

Integrating circular fashion into heritage: regenerating crafts through local collaborative business practices

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Abstract

Purpose: This research paper explores how circular fashion (CF) might be integrated with the interests of local heritage crafts' artisans to slow down fashion industries while sustaining local maker communities. The focus was on seeking perspectives from people who have the twin interests of safeguarding cultural heritage textiles whilst developing innovative expertise and career paths.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper reports aspects of a four-year-long PhD inquiry that combined participant observation with practice-based auto-ethnography and gathered further data through in-depth interviews, a focus group with fashion designers, local textiles makers, businesswomen, and authorities, academics, and experts based in Thailand.

Findings: A key theme emerging from the fieldwork was the importance of educating producers and customers wishing to support local craft as part of a fashion business, especially in developing countries. The paper provides with recommendations of how local fashion businesses working with local craft may contribute to CF models. Rather than considering craft makers as a supplier, fashion companies understand artisans as 'collaborative workers' and 'business partners', regenerating local communities while enhancing the value of products by merging traditional knowledge with innovative thinking on fashion.

Originality/Value: Understanding connections between local practitioners and outsiders is developed both theoretically and practically. This research contributes to furthering understanding of how local heritage practices, collaboration and systemic change in the fashion industry can support opportunities for local traditional textiles in other perspectives, thereby aligning with circular economy systems.

Keywords: heritage textiles, craft design, collaboration, safeguarding, Thai textiles, circular fashion, circular economy, local weaving, co-working, co-creation

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1 Introduction

The paper presents how local textiles weavers have continued working within their local communities and following traditional methods. This case study in Thailand, a country rich in craft but experiencing the familiar stresses of local products being undercut by imported fashion, offers lessons for other countries suffering from decreased consumption of local makers.

In findings and discussions, the first section presents how local weaving communities still exist and succeed, while a Buddhist temple has turned into an abandoned temple school for weaving textiles as a local business. The fieldwork mainly collected data of local communities in Northern Thailand, especially in the so-called 'Lanna Kingdom', where local culture and Buddhist practices are heavily intertwined with heritage textiles. The fieldwork has been recorded as part of Conway's data collection (2014) about Thai supernatural arts. It was found that Lanna communities continue to have a localised lifestyle, at times seemingly frozen in time and untouched by advanced technologies, and this was found to present particular sensitivities for global outsiders wishing to develop contemporary craft products with Lanna artisans.

The second section presents how outsiders such as fashion designers and businesswomen have worked with local communities to develop heritage textile products as part of their business and intend to preserve heritage textiles. The research uncovered many challenges to forging successful collaborations between local craft makers and global design players; amongst other things, it found arguments and misunderstandings on the purpose of specific design approaches and the interest in being part of present global fashion demands.

After careful reflection and analysis, the paper presents suggestions for solving these issues, creating sustainability themes relating to safeguarding heritage textiles that possibly integrate with CF, and bringing heritage textiles into relevant contexts of the fashion and textiles industry.

2 Literature review

2.1 Safeguarding cultural heritage in Thailand

Most countries from Asia see First World technology and consumerism as, in Ghose (1995)'s words, 'the handmaidens of design and the harbingers of modernity. Western technology is a model for Asian countries to adopt; they should adopt this technology to make it relevant to the diverse economic, social, cultural and political conditions in the Asian world. Thailand or Siam, as it was called before 1939, is no exception. Until the present day, the influence of Western culture is still powerful, including the policies around cultural heritage.

In the Thai context, heritage authorities have followed the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for approximately a decade now, considering and discussing whether to proceed with signatory status (Foley, 2014),

as the 2003 ICH Convention was intended as an instrument that would mitigate both political and commercial appropriations of living cultural practices (Denes, 2015). Nevertheless, only a few researchers in Thailand published relating to safeguarding cultural heritage with ICH approaches. For example, Sarnnoi's et al. (2018) research focused on legal issues around the safeguarding of Thailand's ICH by comparing it to other countries, concluding that Thai living culture is a co-culture in each region and minor ethnic group of people, not to be claimed by only one owner. Nevertheless, 'A-nu-rak' (อนุรักษ์) which means 'safeguarding' or 'preserving', is a keyword in most research relating to traditional Thai textiles, but largely excluding ICH practices.

2.2. Collaborations between local people and participatory involvement

The concepts of community engagement and participatory involvement are not new; however, when focusing on cultural heritage preservation science, Spiridon and Sandu (2015) said it is not just a concept as participatory conservation provides an essential means to value the cultural rights to access and engage in cultural life combined with other individual rights.

One collaboration concept, 'co-creation', has been commonly seen in literature as told by Greru (2018), who explains participatory approaches in design studies generally found in the literature. The term was coined by Sanders and Stappers (2008) where it refers to an act of collective creativity that two or more people share, while Greru (2018) defines it as focused on co-realisation and co-construction and learning through sharing with the idea of creativity at heart. For example, Daldanise (2020) presents a view on place branding by adopting a community-based approach, in which it is evidenced that community has a crucial role in cultural heritage enhancement because of the intangible advantages in which people acknowledge themselves. He describes the community branding process as a creative co-creation of the place identity where tools and approaches of multi-group regional planning are connected with tools and economics' methods and resource management in a multi-stakeholder view to contributing the value process planning actions achievable (Daldanise, 2020).

