

THE IDENTITY OF ISAN MUD MEE SILK TO CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) of Thailand currently set guidelines to develop the country by differentiating of products and services, applying social and cultural cost to be an integrated national strength and potential, these lead to national development in accordance with Thai good cultural heritage that concentrated on the development of cultural cost in commercial ways and the development of national economics by connecting with other types of cost. The utilization of ISAN Mud Mee silk textile woven identity for promoting and developing cultural tourism, therefore, is regarded as a concrete support on the national development guidelines. The important things should be considered are: to let all stakeholders participate cultural tourism management, to make communities who own those resources have awareness on the value and importance of their own cultural heritage and to encourage consciousness to be proud on their cultural heritages. As mentioned above, these are affected to ISAN Mud Mee silk textile woven, an indigenous cultural heritage on traditional fine arts, for conserving their significant value to use as Thailand cultural tourism cost for further attracting tourists.

Key word: Cultural, Cultural Heritage Tourism, Cultural Heritage Significant, ISAN Mud Mee silk

Introduction

ASEAN countries currently realize that tourism industry has its strategic role on the growth of national economics; variety of physical, social and cultural identity including abundant natural resources of tourist locations in each member that are attracted to tourists for their continuous visits. It's the same as Thailand, the country with several of tourist resources, whether natural or arts and cultural tourism of people.

Thai silk is regarded as the most important cultural heritage on handicraft of Thailand with long historical background. This indicates local identity related to cultural way of living, especially E-san Thai silk in "Mud Mee or Ikat" patterns caused by applying traditional knowledge with living conditions in surrounding social of people in E-san area to maintain and inherit from generation to generation. There are many producers and retailers of Thai silk, which can make good income for Thailand. The official information in 1988 showed that Thai silks were exported at 1.5 million meters and sold for tourists at 12 million meters (The Thai silk association, 2011). A special Thai silk so-called "Mud Mee" is promoted by Her Majesty the Queen's Project on the promotion of Thai silk weaving that makes it be popular among consumers. Due to

the identity of E-san Thai silk with differences from silk of other countries: hand weaving, soft, shiny, rough and light weight fabric; Thai silk is currently interested and attracted by general people. The valuable and beautiful E-san Thai silk is not only tailored for wearing, but also be applied for multipurpose objectives as decorating or fitting together with other materials as well as value adding as souvenirs for tourists.

The most patterns appeared on those E-san Thai silks are related to way of life, surrounding environment, belief and favor of local people. That is to say that all patterns on each cloth come from imagination of weavers who have their expert on remember and create those traditional patterns without any drafting. This kind of Thai silk, an indigenous cultural heritage of the northeastern region, is a significant example of culture made with local creative thinking. Thus, related agencies should play their roles on participating in utilizing such cultural cost, planning and creating activities of cultural tourism together with communities (Preeda Poonsin, 2012).

Objectives

1. To study the cultural heritage characteristics of E-san Thai silk that has been inherited from ancestors.
2. To study the value and importance of cultural heritage on E-san Thai silk affected to tourism.
3. To suggest the guidelines for managing indigenous cultural heritage on E-san Thai silk.

Methodology

This study was conducted by collecting data and information from documents, books, articles and related researches. Types and significance of cultural heritage were studied and analyzed under the theory and value of indigenous cultural heritage.

Literature Review

Cultural Tourist

World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1985 : 131) defines “Cultural Tourism” as a travel of persons under a cultural motivation such as a travel for art exhibitions and other kinds of culture included visiting of festivals, cultural occasions, monuments or cultural sites, natural resource sites or making a pilgrimage. Poria et al (2001) recently defines a meaning of “Cultural Tourism” by focusing on tourists’ motivation as “...cultural tourism is a subgroup of tourism which has main motivation on cultural characteristics of those places according to tourists’ understanding about such places.”

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2003, the protection of cultural heritage is divided into 2 types:

- Tangible Cultural Heritage.
- Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The intangible cultural heritages are inherited from generation to generation. They are usually created by communities and groups of people to meet their own environments, to interact among them to nature and their own history (Eleonora Lupo, 2007) as well as to make people feel that they have their identity and continuity and respect on cultural diversity and human creativity.

