

An Application of Indigenous Knowledge for Conservation and Development of the Production Process of Silk Cloths

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Abstract: Problem statement: This study generated from the process of production of silk cloths as the Isan (northeast Thailand) identity with complicated production stages. It takes a long time with low compensations and it is unworthy of investment. Isan people of a new generation have gone to be hired to do other kinds of work. They are not interested in adhering to Isan silk cloth weaving culture. The study purposed were to examine the background of indigenous knowledge concerning Isan silk-cloth identity production and applying the indigenous knowledge to conservation and development of the production process. **Approach:** The study was conducted in Isan in these 3 Changwat: The Saket silk-cloth weaving group at Ban Po Phan, Mu 6, Amphoe Mueang, Changwat Roi Et; the Phrae wa silk-cloth weaving group at Ban Phon, Amphoe Kham Muang, Changwat Kalasin and the Yok Thong Phan Takro silk-cloth weaving group at Ban Tha Sawang, Amphoe Mueang, Changwat Surin. Changwat Roi Et, Changwat Kalasin and Changwat Surin. The qualitative research methodology was used. Data were collected from documents and related literature and from field studies by means of interviews and focus group discussion from a group of 90 informants. The collected data were checked using the triangulation technique. The study findings were presented by means of a descriptive analysis. **Results:** The background of Isan silk-cloth identity production, it was found that there was the identity of each specific group, indicating the ethnic group. They had different production processes generated from the use of indigenous knowledge to apply to conservation and development of the production process. For the current conditions and problems, the production has complicated stages. People of the new generation are not interested in cloth-weaving culture. **Conclusion:** Isan silk-cloth identity had different backgrounds in each local area, the production processes are not similar to each other. For all these, it has generated from adherence to culture, application of indigenous to conservation and development of the production process wit the purpose to be the identity of each specific group.

Key words: Isan silk-cloth identity, indigenous knowledge, application of indigenous knowledge, conservation and development, production process

INTRODUCTION

Silk cloths are creative art, generated by humans using silk threads to weave together to make into cloth pieces for wearing and to invent clothes and household objects. Later, a variety of production processes were developed such as khit-pattern making, chok-pattern making, tho yok-pattern making, luang making or ko making and mat mi-pattern making. All these makings

are to create different patterns as imagined by each producer. The patterns invented on the pieces of cloth are marks indicating ethnic groups. For example, saket mat mi-patterned silk cloths are popular in the Roi Et Thai-Lao ethnic group; phrae wa sikl cloths are popular in the Kalasin Phu-Thai ethnic group and yok thong phan takro thaep-patterned silk cloths are popular in the Surin Thai-Khmer, ethnic group. Later, the production processes for the silk cloths as mentioned have been

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developed in order to be the identity of each specific group or as so-called "Isan silk-cloth identity".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The qualitative research methodology was used. Data were collected from documents and related literature and from field studies by means of interviews using structured-interview and unstructured-interview forms and focus group discussion. The groups of informants consisted of 9 village sages with good knowledge of silk cloths, 36 silk-cloth producers, 30 silk-cloth buyers, 6 silk-cloth sellers and 9 state officials responsible for the silk-cloth production project with a total of 90 informants. The study findings were presented by means of a descriptive analysis.

RESULTS

For the background of the use of indigenous knowledge of producing Isan silk-cloth identity, it revealed that there were different backgrounds generated from applying indigenous knowledge transferred from ancestors of each of their ethnic groups. The knowledge has been used for conserving and developing the production processes. For example, saket mat mipatterned cloths of Changwat Roi Et have these production stages: Beginning from raising silk, selecting silk threads, washing and dyeing silk threads, making mat mi patterns (5 patterns), dyeing silk threads following each stage, then weaving all the 5 mat mi patterns together to make each piece of silk cloth. This is called "pha mai lai saket" (silk cloth of saket pattern) as the identity of Changwat Roi Et. For phrae wa silk cloths of Changwat Kalasin, silk threads are bought from other places. They are made through the production process to generate 2 patterns: Large-sized pieces of phrae wa silk cloths and small-sized pieces of phrae wa silk cloths. The purposes of using them are different. Large-sized phrae wa cloths are suitable for making ladies' suits and gentlemen's shirts and coats. Small-sized phrae wa cloths are used for covering shoulders, hanging around the neck, tying around the waist and wearing across the shoulder. The types of cloth patterns are made by picking up and clinging the silk threads using different colors of threads to invent patterns. There are 3 groups: Lai yai (large-patterned cloth) group, lai lek (small-patterned cloth) group and lai choeng (patterns on the cloth edges) group. The most popular pattern is the lai yai group consisting of lai naga (serpent pattern) and lai phan maha (pattern). For the yok thong phan takro silk-cloth weaving at Ban Tha Sawang, Amphoe Mueang, Changwat Kalasin, the

