

## The development of fashion from the beliefs and amulets of Thailand

### การพัฒนาเสื้อผ้าแฟชั่นจากความเชื่อ และเครื่องรางของขลังของไทย

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#### บทคัดย่อ

การพัฒนาเสื้อผ้าแฟชั่นจากความเชื่อ และเครื่องรางของขลังของไทยนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาเกี่ยวกับความเชื่อเรื่องไสยศาสตร์ และเครื่องรางของขลังของไทยที่มีมาแต่โบราณ เช่น ตะกรุด เสื้อยันต์ เบี้ยแก้ ฯลฯ ซึ่งทั้งหมดให้คุณประโยชน์ในแง่ของเมตตามหานิยมป้องกันตัว และเป็นไปในทางบวก แล้วจึงนำข้อมูลที่ได้ไปพัฒนาผลิตภัณฑ์เครื่องนุ่งห่มจากผ้าท้องถิ่น และความเชื่อไทยให้เป็นที่ยอมรับของคนรุ่นใหม่ นอกจากนี้แล้วยังเกิดพัฒนาการทางด้านทักษะ ในการสร้างแบบตัดเสื้อผ้าด้วยกระดาษ (Pattern Making) การสร้างแบบตัดเสื้อผ้าด้วยผ้า (Draping) และการเลือกใช้เทคนิคพิเศษรวมถึงรายละเอียดตกแต่งให้มีความสวยงามมากยิ่งขึ้น โดยผู้สร้างสรรค์ได้ถ่ายทอดแนวความคิดจากข้อมูลทั้งหมดที่ได้ค้นคว้ามาผ่านกระบวนการทำงาน แล้วนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ ซึ่งได้ผลลัพธ์ออกมาเป็น เสื้อผ้าสตรีร่วมสมัยที่มีกลิ่นอายของความเป็นไทยจากเครื่องรางของขลังทั้งหมด 3 ชุด

**คำสำคัญ:** แฟชั่น ความเชื่อ เครื่องรางของขลัง ไสยศาสตร์

#### Abstract

This article will explore the correlation between fashion design and superstitious belief in Thai culture ranging from trinkets or amulets such as Takrut, Beerkae to patterns in fabric such as Sue Yan (Yantra vest or shirt), etc. This exploration will center only on those practices meant to bring about beneficial results, which is to say that the focus will be on clothing or design that will provide positive effect on the wearers' lives. We will also focus on how this belief helped enhance the progress in fashion development and skills of the makers and designers in pattern making, draping, sewing and applying selected embellishments. The result will be a mini collection called "The Sacred One" which includes 3 designed fashionable garments.

**Keywords:** Fashion, Beliefs, Sacred objects, Magic arts

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## Introduction

In each culture or sub-culture there are beliefs in the unexplainable or the supernatural. In Thai we call it Sai-ya-saht, which is the combination of two words: Sai or Sai-ya meaning magic art (Wit Thiengburanathum, 1998, p.523) and Saht or Satra meaning science, treatise, knowledge (Wit Thiengburanathum, 1998, p.462). Sai-ya-saht then is a practice or study of the magic arts, which range from the practice of meditation, chanting, and alchemy to the study of the power of numbers and stars. These practices originated in ancient India by the Yogis who tried to unravel the meaning of life and death by several means. To survive being secluded in the deep jungle, the Yogis must find ways to manipulate their minds many of which result in pushing their physical and psychological facilities beyond a known human limit. (Or. Itdhivet, 2004, p.9 - 10).

The practice of superstition in Thailand can be traced as far back as the first dynasty of Sukhotai. When a king was to go out to war, he would have a Shaman bless him and his troops before each battle. This helped create confidence among the king and his soldiers. There have been 2 types of Sai-ya-saht in general which are Black Magic and White Magic. (Or. Itdhivet, 2004, p.18 - 20) For example, cursing the enemy with chants or special ceremonies is considered Black Magic whereas blessing the troops with chants or adorning them with blessed amulets to keep them from harm is considered White Magic.

Sai-ya-saht usually comes in the form of blessed objects often found in daily life. Some are designed to reflect an individual's characteristic like the practice of Thai Magic Tattoo. Each tattoo is uniquely designed for the wearer, according to his character and beliefs. The practice of Sai-ya-saht has become so ingrained in Thai's way of life that there is a well-known saying, "If you don't believe it, don't look down upon it."