In conclusion, “**Cultural Heritage**” has wide meaning and correlation among human and nature (UNESCO, 2011). The cultural heritage has its meaning not only visible things as ancient sites, buildings or natural parks that are "Tangible Cultural Heritage" (Marilena Vecco, 2010), but also invisible things as skill, knowledge and competency of person or groups of person, way of life, belief and tradition that are "Intangible Cultural Heritage (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2010). These indicate local wisdom, expression, skill and creative method for showing local identity and reflecting of social development and culture of communities (Office of the National Culture Commission, 2009).

Thai Intangible Cultural Heritage

Department of Cultural Promotion (2556: 36) defines the word of “Intangible Cultural Heritage” as a practice, expression, knowledge, skill, instrument, material, invention and cultural area related to those things that people, community or individual accept as a part of their own cultural heritages. Indigenous cultural heritage is inherited from generation to generation. They are usually created by communities and groups of people to meet their own environments, to interact among them to nature and their own history as well as to make people feel that they have their identity and continuity and respect on cultural diversity and human creativity.

Since UNESCO lets each country uses its consideration to indentify and set details on the category of indigenous cultural heritage without depending on UNESCO convention. In 2003 Department of Cultural Promotion identified the indigenous cultural heritage into 7 categories (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2013).

1. Language means an instrument for communicating people's way of life.

2. Folk Literature means literatures that have been transferred in folk's way of life.

3. Performance Arts mean performances, music, dancing and story plays.

4. Social Regulation, Ritual and Festival

5. Traditional Skilled Craftsmanship means wisdom, skilled craftsmanship, selection of materials and creative techniques that shows local identity and reflecting of social development and culture of communities.

6. Knowledge and Practices Related to Nature and Universe mean body of knowledge, method, skill, belief and expression developed from interaction between human and environment.

7. Thai Indigenous Sports mean recreation, sports and martial arts that reflect Thai way.

From the categorical identification of indigenous cultural heritage by Department of Cultural Promotion in 2003, Thai silk has been categorized in the type of fabric and garment that means all products made from weaving, dyeing, knitting, ikat, printing and Khid as dressings for indicating social status.

Background of Thai Silk

The origin of silk in China and India back to 2,640 B.C. and Chinese merchants brought silk to other Asian area. For Thailand, there is an oldest evidence of the silk weaving with more than 3,000 years. Pieces of silk cloth was found at Ban Chiang Cultural Site at Ban Nadee, Nong Han District, Udon Thani Province and other areas of the northeastern region or E-san. It can be assumed that there was sericulture and silk weaving for dressing spread away in E-san for long time. In the reign of King Chulalongkorn Rama V (1868-1910), it was the first period of promotion on sericulture and Thai silk weaving as the second occupation after rice farming. Later in 1948 Jim Thompson, an American investor, established Jim Thompson Thai Silk Company Limited for developing sericulture and Thai silk weaving to be more industry and commerce by exporting to USA and other countries. Nowadays, Thai silk is a very well-known in worldwide as the most important handicraft of Thailand, a cultural heritage and products that earn income from foreign countries for Thailand (The Queen Sirikit Department of Sericulture, 2011).

Indigenous Cultural Heritage of E-san Mud Mee Thai Silk

This indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk is silk weaving in form of Mud Mee or Ikat i.e. binding silk yarn at required positions before dyeing and drying under the sun. The bound positions have not any color and will be patterns after weaving as weavers want. All patterns are created by local skillful weavers; they do not draw any patterns before that is differed from other countries. All positions of binding come from their memories and accumulated experiences. During weaving processes, Mud Mee weavers have to carefully operate with correct and respective quills, they also use their talents on adjustment of overlapping pattern caused by dyeing process. Mud Mee silk weaving techniques are, therefore, wisdom of traditional craftsmanship based on high level of technical skill and the supreme art of local weaving. It has been popular for long time, especially in E-san or the northeastern region of Thailand (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2553). There are many kinds of Mud Mee e.g. weft yarn silk, warp yarn silk and etc. Procedures of silk weaving are as follows:

1. Yarn Preparing

Yarn preparing is conducted by cleaning sericin out before dyeing colors according to types of weaving or required patterns.

