



The SUPPORT Arts and Crafts  
International Centre of Thailand  
(Public Organization)



## Types of Handicrafts

# Sia-Kaban Doll



**Tookata Sia-Kaban** or Sia-Kaban Doll is a type of doll made from the soil. Sia-Kaban Doll originated back in Sukhothai Era. It is a unique doll that imitates real person's gestures. Sia-Kaban Doll is made from clay, in the form of small boy and girl, in various gestures. Sia-Kaban Doll serves as the owner's representative, and faces the illness, harm, and danger, instead of the owner, or his relative. The process for making a Sia-Kaban Doll doesn't require much meticulousness. Sia-Kaban Doll made in the form of a girl usually wears the hair in a bun, with bare chest, sitting straight, holding fan or a baby, or placing both palms together and hold the flower, etc. Male doll is also bare chest, with chubby cheek like chewing betel nut, playing instrument, or bowing before the sermon, holding a fighting cock, etc. The gestures of Sia-Kaban Doll represent the people's lifestyle of different eras. Once the doll is finished, its head will be knocked off, and thus the name **Sia-Kaban** or '**losing head**' doll.





## Sia-Kaban Doll : the unique identity that reflects the craftsman's wisdom and ability

Sia-Kaban Doll is a form of Celadon Ware. It is used as a representative of an individual in the religious ceremony. The doll's unique characteristic is its gesture, which imitates real person gesture. The doll is usually made in the form of female or male, and imitates real person's gesture. Female doll usually wears its hair in a bun, with bare chest, sitting straight, holding fan or a baby, or placing both palms together and hold the flower, etc. Male doll is also bare chest, with chubby cheek like chewing betel nut, playing instrument, or bowing before the sermon, holding a fighting cock, etc. The gestures of Sia-Kaban Doll represent the people's lifestyle of different eras.

The process for making a Sia-Kaban Doll doesn't require much meticulousness. The clay used for making a Sia-Kaban Doll comes from available source in the community, and sometimes mixed with other materials, such as, sand, soil, etc, in order to prepare raw material that can withstand higher temperature and doesn't change its color after coating. After baking, the doll will be quite strong and can be stored for many years.

The doll is usually made in natural tone of colors, including, green, blue, honey orange, etc. The coating solution is made from soil, rock, and water, mix at the appropriate proportion, until the mud-like solution is acquire. The formula of such coating solution is also unique for each community. The coated Sia-Kaban Doll will have shiny and beautiful body.







## History of the Sia-Kaban Doll

Sia-Kaban Doll is a type of ancient dolls that still exists in Thai community. Thai people preserve and pass on this form of handicraft with special significance. Sia-Kaban Doll is completely different from other types of dolls, which are worshipped for the owner's auspiciousness. On the contrary, Sia-Kaban Doll is used against evil and jinx, as a solution against potential harm and danger, whether against the owner or his family. Therefore, wrongfully use of Sia-Kaban Doll can reflect such bad outcome back to the owner, where the worst case possible is death.

The oldest Sia-Kaban Doll in Thailand is a sculpture made in a shape of human, with girl's head and down the center hairstyle. The doll was made in Tavaravadee Era, back in the 11th – 14th Century of Buddhist Era. It was found in the ancient remains of Ban Khu Muang and Ban Juksi of Ang Thong Province. Most Sia-Kaban Dolls found were made from earthenware or stucco, and not in a perfect condition. Most dolls were damaged, such as, lost their head or limbs, or only limbs were found while the doll's body was missing.

During Sukhothai Era, around the 19th – 20th Century of Buddhist Era, beside making Sia-Kaban Doll with earthenware, the craftsmen back then also coated



the doll with green solution. Some dolls were made in the form of man or woman, carry Pod Duang currency. Most dolls were headless, and made with the same characteristics as Sia-Kaban Doll made for religious ritual or as an offering to the spirit.

In Thailand, Sia-Kaban Doll-related rituals and beliefs were passed on in many areas. During meritmaking ceremony for Songkran Festival, some areas or villages will arrange Sia-Kaban Ritual, or the fortune restoring ritual. In some areas, Sia-Kaban Ritual is a part of their tradition that the people had inherited from the ancient time. In order to alleviate one fortune, the craftsman will create a doll with mid, in a human-shape, for the same amount of the family's members, and the same gender as the real person, as well as for the family's pet as well. The ritual will be performed at a T-junction. After the ritual, the doll's neck and limbs will be broken. The fortune restoring ritual using Sia-Kaban Doll is part of the belief that Thai people inherited from the ancient people.



At Ban Koh Noi Village, Srisatchanalai District, which locates in the vicinity of Srisatchanalai Historical Park, on the bank of Yom River; this village is an important source that imports earthenware and Celadon Ware, since the time of Sukhothai Era. This is because this village locates near a convenient transportation route, along the river. As a result, the village's trading of earthenware and Celadon Ware is well and widely known for a very long time. Over 500 forges for making ancient Celadon Ware were found in this area. It is believed to be the largest manufacturing site of Sia-Kaban Doll in the country as well.

