

TEXTILES OF THE THAI AND CHAM OF VIETNAM AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON OTHER TEXTILE TRADITIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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The origins and diffusion of weaving in Southeast Asia are poorly understood and subject to considerable speculation based on often very limited data. Useful historical written documents are almost non-existent and the archaeological record is poor. Much of what can be reconstructed is based on comparisons of words, techniques, and various stylistic features of textiles placed in the context of what is known about the history of the peoples in the region. It is with these limitations in mind that I would like to explore possible influence of the weaving traditions of the Thai and Cham peoples of Vietnam on other textile traditions in Southeast Asia.

Prehistoric and Historic Context

By way of general background it is important to recognize that the early Mon-Khmer and Austronesian speaking migrants to Southeast Asia did not weave and that for much of the past in Southeast Asia beaten bark-cloth was made rather than woven cloth (see Howard 2006). Moreover, even when weaving did appear it did not diffuse throughout the region and until recent times many people either continued to wear clothing made of bark-cloth or other non-woven materials or traded for woven cloth.

The Southeast Asian textiles tradition has its origins some 3,000 years ago in what is now China south of the Yangtze River and is associated primarily with the ancestors of peoples speaking Daic languages—languages belonging to the Tai, Kam-Sui, and Kadai language families (see Howard and Howard 2002). Evidence comes mainly from bronze artifacts dating from around 2,500 years ago. Bronze figurines associated with the Then (Dian) Kingdom of Yunnan show women weaving on foot-braced backstrap looms. Such figurines as well as figures depicted on bronze drums and other objects from Yunnan, northern Vietnam (the so-called Dong Son era), and elsewhere in this region also provide images of these ancient people's styles of dress and of the patterns found on their textiles.

The weaving tradition developed in this region spread through the migration of Tai peoples into neighboring areas to the south and southwest and through the cultural influence of the Tai on peoples in both the Asian mainland and the islands surrounding it. To the west of the region inhabited by Tai-speaking peoples such influence can be seen in the textiles woven in eastern Bhutan and Manipur by people living along the borders of what in the past were the Tai-ruled states in Assam and Burma (see Myers 2007: 10; Howard 2005: 8, 193). The collapse of Tai political power in this area and subsequent cultural changes among the remaining Tai inhabitants resulted in the disappearance of much of the region's weaving heritage, with eastern Bhutan remaining as one of the very few locales where it has persisted into modern times. Chinese influence from the north has served to undermine many aspects of weaving among Tai and other non-Chinese people in what is today southern China. The Kadai-speaking Li people of Hainan Island have retained more of this heritage than others in southeastern China. Even in the northern border area of Vietnam, Chinese influence on the Tai-speaking Tay-Nung peoples has resulted in the disappearance of most traditions of decorative weaving (see Howard and Howard 2002: 41-63). It is only within other areas of the remaining Tai heartland in Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam and to the immediate south in central and southern Laos, the Central highlands of Vietnam, and among the Cham of southern Vietnam that the weaving traditions associated with earlier Tai people remain much more in evidence.

The early Austronesian-speaking migrants to Island Southeast Asia and the islands of the Pacific did not weave, but made bark-cloth instead. Weaving appears to have diffused from the mainland during the Bronze Age as a result of Tai cultural influence, spreading across many of the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines and later into a few parts of Micronesia (such as parts of the Caroline Islands). The bast fiber woven textiles produced at the frontiers of this island region, such as in the state of Yap and in northwestern New Guinea, tend to be relatively plain and with a few exceptions do not feature the warp patterning that is of interest here. The pattern of diffusion of more complex weaving techniques appears to have been first to certain areas of the Philippines such as Mindanao and eastern Borneo, and then to the south to Timor, Sumba, and neighboring islands and westward to northern and southern Sumatra and subsequently on to Java and Bali. These are weaving traditions linked to the Tai Dong Son culture and within the Indonesian context associated with early Megalithic cultures and the spread of bronze drums. Much later the spread of Islam served to put an end to many aspects of this weaving tradition in much of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the southern

Philippines. The tradition has survived to a greater extent in non-Moslem areas, such as on the islands of Sumba and Timor and with the Batak of Sumatra.

