

## **A Study of Pattern and Perception of the Northeast Identities for Hotel Interior Design in Thailand**

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**Abstract:** The northeast identities are inherited from wisdoms combined with local belief, values, traditions and cultures. In the interior design society, it has been wakeful and more progressive because more culture-based creativities used to express identities of local wisdoms and traditions have been increasingly invested. However, only a small number of the hotel interior designs were associated with the identities of the north-eastern region. Thus, this study aimed to find the pattern and northeast identities of hotel interior designs to compose an analytic guidance for interior design. It was also to study patterns and northeast identity perception in hotel interior designs targeting to examine the pattern evolution of former interior design in hotels located in north eastern region and apply the northeast identities in hotel interior designs and to study the perception of northeast identities in hotel interior designs among hotel customers. The mixed research methodology was employed, e.g., quantity and quality based research to observe population and research samples in north eastern region. Research tools were questionnaires, survey forms, observation forms, interviews and focus group discussion.

**Key words:** Northeast identity, hotel interior design, pattern, perception, forms

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The western ideology of globalization has been an influential tool to unite the diversified world into one through communication, technology breakthroughs, language and cultures. Because of this, it erodes unique and local identities of ethnic communities that adopt the globalization idea into their cultures. Accordingly, the proposal of localism has been developed against the rapid expansion of globalization. The core of localism is based on wisdoms or local wisdoms emphasizing the local importance (Samutkup and Kitiarsa, 2009). Ethnocultural identities are then one of the key components to portrait the localism via symbolically verbal stories, pictures and imaginations (Santasombat, 2008). The identities are then expressed in compliance with cultures like stories associated with religions, ceremonies, folk tales, histories, arts and livelihood. Northeast identities are one of those exemplified in cultural studies of localism as they conceal historic dimensions and current social phenomena.

According to localism phenomenon found in Thai society coupled with tourism, it suggested that the income obtained from the supports of marketing strategies of national economic and social development plan 6 (1987-1990) and tourism organizations that support provincial tourisms and products has been surging and distributed to communities which latterly leads to economic growth. Therefore, tourism industry is

the main governmental policy to be a tool to enhance the economic development (Netirangsiwatchara and Wichian, 2008). “Hotels” as tourist accommodations are then progressively growing, both renovated and newly constructed ones.

Hotel is a type of accommodations nicely representing local identities. The interior design is able to deliver ideas into arts that can be touchable and visible for communal understanding. Thus, the interior design is then vital to convert the abstract idea into concrete one which could be applied in compliance with ethnic identities via identity analysis of patterns and interpreted meanings found in those designs. Currently, interior designers have been vigorously progressive in their creativities as exhibited in creative designs which are congruent to cultures and identities of local wisdoms. Moreover, an integrative term, Creative Economy (CE) is an important concept to drive economy using study cases, creativities and intellectual properties associated with cultural backgrounds (Office of National Economic and Social Development, 2009).

One other interesting point related to creative design is “the perception of receivers”. In this study, it refers to “hotel customers”. As humans live their lives surrounded by internal and external cultures, the cultural transfer and expression then affect them to perceive and understand those cultural messages. The perception by touching using body and by feelings as the consequence of

touching has no implication itself. The receivers are to interpret this by themselves using their experiences or backgrounds called "perception" (Chuangchot, 1972). Regarding key research questions related to perception, it was to prove whether and how the hotel customers could be able to perceive and understand "the northeast identities" when they were used as the concept of hotel interior designs.

On the ground of the research problem, it could be roughly divided into two parts. Firstly, it was to use the northeast identities in interior designs to present the local unique which was related to the creative economy. Secondly, it was the perception and understanding of hotel customers. Therefore, the perception could refer to the understanding and interpretation of the northeast identities through designs.

Thus, it could be assumed that it is important and vital to access the sense of art that the interior designers use their knowledge combined with the northeast cultures to create artworks using the northeast identities in interior designs to the receivers. The consequence of this perception could then lead to extensive creativity involved in the northeast identities and it is to maintain the identities belonging to people in northeastern region.

#### **Aims:**

- To study the pattern evolution of former hotel interior designs in northeastern region
- To study the northeast identities applied in hotel interior design and the perception of hotel customers to the application of the northeast identities in hotel interior design

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research involved in pattern and perception of northeast identities in hotel interior design composed of two themes; the evolution of former hotel interior design in northeastern region and the application of the northeast identities in hotel interior design and the perception of hotel customers to the application of hotel interior design. The selection criteria of hotels for this study due to the observation of interior designs in 30-50 years old hotels located in northeastern region were hotels in the northeast constructed in the past and currently operating, the list of hotels officially registered in Hospitality Act 2004 and hotels that widely recognized by locals. To select the hotels used in the study of northeast identities applied in hotel interior designs, there were two criteria, 3-5 star hotels in the northeastern region using the northeast identities as the concept of interior designs and hotels enlisted in Thailand Tourism

Authority accommodation guide 2012. It was qualitative and quantitative-based research and conducted using mixed method. The study tools were questionnaires, survey forms, observation forms, interview forms and focused group guideline. According to the preliminary data analysis and the observation of northeast identities, it was to classify based on the data appropriateness, e.g., types of northeast identities, communication, patterns and art that were influential to design and theoretical analysis particularly the theory of semiology to interpret the hidden significance, theory of design to classify the art composition, theory of aesthetics to analysis the exquisite values and theory of perception to analyze the influences to the designs. The data presentation was in form of descriptive analysis.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study of patterns and perception of northeast identities of hotel interior design suggested by literature review and surveys, observation, interviews and group discussion revealed as follows.

