proposed a way to transform local culture through jewelry design in various contexts, such as batik patterns from Indonesia, which can be applied in the Thai context as well.

Implication

The study of artistic identity derived from the architectural patterns and motifs of Narai Ratchaniwet Palace in Lopburi Province provides meaningful implications for the fields of cultural heritage preservation, creative design, and cultural tourism development.

Cultural Preservation and Revitalization

The research demonstrates the enduring value of traditional motifs—such as floral, geometric, and sacred patterns—not merely as decorative elements but as carriers of historical and cultural narratives. These findings can guide museums, cultural institutions, and educational organizations in designing programs and materials that teach the public about the meanings embedded in Thai architectural arts. This contributes to a broader awareness of heritage and encourages intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Contemporary Product Development and Cultural Adaptation

The detailed analysis of pattern structures, compositions, and meanings can be directly applied to the design of contemporary products, particularly souvenir jewelry. Designers can use this cultural data as a foundation for creating items that merge heritage aesthetics with modern consumer preferences. By doing so, traditional motifs are preserved in new forms that are both economically viable and culturally expressive, serving the dual purpose of commerce and conservation.

Enhancing Cultural Tourism Experience

By translating local artistic identity into tangible forms such as wearable art or interpretive displays, this research supports destination branding and storytelling in cultural tourism. Tourists are increasingly drawn to experiences and products that hold meaning and reflect authenticity. Souvenirs developed with a deep understanding of cultural patterns can serve as "living souvenirs"—objects that carry personal, emotional, and cultural significance—thus enriching the tourist experience and strengthening place attachment.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The study illustrates the value of interdisciplinary approaches—blending art history, anthropology, design, and tourism studies. Future cultural product development should involve collaborative efforts among designers, historians, community artisans, and tourism planners to ensure that interpretations of heritage are accurate, respectful, and innovative. Such partnerships can foster sustainable cultural economies.

Policy and Educational Recommendations

Government agencies like the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation could incorporate findings from this study into curriculum development, community-based design training, and local entrepreneur

support schemes. Encouraging the use of cultural capital in product design can enhance Thailand's competitiveness in the global creative economy while protecting intangible cultural heritage.

In conclusion, this study not only identifies the aesthetic and symbolic depth of patterns in Narai Ratchaniwet Palace but also provides a practical framework for transforming cultural identity into sustainable creative outputs that serve cultural, economic, and educational objectives.

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