

# A Study of Thai Muslims' Way of Life through Their Clothes

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**Abstract**—The purpose of this research was to investigate Thai Muslims' way of life through the way their clothes. The data of this qualitative research were collected from related documents and research reports, ancient cloths and clothing, and in-depth interviews with clothes owners and weavers.

The research found that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces used many types of clothing in their life. At home women wore plain clothes. They used checked cloths to cover the upper part of their body from the breasts down to the waist. When going out, they used Lima cloth and So Kae with a piece of Pla-nging cloth as a head scarf. For men, they wore a checked sarong as a lower garment, and wore no upper garment. However, when going out, they wore Puyo Potong. In addition, Thai Muslims used cloths in various religious rites, namely, the rite of placing a baby in a cradle, the Masoyawi rite, the Nikah rite, and the burial rite. These types of cloths were related to the way of life of Thai Muslims from birth to death. They reflected the race, gender, age, social status, values, and beliefs in traditions that have been inherited.

**Practical Implication:** Woven in these cloths are the lost local wisdom, and therefore, aesthetics on the cloths are like mirrors reflecting the background of people in this region that is fading away. These cloths are pages of a local history book that is of importance and value worth for preservation and publicity so that they are treasured. Government organizations can expand and materialize the knowledge received from the study in accordance with government policy in supporting the One Tambon, One Product project.

**Keywords**—Way of life, rite of placing a baby in a cradle, Masoyawi rite, Thai Muslims.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THAI Muslims in the three southern border provinces of Thailand have utilized many types of cloths in their daily living. Some of the fabrics are native woven fabrics and others are imported from abroad such as India, China, Arabia, and Persia [1] Each type of fabrics such as Lima, Sakae, Palikat, Pla-nging, etc. is different in color, weaving technique, patterns, and in its use [2]. These fabrics reflect the wearer's social status, tradition, and culture.

### A Aim

The aim of the research was to investigate Thai Muslims' way of life through their clothes.

### B. Scope of the Study

The researcher used Eisenstadt's modernization theory as the main instrument in describing the phenomenon of fabrics used in the way of life of Thai Muslims in the three southern

border provinces in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during which the industrial revolution took place in Europe, and machines and technology were used in the manufacture of goods. Production of goods for commerce influenced Southeast Asian countries including Thailand. Particularly, the three southern border provinces that were then underdeveloped society were open to technology and culture of the modern industrial society. It can be said that modernization refers to structural change of society to modern development using technologies. [3] This study, thus, used the modernization theory to describe the cultural change in the use of fabrics among Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces that was influenced by modernization in the Western world, and as a result, their clothes were made of imported fabrics that made native fabrics become less important.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Respondents

The respondents of the study consisted of five experts in southern ancient fabrics, 15 owners of ancient's cloths, and 7 local cloth-weavers.

### B. Instrument

Field data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted with all the three groups of respondents.

### Data Analysis

Data collected from related documents and research reports, in-depth interviews, and ancient cloths were classified into categories according to the purposes of the study, put in order of their relationships and links, and analyzed, interpreted, concluded, and presented in analytical description.

## III. FINDINGS

Many types of fabrics were used in the way of life of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces, for example, check-patterned, Lima, Pla-nging, and Sakae. These fabrics were long pieces of rectangular cloths. [4] In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Thai Muslims women wore a piece of cloth covering from the breasts down to the legs or a piece of long rectangular cloth wrapping around the chest. This type of clothing could be worn when at home and it could be worn when going out but a head scarf was required. This dress consisted of three pieces of cloths. The first piece could be a check-patterned cloth or Lima silk worn as a lower garment. The second piece was a piece of Ae-chae cloth or Lima silk for wearing or wrapping around the chest down the waist. The third piece was a head

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scarf usually made of voile with beautiful flower-patterned or Pla-ning cloth. For lower-class women, the fabrics used were check-patterned cotton, and for the rich, silk was used (Fig. 1). For males, when at home, they wore no upper garments, and their lower garments were made of check-patterned material that they wore down to just above their knees. This lower garment was tied at the front as a knot that fit their waist then the rest of the cloth was hanging between the legs. Another long piece of cloth is used as a belt and another piece of cloth was used as a turban. When going out, common men wore a shirt without a collar and wore a check-patterned lower garment. Wealthy men wore a shirt without a collar and a lower garment made of Sakae or Lima, the whole outfit was called Puchopotong [5]. Moreover, Thai Muslims also used a piece of cloth in the rite of placing a baby in a cradle and the cloth used to wrap the baby in the rite was usually a piece of Lima passed down from their ancestors. In the Masoyawi rite, children in the rite wore a piece of Lima passed down from their ancestors, as it was believed that the cloth was auspicious for them [6]. Lima-a-ya cloth was used to cover a dead body while being moved to Kubor or a burial ground.



Fig. 1 The clothes worn by female Muslims while at home in the three southern Thailand in the 18th century photo by J. Buakaew, researcher

When the influence of Western style clothing reached the three southern border provinces, women in these provinces bought imported material to make their blouses to wear instead of wearing a piece of cloth to cover their breast down to their waist or simply using a piece of cloth to wrap around chest. A dress worn by females of all ages was called Kurong consisting of a loose long-sleeve blouse without the collar with a length covering their hips, and a sarong for the lower garment (Fig. 2). Males wore a long-sleeve shirt with a Chinese collar, and a sarong [7].

Fabrics from abroad became increasingly popular, and as a result, native woven material was less important and gradually vanished.



Fig. 2 Wealthy women in Pattani in the reign of King Rama V wearing a Kurong blouse, a check-patterned lower garment while the servant still wrapped her chest with a piece of long rectangular check-patterned cloth [8]

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces in the 18<sup>th</sup> century used cloths in conducting rites in order to feel happy and to get encouragement for their living. This is in accordance with Thanu Kaewophas's concept that in Thai society there are some superstitious beliefs that control the fate of humans, and help protect them from all dangers [9]. Thus, conducting rites is an instrument that communicates the meaning and signal of the community with superstitious things that make humans confident that they will be successful [10]. When Thailand began to enter trading with the Western world, the native woven fabrics began to be less popular that is in line with the concept of Chatthip Natsupha and Suthee Prasatset who stated that the Bowring treaty made in 1855 resulted in trading of a lot of material from abroad in Thailand [11]. That was because such fabrics were cheaper as they were made from factories with lower costs, and there were many beautiful varieties in addition to their being modern while locally woven fabrics were made from imported thread making the costs higher and could not be competitive with imported fabrics when people increasingly valued cloths from abroad. Consequently, production of local woven fabrics had to terminate. It is also in accordance with Eisenstadt's modernization theory that under developed society has to change to accommodate modern society. Modernization is a process of change that affects society, economics, and politics. [3] Thus, the use of cloths in the way of life of Thai Muslims had to change with modernization that came with technology from the Western world that had eventually made native woven fabrics less popular.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Cloths had various uses for Thai Muslims in their daily life, traditions and culture. Moreover, they depict users' sex, social class, and economic status. When technological development entered Thai society, fabrics from factories were imported and sold at lower prices, and made native woven fabrics gradually vanished.

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