Moreover, container made from Banana bark and used for holding the doll and offering was also found. Such container is known as 'Kaban' as well. The word Kaban, as originally used by the ancient people, means square or triangular container made from Banana bark, and used for containing the spirit's offerings. The Kaban will be covered with Banana's leaf, or the offerings will be placed in small Banana leaf basket. Banana bark will be cut



and carved into human-shape, and represents the family's member, including family's pet.

It is possible that because the doll will be disposed with the Kaban container, thus, became the origin of the word Sia-Kaban Doll. Back in the past, the people will place Kaban on the east of a T-junction, on high mound, or in the middle of the paddy field, as a way to invite the spirit to come and take this offering.

Another drastically different belief from some schools of historian believes that Sia-Kaban Doll's head wasn't broken during the ritual. Instead, as the people were sending the doll to serve the spirit in their place, by putting the nail and hair in the container; breaking the doll's head might upset the spirit, as it means sending useless object to the spirit. Therefore, there was no reason to break the doll head.

However, the reason for the found dolls to be headless was because the people back then made Sia-Kaban doll simply with mud and earth, and just left the doll at a T-junction. It is possible that the doll was damaged by passing by animals. The word Kaban thus came from the container made from Banana bark, which would be made into a triangle or square shape. The Kaban's edges will be held together, using a piece of bamboo that pierces one end to the other end. Seven pieces of bamboo will be use for each side, and therefore, there will be 14 pieces of bamboo weave into the Banana bark and serve as the container's bottom.





## Belief and tale that reflects the people's lifestyle

It is belief that Sia-Kaban Doll originated from Thai people's belief, and built as a tool to negate and prevent any potential harm and danger, whether to the owner or his relative, or the patient. Sometimes, Sia-Kaban Doll is used as a representative of the owner's enemy, and used in a ritual to destroy such enemy with magical power and enchantment. The ritual involves piercing the doll with needle, breaking the doll's limbs, etc; as the some people believe that doing so will cause danger, harm or even death, to their enemy.

The Royal Society's 1982 Dictionary gives the following definition to Sia-Kaban Doll: 'Sia-Kaban Doll means doll put into the Banana bark container, along with other offerings, such as, candle, joss stick, and foods. The Offering will be left over a T-junction, or float in the river, where the doll's head will be removed first.

The word 'Kaban' in Thai means skull or head. Sia-Kaban Doll is therefore made as a representative of the owner, in order to face the danger and harm for the owner,

as the people believe that since the doll has already faced the harm, the owner will be safe.

Such belief is a result of the ancient time, when local medicine was less efficient, and incapable of solving the people's problem. Pregnant woman faced high mortality rate from childbirth, where only aid came from midwife, or in some rural area, the people had to deal with it themselves. Such condition presented danger to both the mother and her child. Moreover, after a child was born, he or she would have to endure further more harms and dangers, where most children died at young age.

Thai people believe that pretty children are preferred by the spirit, and the spirit will take them away. In the ancient time, Thai people would not praise new born baby as pretty, but would say the opposite, that is, 'such an ugly child you are.' Saying so was believed to convince the spirit that this child was truly ugly, so the spirit wouldn't want him.

In some communities, such believe spreads to the craftsmen's workpiece, where the craftsmen would deliberately make ugly doll of a child, or even mark the doll's face with knife, in order to make him uglier.

The reason for the people in the past to find many ways to expel, please, or deceive the spirit was because they believed that all illnesses, harms and dangers were caused by the spirit's power. Therefore, the people usually deceived the spirit that wanted the baby by making a doll of mother holding a baby, and presented the doll as an offering, on the Banana bark container, to the spirit. The offering would be place at a T-junction, as the people believed that doing so would also misled the spirit from the actual path. Therefore, instead of the spirit to take the life of the mother and her child, the spirit will take the doll instead, and thus, both parties were now even.

On the other hand, if the people doubted that their family's member was suffering from some illnesses, black magic, bad fortune, bad luck, chronic illness, etc. Sia-Kaban Doll would be created as a represent for such person, and the owner would then break its neck, as a performance to show the spirit that such person is already dead, so that the spirit would no longer try to take such person's life. The people believed that a person would be safe after such ritual was performed.

An example of such ritual was found in the book of Tri Phoom Pra Ruang, as follow:

'if any individual should worship such glass Goanjuk with rice and flower

The Glass Goanjuk will save them from illness.'





## Doll and belief of Thai society since the ancient time

Thai people lived with many believes for so long. Such believes can be found in the people's lifestyle, tradition and culture, as part of the fairy tale or mystery that have been passed on from the ancestors to the people of the next generation, in the form of various sacred objects that Thai people are worshipping. Many of these believe are still influencing Thai people's lifestyle these days.