Trinkets and amulets are created to serve specific beliefs in specific groups at a specific time. An object which once served as a protection against one thing might serve another purpose as time passes. Since each culture believes in different power, trinkets and amulets are tailored to suit that belief. Most times, a trinket provides more of a psychological effect for the owner since they are the ones who understand the true meaning of it more than others. Creation of blessed objects can be traced back to prehistoric times. There are many archeological artifacts from all over the world to support this assumption. For example, engravings of the sun or the moon can be found in cultures that worship their power. Statues of Sun God and Moon God are discovered in many places around the world, along with artifacts of worship which may vary from culture to culture.

Magical objects can be divided into two groups: natural and manmade. The first kind is believed to contain power within itself while the later must go through a special ceremony to acquire its power (Wiluck Sripasang, 2015, p.8). In the old days, a person who can perform this special ceremony are hermits or monks who study Sai-ya-saht since not all hermits or monks study the art of magic. They believe that they can gain magical power through strict practice of meditation and the study of the supernatural. If they are not strong in their power and knowledge of the art, the object might not absorb and maintain their power to their desire. Magical objects can range from small amulets or statues to a buddha-embedded coins. For religious objects, only a monk who is considered a Geji Ajarn can perform the ceremony. The following are categories of magical objects which are not religious:

- Kong Kra Pun: protects the wearer against all weapons
- Char Tri: protects the wearer against being hurt by beating
- Maha-ut: the wearer can stop people from shooting at him
- Kleaw Klad: protects the wearer from accidents and natural disasters
- Maha Umnart: the wearer is feared and respected by people who see him
- Made Ta: the wearer is endeared by all who come across him.
- Maha Niyom: the wearer is popular among the people.
- Chok Larb: the wearer is blessed with fortune and wealth

There are various types of talismans in Thailand such as:

Buddha-embedded coins which are usually made from several magical metals melted then pour into a mold in a special ceremony called Buddhapisek. In some occurrences, special powder is used instead of metals. Powder is made from several natural objects which are considered magical, grounded until becoming a fine dust before compressed in a mold.

Takrut or a cylindrical-shaped amulet is made from thin sheets of either gold, silver, bronze or a mixture of metals and sometimes leathers. Special writings will then be engraved on to it during a ceremony. Then the sheet is rolled into a calendar of various sizes with a hole going through the middle of it so that the owner can insert a blessed yarn through in order to wear it. Each kind of metal is believed to carry different power. For example, gold or silver contain the power for Made Ta and Maha Niyom. Bronze is good for Kong Kra Pun while lead is good for Kleaw Klad, etc.

Look Om is candy shape object. It is made from a mixture of magical substances rolled into a small ball. When used, the owner must follow a strict instruction. It helps

protect the owner from bad spirit, ghost or natural harms. When use by merchant in their trade, it is believed to help bring about success.

Kreung Lang is made from natural objects believed to contain either magical power or a curse then carved into various shapes. Kreung Lang is usually small enough for the owner to carry with him on their body. Sometimes, Kreung Lang can be made from metal as well. It will come in the form of small statues of mythical animals or creature such as Naga. Naga Geow is a small statue of two Nagas entwined, often made from dirt or metal. It is a Made Ta and Maha Niyom object. (Kitti Wattanamahad, 2004 , p.91).

Beer Kae is seashells filled with lead then covered with insect manure. Beer Kae comes in the form of a netted shirt or a necklace. It is a protection against Black Magic. (Ratch Ramun, 2005, p.27 – 29).

Kumarn Thong is a statue of a male child in various poses. It is believe to be like a real person who can help the owner in almost every aspect of his life, like a genie from a magic lamp.

Yantra shirt or vest is a shirt with magical writings or pictures drawn on it by a Geji. It protects the wearer from weapons of all kinds. (Wiluck Sripasang, 2015, p.58).

Look Pra Kum, or a buddhist rosary once used among monks, and prayers recently became considered a magical object as well. A rosary owned by respected monk can be a valuable object that people who believe in Sai-ya-saht would seek (Wiluck Sripasang, 2015, p.269).

All of the magical objects mentioned above share one thing in common they are for wearing or carrying on a body. It is comparable to clothing and accessories which provide psychological soothing effect on the wearer. Though details vary of what purpose each object serves, every single one of them exists to serve the need of the owner all the same.