weaving process applies the indigenous knowledge to cloth weaving to have differences from the original but they still retain the quality of beauty of silk threads and neatness of the weavers' skills. Patterns are developed to have the identity with added values, to build jobs and incomes for the community. Also, the patterns on the pieces of silk cloths are originated from making takro (special technique of using the reed of the loom). In weaving, 5-6 weavers are used. No more than 3-4 centimeters of the cloth can be woven per day. One meter of the woven cloth can be sold for no less than 70,000 baht. This is only one place in Thailand where the cloth is woven with 1,081 phan takro. They are the patterns of Ramayana (Rama or Vishnu) riding on Garuda, King Rama 9 Cloth on the Throne Succession Day and the phum khao bin pattern, the cloth for making the coat of the master of Ploughing, Ceremony in 2010 (Soykham, 1993).

Conditions of current problems: Currently the production of the Isan silk-cloth identity is popular in silk-cloth weaving groups in every Changwat of Isan. The identity interests Thai and foreign tourists. The supply is less than the market demand because there are a small number of raisers of silk threads. They must buy silk threads from other places as well as from foreign countries, causing higher production costs. The production stages are complicated and it takes a long time for production. There are a small number of weavers. Young people in the new generation are not interested in adhering to their indigenous knowledge. Also, they lack supporting budgets from organizations in the state and private sectors.

Guidelines for problem solving: There must be promotion of adherence to indigenous knowledge of cloth weaving for conservation of cloth weaving which is local handicraft in different forms currently available to exist in the future and to apply local indigenous knowledge to suit the present global situations. The silk-cloth production process should be developed by adjusting the complex production stages which take much time to be simple stages to produce neat, pretty and value added cloth products. All these must be on the basis of local indigenous knowledge (Saenyabud *et al.*, 2010).

DISCUSSION

The Isan silk-cloth patterns found in this study all have specific identities in the study areas of the ethnic groups. The identity is what we want for our ethnic group due to the silk-cloth patterns found. For example,

mat mi silk cloths of the Thai-Lao ethnic group in Changwat Roi Et with invented patterns on the pieces of cloth by making mat mi patterns on silk threads according to the patterns from weavers' imaginations. They dye silk threads as needed. Then these dyed threads are woven together according to the mat mi patterns already prepared. Each pattern is agreeably named to be the identity of its own group. The Saket mat mi-patterned silk cloths, for example, are the identity of Changwat Roi Et. Phrae wa silk cloths, obtained from the production process by the methods of clinging, picking up and chok (using special reeds of the loom), use threads with several colors spun together to make patterns on each piece of cloth such as lai yai lai lek and lai choeng. Each piece of phrae wa is approximately 1 wa (2 m) long, so it is called "phrae wa" which is the identity of the Phu-thai ethnic group in Changwat Kalasin. Yok thong phan takro silk cloths are the cloth weaving which the patterns are invented on takro before weaving on the piece of cloth more than phan takro such as the patterns of Narayana riding on Garuda, King Rama 9 Cloth on the Throne Succession Day. For weaving they used 1,081 takro, 10 weavers and spent 5 months to complete the work. There is only one place in Thailand where they weave silk cloths using phan takro, that is at Ban Ruean Thai Pha-mai Nueang Phan House at Ban Ruean Thai Pha-mai Nueang Phan House at Ban Tha Sawang, Amphoe Mueang, Changwat Surin. For all these, the production of the Isan silk-cloth identity in all of the 3 types as mentioned is the application of local indigenous knowledge to the conservation and development of the cloth production process (Thongwol *et al.*, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This study of the identity of Isan silk cloths applying indigenous knowledge to conservation and development of the production process aimed to examine the background of Isan silk-cloth identity in 3 types: Mat mi silk cloths, phrae wa silk cloths and yok thong phan takro silk cloths in 3 changwat of Isan, namely Roi Et, Kalasin and Surin. These 3 areas were selected because they have the background of silk-cloth weaving and have developed the production process and have had such activities in continuity for a very long time. Also, the weavers have applied the local indigenous knowledge to conservation and development of the silk-cloth production process to generate patterns with specific prominence called "identical cloths". It is regarded as adherence to silk-cloth weaving. These cloths are Isan heritages which

should be in existence of Isan silk-cloth identity forever (Natsupa, 1995).

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