Thai ancestors frequently warded their children, for example, 'if someone is calling your name at night, don't answer the call', 'heed the lizard's warning', etc. Thai people hear about these cautions since we were young, however, many people of the next generation hardly paying any attention, nor giving any importance, to these warnings.

Meanwhile, many people do not reject the idea of 'don't believe, but don't disrespect.' This is because of the principle Thai people hold in living their life, as Thai people usually respect in many mysterious beings, believing that such being can and will protect their family's members. Thai people show their respect by worshipping, mentioning, and following.

Such belief is also closely related the people religious belief, and comes in various forms of religious practices and rituals, such as, the ritual for birth, death, building a house, growing up, war, etc. All these events will always involve the aspect of spirit and supernatural being, such as, the belief about the house spirit, the land spirit, the forest spirit, the town spirit, the guardian spirit, etc.

One of Thai people's practices reflects their belief in supernatural being in the form of the arts and handicrafts. The most prominent sample is the creation of sacred images for worshipping, as well as creation of simple doll used in the ritual and black magic. Such doll is known as 'Tookata Kae Bon' or offering doll, and it is made as an offering to the supernatural beings, to ask their help and guardianship, where in turn the people promise that they will return the fewer by present the offerings, after the favor is fulfilled.

Offering Doll is used as an offering to the angel, the land spirit, the house spirit, or the area spirit; the doll is usually made in character. Originally, such doll was made with marly limestone, in the form of man, woman, and servant. They were also made with earthenware, and the doll's clothes were made of paint. Some dolls were made in the form of vehicular animals.



Other form of doll is in the form of cute little boy with topknot hair, wearing ancient costume, such as, Joang Kraben. The people make this doll for worshipping, and it is know as 'Kumarn' (means the baby). Kumarn is is normally worshipped by placing on high altar, at the same height as sacred image of Buddha, and presented with offerings, including food, desert, and toy. Kuman is believed to originate from the tale of Khun Chang Khun Pan, and worshipped for good intentions, such as, to guard the house and protection against supernatural harm.

Other popular form of doll for worshipping is 'Tookata Nang Kwak' (The Inviting Lady), which is believed by merchants to have the power to invite money and fortune, helps promote their business, and attracts customer to their store. Most Nang Kwak doll is made in the form of a woman, sitting politely in a squat on the ground. The doll is pretty, wearing angelic dress and head ware, placing left hand on the ground and lifting right hand in a gesture of invitation. Nang Kwak doll is worshipped with joss stick and flower.

Nowadays, we can still such belief in other form of doll, which is improved and developed with the modern world, for example, Tookata Look Tep (The Angelic Baby Doll). Such item is made to answer the demand of the next generation of people. The Angelic Doll dresses in western dresses, and looked like western kid than Thai.

All of these depict that, no matter how far has the world evolves, even when mankind is on the edge of setting foot on Mar, such ancient belief has never disappear from Thai society. It just changes its form, or the people just change their way to treat with their belief only.



## The method for making a Sia-Kaban Doll

Nowadays, production of Sia-Kaban Doll exists among the local people that work and produce Celadon Ware in Sukhothai Province. The doll is no longer made to answer its original purpose for magical use anymore, however, Sia-Kaban Doll is now considered as a valuable object, the legacy passed on from the time of Srisatchanalai Era. It is not just a collectible for the collector, but also an artifact that reflects the quality of life of Thai people in the past.

### Materials and equipment for making a Sia-Kaban Doll

1. Soil
2. Soil compactor
3. Molding pad
4. Oven
5. Coating solution for the Celadon Ware
6. Spinner pad
7. Pattern inscription stick
8. Paint
9. Brush
10. Sponge
11. Base supporter / base dresser stick
12. Ruler







## Making process

1. The soil will be molded freely, or by hand
2. For the case of large scale production, the craftsman will first make the mold and cast the sculpture with the mold; in order to produce large amount of product.

3. The formed body will be added with limbs, or pattern and face, then leave under the shade.

4. The workpiece will be placed in the oven for the first bake, which is known as Biscuit firing, at the temperature of 800 degree Celsius, for 8 - 14 hours.

5. The craftsman will now decorate the workpiece after the first baking with paint.



6. Once the paint is dried, the workpiece will be coated with the clear solution.

7. The workpiece will be baked for the second time, which is known as Glost firing, at the temperature of 1,200 centimeters, for 10 – 16 hours, then left in the oven until the oven is cool.

8. Sia-Kaban doll will be removed from the oven.

9. The craftsman will clean the doll with a wet rag.

10. Final decoration and finishing.



Thai people live with these beliefs since the ancient time, then time changes, and Thai people acquire new culture and tradition. As a result, some of these beliefs may disappear. Even though Sia-Kaban Doll is no longer used for ritual as it once was in the past, these dolls are preserved in the museum, as a tool to educate the people of the next generation about historical events and life in the past.









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