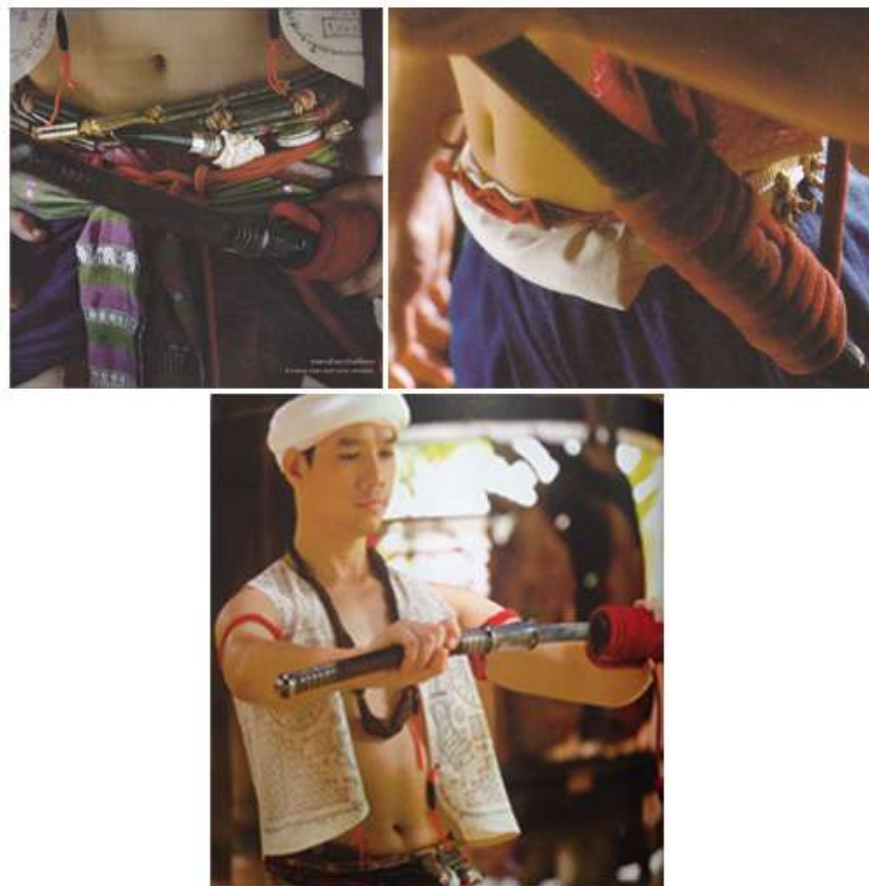


Figure 1: Magical object being worn as an addition to regular clothing.

Adapted from *Sacred, Indomitable, Invulnerable, Invincible Lanna Sacred Objects*. (p.7, 160, 162), by Wiluck Sripasang, 2015, Bangkok Thailand: Na Baanwannagum Publishing

The influence of Sai-ya-sart through magical objects can be seen in fashion design in Thailand. It can provide inspiration for designers to integrate the object itself or the old idea behind each object to a modern design for women's clothing. However, progress is made by substituting material used in original objects with something more practical and suited to the demand of consumers.

- Function: it must be practical for daily function
- Aesthetic: it must be aesthetically pleasing to consumers
- Meaning: it must convey the meaning the designer intend to deliver

## Objective

1. To study the influence of Sai-ya-saht and the believe in magical power in Thai culture.
2. To develop a design by using regional fabric and integrate old beliefs into the design in order to appeal to modern society.

## Design Process

The Collection: The Sacred One is a project aims to design woman's fashion by using inspiration from old Thai belief in Sai-ya-saht in creating interest among customers. The project will focus on the expression of Thainess from an angle which has never been approached before. By exploring this new territory, I hope that it will inspire new techniques and open more markets for local fabric.

### 1. Study and Research

Designer collect information on Thai superstitious beliefs through various printed sources. After studying and analyzing the information, designers then draft a plan to translate the information into a design. After a design is finalized, designers then begin the process of selecting suitable materials.

### 2. Design Analysis

#### 2.1 Design Brief

How to develop inspirational yet wearable fashion clothing from beliefs. and sacred objects in Thailand, which includes the following information.

This will be a mini collection called "The Sacred One" which includes 3 designed fashionable garments

##### 2.1.1 Target Group

Physical Makeup: Female age 20 year or older. Generation Z who lives in an urban area with a bachelor degree or higher. Monthly income of 10,000 - 30,000 Thai baht. Entrepreneur possible.

Psychological Makeup: Self-confident, individualist who believes in supernatural powers but is interested in modern technology. A quick learner. Trendy but not too much. Open-minded and love nature.