Following the initial diffusion of weaving local variants evolved that were influenced both by aspects of local cultural traditions and by later external influences. An example of modifications related to local cultural traditions can be seen in animal motifs. Thus, while some Dong Son era animal images such as spotted deer continued to be found on textiles in eastern Indonesia, some important animal motifs such as frogs and the grey heron disappeared, and new animals of local importance such as crocodiles and monitor lizards appeared. [The spotted deer, called *tô quang bók* (flower deer) in Tai Dam, and also known as the dapple deer or Japanese deer, appears in Tai legends and represents the fire god. It is considered particularly auspicious to encounter such a deer. Its image is found on Đông Sơn era bronzes and on Tai textiles.] In regard to later external influences, these include the spread of Indian (including Hindu and Buddhist) influence and later the spread of Islamic influence. In some cases these later influences completely replaced earlier textile traditions, but in many instances there was a process of mixing. This was especially true in areas of Buddhist-Hindu influence.

Considerable care should be used when assessing external influences on Southeast Asian textiles. An example of this is provided by an elongated or isosceles triangle pattern that is often referred to as a *tumpal* in Indonesia. In general shape this pattern is not so different from the Dong Son inspired pattern representing a funeral hut and artificial tree. This is a pattern formerly employed of funerary tubeskiirts by Tai-speaking peoples. The funeral hut is referred to as *thiêng hèo* in Tai Dam. Such artificial trees are made of bamboo and then are decorated in various ways. The huts and artificial trees differ depending on whether it is a male or female being buried. The Thai erect artificial trees for a variety of ceremonies and festivals, including funerals. Thus, such a tree is called *ko han khuông* (*ko/co* = tree) or *lak sáy* when it is erected for the annual *han khuông* festival, which is held in the dry season after the harvest. When erected for funerals the tree is called *ko hèo* by the Tai Dam (*hèo* = funeral).

At funerals, after praying in the house, the tree is erected at the gravesite. This triangular pattern is often associated with the Indian *patola* pattern. There are a variety of such triangular patterns found on textiles in eastern Indonesia. Some of these may be inspired by

patola, but the origins of this pattern appears to be linked to the earlier Dong Son tradition. In fact, it is possible that the existence of the elongated triangle on Indian textiles that were intended for the Indonesian market was a response to Indonesian market demands that such textiles feature this pattern. One is on safest ground when known historical links exist between the use of *patola* and their influence on local textiles, but often this is not known and discerning external influences is a matter of speculation. There has been a tendency to exaggerate Indian influence in regard to such patterns I suspect largely because textile scholars have been far more familiar with Indian textiles than with those of the Tai of Vietnam and Laos.

Many commentators on Southeast Asian textiles have pointed to certain geometric patterns as being linked to early Dong Son influence. A particularly important and widely used one of these is a hook and rhomb pattern. This pattern is widely used on Tai textiles and is usually said to represent some kind of flower. On Timorese textiles it appears as the *ma'kaif* motif. Another important pattern is an eight-pointed star. It is also widely used on Tai textiles as well as on textiles elsewhere in Southeast Asia. These two patterns will be familiar to those acquainted with Middle Eastern weaving (e.g., the *bastani* motif of the Yomut Turkoman). To some extent geometric shapes may be simply influenced by the technology of weaving, but this is not completely true in these instances and there are also cultural factors and historical connections to consider. These include ancient trade routes linking the Middle East, Central Asia, and the earliest Tai kingdoms along the Yangtze River and in Yunnan. More distinct Southeast Asian imagery is to be found in the depiction of particular plants and animals (e.g., the grey heron, spotted deer, and water dragons).

Weaving of the Tai Peoples of Mainland Southeast Asia

The weaving traditions of the Tai-speaking peoples of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Burma, northeastern India, and southern China share a common heritage that can be divided into two streams reflecting their early history of migration. One stream is associated with the Tai who settled initially along the southern coast of China and northern Vietnam and who subsequently migrated west into presentday Laos and Thailand. These Tai include groups speaking Southwestern Tai languages that linguists categorize as Chiang Saen and Lao-Phutai. The traditional core of this weaving tradition can still be seen in the textiles of Thai in northwestern Vietnam and neighboring areas of Laos. The second stream is associated with

peoples speaking Southwestern Tai languages that linguists categorize as Northwest. These include the Shan and Lue.