##### **In aspect of the evolution of patterns related to former hotel interior design found in the Northeastern region:**

The study suggested 3 periods of time among the sampled hotels operating for 30-50 years that used the northeast identities applied in their interior designs, hotels using the northeastern identities operating for >50 years, for 40-50 years and for 30-40 years.

The evolution of hotel interior designs consecutively initiated from hotels formerly constructed over 50 years ago. Most of these hotels were built with half wood and half cement. The decoration of reception hall and hotel rooms was based on functions. The hotel management was operated as a family business inherited from one generation to another and there was no external employee. For example, Saen Sam Ran hotel located in Khon Kaen Province, its first storey was constructed using bricks and cement. The floor was covered with tiles. The upper storey was wooden. The floor and passage wall of this storey was built using natural woods decorated with nature and scenic pictures (Fig. 1). Later during the period of 40-50 years, the economy, society and politics of Thailand rapidly grew. A number of constructions like hotels, shopping complexes, banks, restaurants, cinemas, hospitals and multi-floor office buildings were developed. Hotels that were once in half wood and half cement, they turned to be fully built with cement with higher numbers of rooms. Hotels in this period were in various scales, small, medium and large. The decoration was in purpose of its function and simple. They might be renovated due



Fig. 1: The passage hall of second floor, Saen Sam Ran hotel, Muang, Khon Kaen



Fig. 2: The decoration in the front area of elevator, Pathumrat hotel, Muang, Ubonratchathani

to the hotel's conditions and age. Furniture seen in most of reception halls and hotel rooms were in free form found in general markets.

In the hotels aged 30-40 years, the decorative design was more focused in this period. Most of the hotels were in medium and large scales. Bronze sculptures and sand stones were used for decoration including crafted woods for luxury, exquisite and artistic values but still remained the practical functions. There were interior designers involving in the hotel interior designs to introduce the local identities as the concept of the designs especially in the area of reception halls and hotel lobbies. For instance, Pathumrat hotel in Ubonrathathani Province, the interior design in this hotel was decorated with lotuses which were the symbol of the province as the designing concept, i.e., the front area of the hotel's elevator was decorated with painted hardened clay arranged in shape of lotus petal. As the different thickness of the hardened clay, the composition and installation on the hotel wall led to dimensional surface as if it was the layout of lotus petals (Fig. 2).

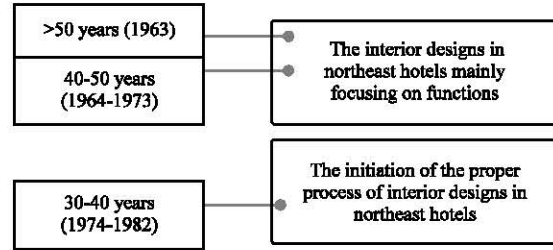


Fig. 3: The patterns of interior designs in different periods

For those hotels aged from 30-40 years, the interior design of the hotels located in the northeast was found more local because more indigenous identities were used as the concept of the interior designs. However, there was no clear indication of using the northeast identities and patterns as the concept of interior designs. Therefore, the introduction of the northeast identities into interior design to be more diversified and complicated was the next aspect for further studies as shown in Fig. 3.

**The application and the perception of the Northeast identities in hotel interior design among hotel customers:**

As the results of the application of the northeast identities and their impacts to hotel interior designs, it could be concluded the patterns of hotel interior designs using the northeast identities as follows.

In term of the application of northeast identities to interior designs in 15 hotels located in the northeastern region, the products using the northeast identities as the concept of interior designs in the reception area were the wall ornaments because they were able to prominently exhibit the local handicrafts and paintings. They were made up of fabric and wood. The patterns or drawings of the products used to decorate were based on the cultural concepts and could be found in local area or in the northeastern region where the hotels were located in.

The area where the interior designs observed the most was the reception hall and backdrop of the reception counter was the most ornamented area because it was the area of information center for the hotel customers using the services or other general enquiries related to hotel services. So that, this area was then the place where the ornamental materials were focused using northeast identities to impress the customers and to remind them of the hotel.

In aspect of the compositions used in the interior design inside the hotel rooms in 15 hotels, it was found that the upper part of the bed or the wall above the bed was the most decorated using local crafted textile to line and ornament. The patterns used were various due to the

cultures where the hotels were located in. For instance, in Tepnakorn hotel, Buriram, the wall above the bed was decorated with textile handicraft called Kid in elephant shapes as illustrated in Fig. 4.