Figure 2: Target Group

Created by Simart Prateepavanich

### 2.1.2 Inspiration

Inspired by traditional Thai beliefs in Sai-ya-saht such as Yantra 108 tied around the waist, Yantra vest with naga serpent design, Pra Kum necklace, Beer Kae, etc



Figure 3: Inspiration

Created by Simart Prateepavanich

### 2.1.3 Concept

The development of fashion from the beliefs and amulets of Thailand focuses on a woman's fashion design which depicts old beliefs in contemporary style.

#### 2.1.4 Mood and Tone

The design will create a sense of security and confident of the old world through a contemporary line, shape, color, texture, light and shade.



Figure 4: Mood and Tone

Created by Simart Prateepavanich

#### 2.2 Sketch Design: All sketches



Figure 5: Sketch Design: All sketches

Created by Simart Prateepavanich

The development of fashion garments from the beliefs and amulets of Thailand is a mini collection consisting of 3 outfits as follow:



### 2.2.1 The first sketch with technical Drawings and prototype



Figure 6: The first sketch with technical Drawings and prototype

Created by Simart Prateepavanich

The first design is a two-piece, consisting of a short-sleeved jacket and skirt that contain a silhouette of Thai traditional costume with an exaggeration of shoulder parts. The creases and folds on the fabric create the effect of magical object being carried on the wearer's body.

Technique and Details: Pleating is applied to fabric to create the same effect of Thai Traditional body wrap. Gold leaves are used on the print in the fabric which is raised slightly from the rest. With additional of rope binding and round beads are applied.

Tone of the color chosen is designed to create an effect of magical object in the nature by using dull tones with a mixture of bright gold which is commonly used in magical objects.

Cotton and linen are chosen for fabric. Rope, embroidery floss and extra long bugle glass beads are used for embellishment.

### **2.2.3 The second sketch with technical Drawings and prototype**





Figure 7: The second sketch with technical Drawings and prototype

Created by Simart Prateepavanich

The second design is a one-piece with a silhouette of Thai traditional costume. Especially Jong Kra Bane which is Thai lower body wrap style of knotting the fabric. The details from the waist down create an essence of magical objects being adorned on the wearer. Technique and Details: Pleating is applied to fabric to create the same effect of Thai Traditional body wrap. Gold leaves are used to create depth in texture. Extra long bugle glass beads are sewn onto fabric around the area where fabric is pleated to create additional dimension with a break in colors. Dull color tones are used along with a little mixture of gold, bright orange and blue.

Cotton and linen are chosen for fabric. Rope, embroidery floss and extra long bugle glass beads are used for embellishment.

### **2.2.3 The third sketch with technical Drawings and prototype**





Figure 8 The third sketch with technical Drawings and prototype

Created by Simart Prateepavanich

The third design is a two-piece, consisting of a short-sleeved top and pleated pants that contains a silhouette of Thai traditional costume. Pleated top is sewn in an unpredictable pattern and bulky style, especially on the top piece to create an sense of magical objects being carried around that area. Technique and Details: Pleating is applied to fabric to create the same effect of Thai Traditional body wrap. Gold leaves are used on top of the pleated area which is raised slightly from the rest. Other details derive from stretching technique and embellishment of various objects onto the fabric. Dull color tones are used along with a mixture of gold and red. Cotton and linen are chosen for fabric. The dress is embroidered with shells, ropes, ribbons and extra long bugle glass beads.

### **2.3 Design Construction**

All three designs apply the pleating technique to the padded fabric prior to forming and sewing stage. Combining pattern making and draping techniques helps create silhouette of the designs as expected. With the final touch of screen-printing, embroideries and applying gold leaf aims to create depth in the texture and design

## **Results**

In the process of creating this collection, designer has the opportunity to explore a subject they didn't have much prior knowledge. Designers learn to integrate their new-found knowledge of Sai-ya-saht to their knowledge of Thai Traditional Costumes in order to create a new design. During the assembly process, designers have the opportunity to hone their skills in pattern making, draping, sewing and applying selected embellishments. They also learn to plan their progress and work according to the timeline more effectively. They have a chance to develop their decision-making skills when it comes to selecting fabric and materials which are suitable to their designs.

Designers also learn the process of screen printing without a substantial source of heat. Screen printing usually requires heat in order to result in a smooth effect. In this case, a hair dryer is used as a source of heat. However, it does not provide a high, and stable enough temperature for the color to raise smoothly throughout the fabric. Fortunately, the uneven effect makes for a better finished product.

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