There are two examples of Tai weaving that I wish to use to explore the spread of Tai weaving traditions across Mainland Southeast Asia: the use of the grey heron motif on weft ikat patterned tubekirts and supplementary warp *muk* weaving. Images of the gray heron (*Ardea cinera*) appear prominently on many Đông Sơn era bronzes and the bird was the emblem of the Lo clan, one of the dominant ruling clans among the Yüeh Tai people of southeastern China and northern Vietnam. In the past the gray heron emblem appeared on women's tubeskirts that could only be worn by those of the noble class. Rare examples of skirts with the gray heron motif have been found on Thai skirts from the Thanh Hoa area of northern Vietnam. In earlier versions the representation of the bird is fairly realistic in terms of shape and coloring. By the 20th century the motif had become more abstract and the use of color more limited. The gray heron motif also appears on tubeskirts from neighboring parts of Laos. I have seen this motif on a tubeskirt that has been attributed to Muang Kham in Xieng Khouang Province, Laos. In this instance, the motif is fairly abstract and is woven with dark indigo blue and white thread. Another example of the use of this motif is found on Lao Khrang tubeskirts (*sin mi ta*) woven in Uthai Thani and Suphanburi provinces, Thailand. In the case of one older example from *king-amphoe* Kogmor, *amphoe* Thap Than, Uthai Thani Province, the gray heron motif is fairly realistic and is woven using green or black thread for the body with white accents and surrounded by red. Recent examples are much more abstract and are usually woven with only two colors. The Thai brought the Lao Khrang to this area from Houa Phan and eastern Luang Prabang provinces in Laos in the 19th century.

Supplementary warp patterned *muk* textiles of the Tai are an especially interesting example of the survival of a Dong Son era weaving tradition. Tai speaking peoples most commonly use the term *muk* to refer to a particular type of supplementary warp patterning. This takes the form of a warp directional stripe with supplementary warp patterning. White supplementary warp thread on a dark ground is most common, but sometimes other colors (such as red, blue, or green) may be used for the supplementary warp threads. While *muk*-like patterns probably were more widely woven by Tai speaking peoples throughout what is now southeastern China and northern Mainland Southeast Asia in the past, at present the *muk* stripes are woven only by a few Tai-speaking groups in northern Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. The Lue of Nan Province in Thailand also employ the term *muk* in reference to weft

directional supplementary weft stripes that look like the white supplementary warp stripes. Muk-patterned textiles remain especially popular in Laos. In recent years *muk* patterned textiles have also been woven in Vientiane for the urban market. Weaving *sin muk* in Vientiane is part of a general trend that emerged several years ago of copying popular styles of textiles from Houa Phan Province for the urban Lao and foreign markets. These include what Naenna (1990: 13; 1988: 115) refers to contemporary "mock supplementary warp designs on the model of the **sin muk**" that are woven in Vientiane as well as actual supplementary warp woven muk patterned textiles such as those woven by the Houey Hong Centre on the outskirts of Vientiane.

Muk-patterned textiles were woven by Tai people in Thailand in the past as well, but in general have fallen out of fashion in recent years. An exception is the bodies of the popular *pha sin tin chok* (tubeskirts with discontinuous supplementary weft, *chok*, patterned feet, *tin*, or hem-pieces) woven by the Phuan of central Thailand, such as those from Hat Sieo in Sukhothai Province. The Phuan settled in central Thailand starting in the late 18th century and their culture has been strongly influenced by neighboring Yuan and other Tai groups who were already living in the area. The hem-pieces featured on these Phuan skirts in Thailand appear to have been adopted from the neighboring Yuan who also weave a variety of styles of *tin chok*. The Phuan in Laos do not weave hem-pieces with this style of discontinuous supplementary weft patterning, but instead employ a supplementary warp weave. It is the body of the *tin chok* skirts woven by these Phuan that is of interest here. As with the hem-pieces, the type of skirt body woven by Phuan in central Thailand is not woven by the Phuan in Laos. The body of the Phuan skirts from Hat Sieo in Sukhothai Province and Laplae in Uttaradit Province features rows of small supplementary warp motifs in such shapes as a stepped version of the eight-pointed floral pattern (*lai muk*) and a combination rhomb and X pattern. On older skirts, the ground weft threads are black and most of the ground warp threads are also black (sometimes lines of dark blue thread may be added). The supplementary warp threads are green. With more modern versions other color combinations may be used. At first glance it is easy enough to see the Phuan supplementary warp patterned textiles as being quite different from the *muk* patterned textiles of the Tai peoples of Laos and Vietnam. However, on closer examination they are quite similar. The supplementary warp motifs used by the Phuan on the skirt bodies are similar to the motifs found on the *muk* stripes on skirts from Laos and Vietnam. Differences are mainly in the colors of the threads and the Phuan covering the entire cloth with rows rather than weaving only a limited number of discreet

rows. I have a feeling that the Phuan modified the older *muk* patterns for the newer style of skirts and that Yuan weavers in Thailand copied these, but did so using supplementary weft instead of warp threads.