Both Greru's (2018) and Siriphon's (2019) research pointed to designers who have chosen to co-work with local weavers, while Koning et al. (2016) explain that the term co-creation is often connected with participatory design where participants are seen as advantageous contributors to the design method by contributing their expertise and knowledge as a source. Ehn (2008) describes participatory design as focusing on people engaging in the design process as co-designers, while Robertson and Simonsen (2013) said it is a method of understanding shared learning between various participants in common 'reflection-in-action'. DeNicola and Wilkinson-Weber (2016) state that designers can create something that artisans cannot. They explain how designers and craftspeople have different functions while designer's trade is an extension of the eye, brain, and the fingers in assessing the tactile qualities of cloth, as well as communication abilities with clients as they have a class-specific language. On the other hand, craftspeople can create things but might have a difficult time explaining their work. Therefore,

public projects relating to safeguarding cultural heritage often use co-creation and are mentioned to co-designers. Suib et al. (2020) prove that craftspeople and designers can work together more efficiently by supporting diverse kinds of boundary objects, encouraging knowledge exchange and collaboration. Meanwhile, nationalism is affected by 'globalisation' from regional power blocs and by global economic trends, immigration, global communication and even environmental issues. Therefore, the whole concept of regions and sub-nations has to be re-evaluated and refined in terms of concept and description (Gimeno-Martinez, 2016).

2.3 Circular fashion (CF)

Changing systems and technological development are needed for textile recycling (Sandvik and Stubbs, 2019). Watson et al. (2016) claimed "reuse" has more significant environmental advantages than recycling which on its own is not sufficient to reduce textile waste and does not address the problem of resource scarcity for large fashion businesses. Although all textiles can be recycled in one way or another, used textiles are not commonly accepted as a source of raw material for new products (Stall-Meadows and Goudeau 2012). This kind of recycling is called an open-loop recycling method because the new products are not remade into yarn nor fabrics and are not "closing the loop" (Weber, 2019). Therefore, to close the loop, a circular system has been considered for improving the recycling process into the circularity.

Kumar and Suganya (2018) emphasise that circular economy is one of the most agreeable decisions that minimises negative impacts while transforming how textile disposes of are delivered. A point between a drop in production increase and utilisation of resources causing an amount of wastage. Landfilling textile waste is not supported in circularity, but it increases pressure on supplies through recycling. In contrast to the linear economy, it necessitates the proper consumption of measurable resources and the design of a waste system to enhance economic movement (Kumar and Suganya, 2018).

Nevertheless, the shifting to circular economy (CE) needs to analyse industrial capability, management disturbances, and innovation developments (Kumar and Carolin, 2018). Frequently, the limitations noted in this study are most probably equal to the barriers to promoting sustainability. By focusing more on the CE, the textile industrial waste can be reduced and reused, producing higher product quantities and reducing costs, while the connection between remanufacturing, refurbishment, reusing, and recycling may improve the innovations in a CE (Kumar and Carolin(2018).

3 Methodology

This thesis has drawn upon two months' fieldwork of ethnographic research in Thailand, subsequent to my initiation into the preservation of heritage textiles. The fieldwork was carried out between October and December 2019, and supplemented by evidence gathered on earlier and shorter trips during November and December 2016 as part of a residency project with The British Council, as it is a preliminary research.

To ensure some exposure to different aspects, I selected two areas for the fieldwork, Northern Thailand and Bangkok, the capital city. I chose three different groups of people who have been involved with preserving heritage textiles but who were non-practitioners (meaning that they were not textile makers) from both the public sector and private sector. For textile practitioners, I carried out fieldwork trips in Northern Thailand where I worked with the British Council, in Chiang Mai, Nan, Phare and Lampang provinces, as I intended to focus on one particular ethnic group residing in one area known as the 'Lanna Kingdom', in Northern Thailand.

The interviews took place in the Lanna Kingdom (Northern Thailand) and Bangkok whilst the focus group was held in Bangkok as most organisations are located in the capital city. For convenience, the practitioners who live and work in Bangkok were then chosen to attend the focus group. I recorded informal group discussions with the participants by voice recording, note taking, and in one place I videotaped the discussion which formed the focus group. During fieldwork in Northern Thailand, I practiced as a traditional textiles' maker and an observer of local cultures, tribes, events and traditions which I recorded by photography and note-taking. In addition to the ethnographic work, I conducted open-ended interviews with textiles practitioners, and experts, including authorities, fashion and textiles designers, business women, educators and monks.

Lastly, autoethnographic research includes describing and analysing personal experiences so as to understand cultural experiences. In order to present the personal perspective, identities and subjectivities involved with the everyday experience during the fieldwork, in the current research, notes were made and photographs taken throughout the data collection.