2. Dyeing

After preparing, all silk yarns will be soft white and ready for dyeing. Both of chemical and natural colors are popular used in dyeing process. Monochrome dyeing is used for only one color of all yarns, while polychrome (Mud Mee dyeing) for many of color shades in the same yarn in accordance with designed patterns.

3. Weaving

Silk weaving is conducted by putting warp yarns in a shuttle for crossing them with weft yarns in weaving machine called “loom”. Weaving process by inserting the shuttle back and forth alternates with treading 1 time on batten for crossing warp yarn with weft yarn as designed patterns, the weaver have to remember all of details and sequences of weft yarn shuttling and picking up.

4. Picking Up (Making Khid)

Making Khid is picking or raising warp yarns up for attractive patterns, it is similar to brocade but using wooden instruments for picking them up.

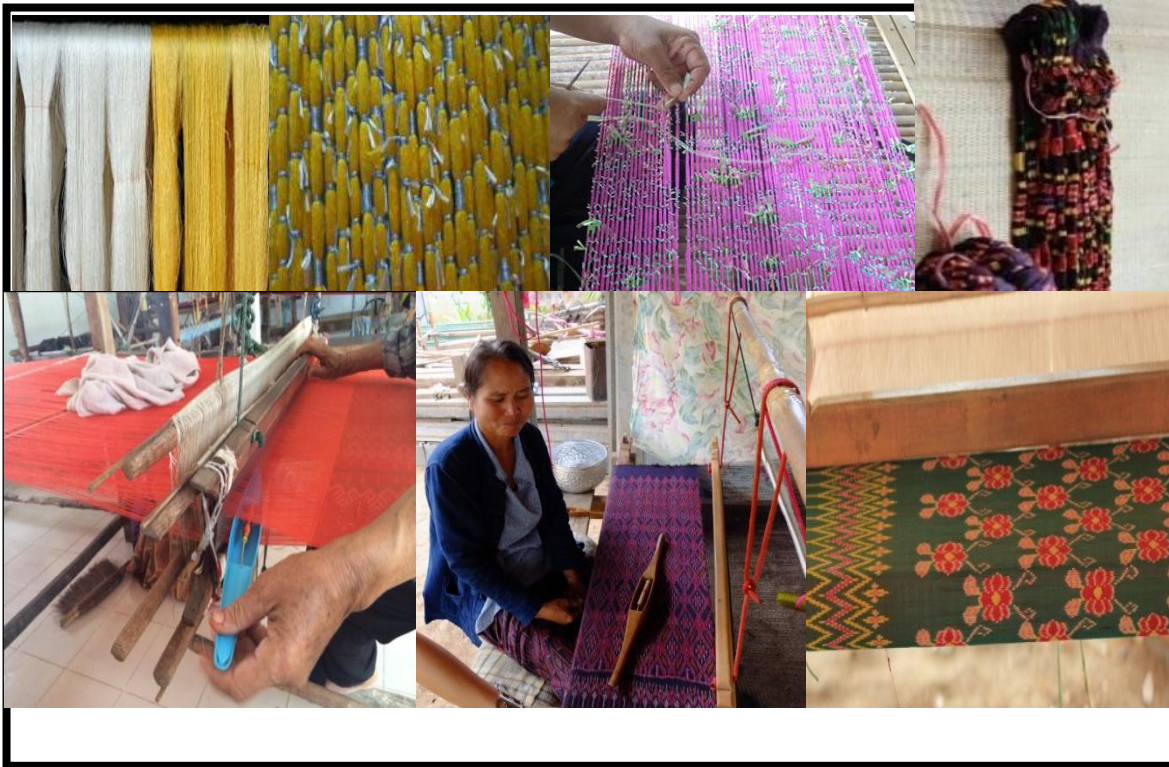


Fig. 1 Mud Mee Silk Weaving in E-san Region

(March 15, 2014)

Value and Significance of Indigenous Cultural Heritage on Mud Mee E-san Thai Silk