Cham Weaving

The weaving of the Cham people represents another of Southeast Asia's major weaving traditions. While undoubtedly influenced by Tai weaving in its early development, the Cham developed a distinct weaving tradition that influenced many other peoples in Southeast Asia. Chamic peoples may have made bark-cloth and not woven cloth when they first arrived on the mainland. Whether they brought the knowledge of weaving with them or began to weave once they settled on the mainland, it is likely that the knowledge of weaving was a result of contact with the Tai-speaking people associated with Dong Son culture. Dong Son influence is associated with weaving by peoples of coastal Borneo (from where the ancestral Cham migrated to coastal Vietnam) and as well as among the peoples of central Vietnam. The Heger I bronze drums that have been found in numerous sites in central and southern Vietnam attests to the extent of contact with the Dong Son Tai. There is archaeological evidence of weaving among the Chamic peoples associated with Sa Huynh culture. Sa Huynh culture dates from the earliest period of Chamic settlement in Vietnam and sites associated with it are found mainly along the coast of central Vietnam.

The Cham weave using both a backstrap loom that resembles those used by other Austronesian-speaking peoples as well as a distinct type of frame loom that is used to weave long, narrow strips of cloth with supplementary warp and supplementary weft patterned cloth. Most of the motifs found on Cham cloth feature geometric shapes similar to those on Tai textiles. More realistic representational motifs are limited. These include a human figure that again resembles the human figures found on Tai textiles as well as a distinctive Siva and peacock motif reflecting Hindu influence.

The Cham founded the Champa empire along coastal central and southern Vietnam. Cham people also settled further inland along the Mekong River as far as Champasak in southern Laos. Champa was actively engaged in international trade. This trade included the export of textiles both to other regions within Southeast Asia and further afield as far as Japan. The gradual conquest of Champa by the Kinh people from the north resulted in the migration of Cham people to Cambodia and later to Siam and the Malay Peninsula as well. This migration resulted in the emergence of two distinct weaving traditions: one associated with

the Cham who remained in Vietnam and the other with the Cham who settled in Cambodia and including those who later settled along the border of Vietnam and Cambodia. The Western Cham in Cambodia came into contact with Khmer and Malay weavers and adopted use of the Malay-style frame loom and began weaving textiles influenced by the Khmer and Malays.

Tai and Cham Influence on Other Peoples

Tai culture has exerted considerable influence on neighboring non-Tai peoples. In cases of pronounced assimilation, such as has occurred among numerous Mon-Khmer speaking groups, this is often referred to as Thai-ization or Tai-ization. My interest here is to explore how Tai weaving traditions have influenced the weaving traditions of neighboring peoples.

The early influence of Tai speaking groups on the material culture of Mon-Khmer speaking groups in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand is readily apparent from the presence of large numbers of bronze drums and other artifacts associated with Tai Dong Son culture all along the Mekong River and even in Dak Lak Province of Vietnam's Central Highlands. This early influence may account for the widespread use of the foot-braced backstrap loom among Mon-Khmer speaking peoples in the Central Highlands of Vietnam and in central and southern Laos. More recent Tai influence to the south has resulted from the migration of Phutai and other Lao-speaking peoples into areas adjacent to the Mekong River in central and southern Laos. Language can provide evidence of the origins of weaving materials and techniques. In the case of the Mon-Khmer speaking Katang, while they use the common Mon-Khmer word *sbah* for cotton, they use Tai words not only for the supplementary warp and alternating warp float techniques (*muk*), but also for silk (*my*). The Mon-Khmer speaking Bru of central Laos and Vietnam, who formerly made bark-cloth and learned weaving from the Phutai, also use the term *muk* to refer to the alternating warp float technique and the Tai-derived word *senh* for a tubeskirt. Thus, the Bru weave a type of tubeskirt with alternating warp float patterning that they call a *senh toh* (or *taa muk*).