According to the observation of the northeast identities in 15 hotels, the concept used in interior designs was obtained from the impacts of these following factors:

- The impacts derived from local cultures, traditions and beliefs
- The impacts derived from the northeast cultures, traditions and beliefs
- The impacts of the cultures, traditions and beliefs obtained from neighboring countries



Fig. 4: The decoration on top of the bed inside hotel room, Tepnakorn hotel, Buriram

The study results suggested the concept of northeast cultures, traditions and beliefs was the most influential to interior design in hotels located in the northeastern region because the northeast cultures, traditions and beliefs had been widely recognized. This led to the perception and understanding of stories or contexts present in hotel interior designs among the hotel customers who had previously experienced the northeast cultures, traditions and beliefs. The familiar narration of the stories was then to remind and excellently emphasize the northeast identities resulting in the success of the design targets. Due to the pattern study of the application of the northeast identities in interior design in hotels located in the northeastern region, the patterns used to apply in hotel interior design were concluded as shown in Fig. 5.

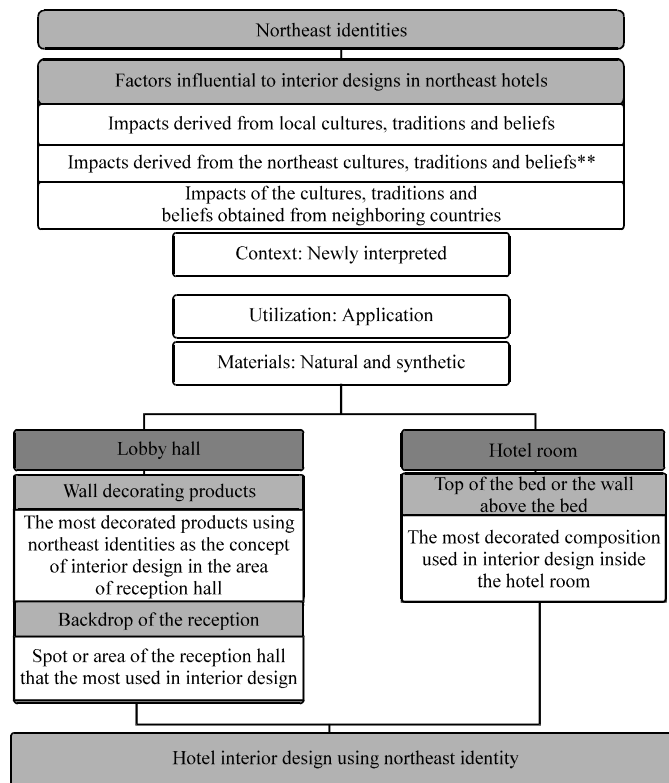


Fig. 5: Diagram of patterns used in hotel interior design based on the northeast identities. \*\*The concept derived from the impacts of cultures, traditions and belief was used in the hotel interior designs

Regarding to the perception of the application of northeast identities amongst hotel customers, the study was to observe the questionnaire responded by 450 customers of 10 hotels. The results on the aspect of 7 identity types, the perception of the northeast identities applied in interior designs in hotels located in the northeastern region responded by 10 experts suggested that the value of understanding the messages delivered from the hotel decoration calculated from the questionnaires was higher than that by the hotel customers with the value at medium level. This implied that, among the hotel customers, there was the lack of understanding the messages of the northeast identities delivered from the hotel decoration. Similarly, among the hotel customers, the medium level was suggested to the value for the appropriateness to introduce the traditions, cultures and beliefs into hotel interior designs. Thus, to design the ornamentation inside the hotel rooms, it should be improved to reach a higher value.

### CONCLUSION

The hotels using the northeast identities in their interior design has been operating for 40-50 years. The interior design in the hotels in service for >50 years and from 40-50 years was mainly for the functions. In those hotel aged 30-40 years, the interior design was practically initiated in those hotels located in the northeastern region. For the patterns of the northeastern identities applied in the hotel interior design, the wall decorating products were used the most as the concept to decorate the position or area, i.e., on the back area of the reception; the ornamental products were dominant in their patterns presented in local handicrafts and paintings. The materials used were textiles and woods giving the warm and friendly feelings to the hotel customers which were appropriate to use in the reception area where the information centers were. Inside the hotel rooms, the upper part of the bed was found to be decorated the most. The materials used were local textiles lined on the wall

above the bed. The motifs of the textile were weaved using Kid and Madmee techniques which were the renowned northeast handicrafts. The textile handicrafts were the most favorable for decoration inside the hotel room as they could give the sense of relaxation. The concept used in interior designs was obtained from the impacts of these following factors, the impacts derived from local cultures, traditions and beliefs, the impacts derived from the northeast cultures, traditions and beliefs and the impacts of the cultures, traditions and beliefs obtained from neighboring countries. In addition, the consideration of the perception of the northeast identities in hotel interior designs among the hotel customers should be emphasized because the customers of the hotels were insufficient in understanding the meaning of the northeast identities delivered from the interior designs.

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