This cultural heritage of E-san Mud Mee silk is a body of knowledge inherited from ancestors for long time. Even though this type of silk is not made for using in daily life as before, but people still wear it. This may comes from weaving processes spend more time, patience and concentration on making designing patterns, color dyeing, binding warp yarns with loom, binding cotton thread with silk yarns and making Khid. These make all of E-san Thai silk has its value for belonging and wearing such as Lai Kab Bua (Lotus spathe

pattern) fabric of Ubon Ratchathani. Ubon Ratchathan, a province in the northeastern region of Thailand, has E-san silk weaving with values of technical design, arts and creativity. Their body of knowledge is developed by a weaving technique on raising weft yarns up to make them curve out of woof as lines of lotus spathe and using a technique of inserting many collors of Mud Mee silk yarn on those cloths (Information Center, The Queen Sirikit Department of Sericulture, 2013). Hence, collecting of all weaving techniques will be very useful for skill training of weavers, being good fundamental of skill development and also making Mud Mee E-san Thai silk popular among people and meet markets.

As a result of the beauty and value of Mud Mee E-san Thai silk's patterns, leading designers both of Thais and Foreigners currently use Thai silk and Mud Mee silk to tailor dresses with modern designs to meet market requirements of all genders and ages. Pieces of Mud Mee Thai silk after tailoring are also used with maximize utility by decorating them with other dresses or materials to satisfy tourists and consumers e.g. decorating as patters of lady's handbags or other souvenirs as pillow cases, key chains, notebooks, and etc.



Fig. 2 Using Small Pieces of Silk for Decorating as Souvenirs
(October 8, 2013)

The management of indigenous cultural heritage for tourism promotion and communication has to present differences of priority with appropriate methods. However, the presentation of the significant of indigenous cultural heritage is regarded as a part of management and value-oriented assessment that has to study in all related aspects and then makes value assessments both of overall and by aspects (ICOMOS Thailand, 2011). The reasons are because natural heritages and cultures have their own priorities; moreover, communications have to be presented the differences of such priorities to local people and visitors with appropriate methods. The tourism development and promotion has to utilize the positive results of those cultural heritages (ICOMOS Australia, 1999).

Nevertheless, in 2010 the importance of Thai indigenous cultural heritage on Mud Mee Thai silk weaving has been already registered as a traditional handicraft in the type of textile and textile products). The management of indigenous cultural heritage for tourism promotion, therefore, is a significant procedure of tourism management that all levels of related sectors, private and state agencies as well as people who belong such culture should co-operate in accordance with following guidelines and procedures:

1. Establishing of a direct responsible agency to manage the indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk for substantial tourism by stipulating clear responsibilities on indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk of such area.

2. Providing of brief meetings for enhancing knowledge and understanding in the management of indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk for tourism and promotion on the participation of area, local and target groups.

3. Analyzing of the significant value of indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk in each area by utilizing integrated body of knowledge in related sciences.

5. Developing of management patterns on the indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk for tourism. Data and knowledge for publicizing, creating and raising the level of tourism on indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk will be expanded to add economic values and develop the country.

Conclusion and Suggestion

In conclusion, the applying of Mud Mee silk's identity in the northeastern region of Thailand to promote and develop cultural tourism is needed to have a responsible agency related to tourism development and local people in such cultural sites. That agency should participate in the management for creating community's awareness on the value of indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Mud Mee silk, admiration of ancestors' wisdom and their own communal identities. These will encourage people's conscious on pride and acceptance of invaluable national cultures and effect to the indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk for being conserved and utilized as tourism cost for further attracting of tourists.

Moreover, the researcher would like to suggest the 4 most important things about the management of indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk as follows:

1. It is a must to respect for diversity of culture, belief, tradition and creativity of local socials.
2. It is a must to totally study on history and culture of such area before any management.
3. The management on indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk has to base on efficient co-operation of related agencies.
4. Management guidelines for indigenous cultural heritage of E-san Thai silk have to be in accordance with all levels of local, regional, national and international guidelines.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is a part of the research project in the field of “The Intangible Cultural Heritage Handicraft Tourism Manual Development in Ubon Ratchathani”

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