It is uncertain when the Khmer first learned to weave, but it appears as if Khmer weaving developed initially mainly as a result of contact with the Cham. The Cham were also the most important source of woven cloth for the Khmer when they first settled in Cambodia. By the 1200s, however, the Tai appear to have become the main producers of cloth for the Khmer. A Chinese account by Chao Ta-Kuan (1967, also spelled Zhou Dagan) based on a

visit to Cambodia in 1296-97 mentions, “Recently much attention has been given by Siamese [i.e., Tai] settlers in this country to raising silkworms and cultivating mulberries; their mulberry seed and silkworm stock all come from Siam... The Siamese use silk to weave the dark damasklike textiles with which they clothe themselves.” Damask refers to richly figured textiles or textiles with variegated patterns. This would seem to describe the weft ikat and supplementary weft patterned textiles woven by the Tai. While weaving within the Khmer empire would seem to have been done mainly by Tai and Cham, the early Tai migrants by and large eventually disappeared as a distinct ethnic community and seem to have been assimilated into an encompassing Khmer society. It is the blending of these cultures that gave rise to the great weaving tradition of Cambodia.

Cham weaving also appears to have a link to weaving on Bali. The Cham formerly were mainly Hindu and many Cham are still Hindu today, as are most Balinese. I mentioned the distinct Cham frame loom that is used to weave long strip of cloth in the previous section. A similar loom is also used by the Balinese to weave long, narrow strips of cloth. The Balinese, however, do not appear to have woven a wide a variety of motifs with this loom as did the Cham.

Tai influence is evident in the weaving traditions of Malayo-Polynesian speaking peoples of island Southeast Asia. The existence of relatively simple weaving employing a rudimentary backstrap loom and using palm fibers among the Malayo-Polynesian speaking Sobei (see Howard and Sanggenafa 1999) who settled in northwestern New Guinea some time around 1500 BC and then remained fairly isolated until the early 20th century would seem to indicate that this type of weaving was known by at least some Malayo-Polynesians as early as 1500 BC. However, only a few Malayo-Polynesian speaking communities along the coast of New Guinea have weaving traditions, and even in these communities traditional clothing is a mixture of woven bast fiber cloth and bark-cloth. This would seem to support the notion that, although weaving might have been known by Malayo-Polynesian peoples as long as 3,500 years ago, this knowledge was probably not very widespread. More importantly for the present discussion, the cloth that was produced was made using only plain weaving techniques to produce stripes and checks.

More complex decorative techniques, such as warp ikat and supplementary warp, came much later than 1500 BC and were never found throughout the Austronesian region. Thus, those who speak Formosan languages have no tradition of weaving ikat-patterned cloth.

The ikat technique appears only further south among speakers of Malayo-Polynesian languages. Its appearance among Malayo-Polynesians is probably linked to their contact with or the influence of Dong Son era Tai speaking peoples from southeastern China and northern Vietnam some time around 600 BC to 300 BC. It is apparent that Dong Son culture exerted influence on these Malayo-Polynesian groups. This can be seen in many of the motifs found on textiles, and it is likely that the warp ikat and supplementary warp techniques were introduced during this period.

The influence of Dong Son culture is particularly in evidence in the weaving traditions of the peoples of Indonesia where ancient megalithic traditions are most in evidence, such as the peoples of Timor and Sumba. It is sometimes argued that the warp ikat technique was introduced to Timor from Java during the Majapahit period. Another argument is that the Tetun who arrived on the island in the 1300s introduced the warp ikat technique. While it is possible that some new aspects of weaving were introduced during these periods it is likely that the warp ikat technique was already known on Timor prior to this based on the wide distribution of the technique on Timor and the motifs employed. As for the various groups of nobles of Tetun descent around the western part of the island it should be noted that their dress is more closely associated with supplementary weft patterning than with warp ikat. It is probable, however, that not all groups on Timor wove ikat-patterned cloth. Schulte Nordholt (1971: 418-19) discusses an interesting division among peoples on Timor (that is reminiscent of ancient divisions among Tai peoples) between those referred to as *nis metan* and those called *nis muti*. Those categorized as *nis metan* blackened their teeth, had tattoos on their arms, and wove ikat-patterned cloth. Those categorized as *nis muti* left their teeth white, did not tattoo their arms, and did not weave ikat. Migrations, blending of cultural groups, and the founding of kingdoms make it difficult to tell what the distribution of ikat weaving was like in the distant past, but it can be seen that a division existed between those who wove ikat-patterned cloth and those who did not. More importantly in relation to the present discussion, many of the motifs found on Timorese textiles appear to be associated with the Dong Son tradition.

Geometric patterns on Timor textiles consist largely of varieties of hook and rhombus combinations as well as patterns with a central element that is surrounded by hooks and other shapes. In addition there are more realistic representations. Human figures are quite popular. As on Tai textiles, humans are usually portrayed facing forward with arms, hands, legs, and feet outstretched. Faces tend to be fairly abstract with hooks or other patterns representing

ears on each side of the head. Depictions of birds are a popular group of representational motifs. These include chickens and roosters (which figure in animal sacrifices) as well as other birds that are not so readily identifiable. Representations of frogs are also found on some textiles. These sometimes resemble human figures, but the limbs are more bent. Other animals that are also depicted, but not so often, include horses, deer, and dogs. Again, many of these animals are also commonly found on Tai textiles and reflect their significance in both cultures. One important difference with the Tai textile tradition are representations of crocodiles. The crocodile represents the supreme god Uis Neno of the Atoni who is the Lord of Heaven and God of Water. The crocodile is also considered to be female and related to the earth and death. Out of gratitude for an Atoni man extracting a fishing hook from his throat, Uis Neno gave the Atoni a herd of white buffalo. The crocodile can be seen as having a similar place in Timorese culture as do serpents and dragons in Tai culture.

The motifs found on the textiles of Sumba Island are also often associated with Dong Son culture. This is especially true of those with supplementary warp patterning. The conservatism of Sumbanese supplementary warp motifs has been commented on by a number of authors. Holmgren and Spertus (1989: 36) discuss the *pahudu* (pattern guide) that is used for supplementary warp weaving: “*Lau pahudu* are precise copies of patterns preserved on *pahudu* (heirloom pattern guides)... By nature, *pahudu*-based iconography changes only gradually, if at all.” Only a relatively limited number of supplementary warp motifs are found on Sumbanese textiles. The motifs include both realistic depiction of animals and other objects as well as geometric ones. These geometric patterns include a hook and rhomb figure (similar to the *ma'kaif* motif of Timor and the similar Tai motif), which Guelton (2004: 52) associates with Dong Son culture of northern Vietnam. More realistic motifs include ones depicting a skull tree (*andung*), a front facing human figure (*tau*), flowers (*habaku*), butterflies (*karihu*), horses (*njara*), chickens (*manu*), various wild birds, shrimp (*kura mbiu*), crayfish (*kurangu*), turtles (*kara*), snakes (*kataru*), and crocodiles (*wuya*). While some of these motifs (e.g., the human figure, butterflies, and chickens) are also found on Tai textiles, others (e.g., shrimp and crocodiles) are not. The skull tree is a particularly interesting motif that is commonly seen as distinctly Sumbanese. However, I find that it bears a resemblance to the artificial tree that is featured on Tai funerary skirts. Both images feature an isosceles triangle with upward thrusting branches. Basically, the Sumbanese version is essentially the same with the addition of the skulls. Remembering that there was a time in the distant past when the Tai

too took heads one can only wonder if the Sumbanese tree reflects a survival of an ancient tradition common to both peoples.

Conclusion

In this brief paper I have only highlighted a few common links between weaving traditions in Southeast Asia. I point to these mainly to emphasize that while Southeast Asia as a region has a rich variety of weaving traditions that reflect its cultural and historical complexity, there is also a common heritage that crosses borders and provides a link among the peoples of the region. It has been common for people in Southeast Asia to use textiles and dress as a means of identity: to distinguish people of differing statuses and roles within a society from one another and to distinguish one group of people from another. In recent years textiles have also been elevated to become symbols of national identity. Writing a number of years ago (Howard 1998: 35-36) about the use of traditionally-oriented fashion in Thailand in the face of Westernization and globalization I commented that “Thais have adopted fashions seen as modern and worldly, while at the same time some have also adopted dress for use on occasion that helps to define their Thainess within this globalized context.” A similar point can be made about fashions in other Southeast Asian countries. At the same time, it is also important to be aware that the traditions upon which these national styles of dress are based have evolved out of a common regional heritage and, as such, can be seen as representing a regional Southeast Asian identity.

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