4 Findings and discussions

4.1 Slow business relating with heritage textiles

4.1.1 Local weaving textiles communities

The fieldwork at Pua district, Nan province was the place I visited during the residency with the British Council in 2016, and where I made a personal trip in 2018. This district is one of the most significant weaving traditional textiles communities in Lanna kingdom and the communities are run by women. There was a specific community which I wanted to observe, 'Phaeo Phafai (แพวผ้าฝ้าย) meaning Phaeo cotton textile) located in Pua.

The model of Phaeo Phafai community is well-known as a thriving community and is a model for other weaving communities, according to The Cloud (2019) and Kumpanuch, the founder of the community. She was the only person amongst other local makers from other communities that we visited who was developing new products and improving local and marketing skills by working with various people from both the private and public projects. Kumpanuch is a woman who started as a maker of bed sets and she then opened her textile shop. Her

garments also showed a certain playfulness, using traditional Tai Lue blanket textiles as yokes adorning contemporary clothes that could be worn as daily wear, and she got her inspiration from a trip in Japan about twenty years ago. Kumpanuch target was local women looking for office clothes. She also tried to develop products reusing Tai Lue fabric scraps. When considering the purpose of making heritage textiles, it has moved from just making them for the home and the household, to becoming a local business, and now a commercial business. Most women in Pua district who are the same age as Kumpanuch (approximately 50 years old) and Teekawong, and those who are more than 70 years old can weave, as they had to weave for use within the family, while Kumpanuch's family also made extra textiles to sell within the district.

However, the level of making textiles are the point to concern. The ability to weave delicate patterns was lessening, as explained by Teekawong, a textiles maker and from Visedsri, a young weaver who was well-known for how he can create the finest heritage textiles. He said...

“We always use old heritage textiles to set a standard for when we make heritage textiles in the present, but we have never thought how we can improve our textiles to be finer and better than they were in the past.” (Visedsri, personal interview, December 2019)

Likewise, Kumpanuch said she is always keen to develop herself and the community; she realised that she needed to be an 'open-minded' person and be ready for new things. She also said she had always tried to tell other local weavers to try a new design, which she found challenging since they only wanted to do what they had practised for their entire life. She understood the nature of weavers and did not want to force them to try new patterns for weaving. Hence, she had only changed her garment designs and adapted those heritage textiles as details of her design apparels. Nevertheless, when Teekawong saw my final work, she seemed satisfied and asked me to photograph her with my scarf. Kumpanuch then told Teekawong that it is why we, as a local weaver, need to more open with outsiders, especially younger people.

Kumpanuch also said she was keen to learn new knowledge apart from traditional weaving which she had learnt with her family since she was a child. Therefore, she was open for outsiders to visit her community, and willing to work with countless projects, both in the public and private sectors, where she had opportunities to meet designers. Kumpanuch told a story of how she started developing her design that she was joined the 'Fai Gaem Mai' group which managed by Mahachaiwong, an academic manager, as she wanted to improving local textiles products of the community. One day she had the opportunity to show her design products at the local cluster event in the Nan province, her hometown and where the community was located.

“At the time, other weaving communities only produced pieces of textiles but I had already started making clothes within the community. The wife of the governor asked us to make clothes

for her to wear for one event in the province. After that, people started knowing that we not only weave traditional textiles, but we also make clothes from our handwoven textiles. After I joined the local cluster, I learned design methods which I realised the meaning of making collections following fashion calendar....I have worked with the British Council projects for three years where I had met designers. They never did design anything for us. On the other hand, they taught me design thinking, and how to bring out our community's identity into our design products." (Kumpanuch, personal interview, October 2019)

Therefore, Phaeo Phafai is a community that has both a weaving house and design studio within the community. The community was a successful case of how the community has welcomed outsiders, such as fashion designers and was keen on learning contemporary knowledge, improving the community following today's world.

4.1.2 Weaving community within a temple

A high proportion, 93%, of Thai citizens are Buddhist (McAleer and Mao, 2017) and Buddhism hence has a significant impact on Thai culture, including textiles. Buddhism plays a significant role in traditional craft textiles in many cultures across Asia, and very much so in Thailand, where such textiles are a crucial object in part of religious events. Likewise, Buddhism has an impact on local people in the Lanna kingdom, as seen from local Lanna weavers.

Abbot M is the leader and the person who had the idea of establishing the weaving house within the temple. He said that the weaving community was established nine years ago, as the temple wanted to set up a group of weavers within the community. In the past, the village was the weaving community.. There were weavers but not for making any profit. All women had to know how to weave, as part of their housework. They weaved to make home textiles and their outfits. About 30 years ago, they started selling but only a small quantity of their products as their main job was still harvesting rice. People in the weaving community were all women. Abbot M also told a story that weaving was a women's skill before getting married, which was the same as Teekawong told me. In the past, if women could not weave or spin yarns, they could not leave the house (meaning they were unable to get married) because men would not select those unskilled women. Moreover, Abbot shared the same information about local people having worked as a farmer, while being a weaver was only a second job.

Abbot M also explained

"Since societies have changed, weaving is not a fundamental skill for most women as in the past anymore, and the demand for traditionally woven textiles has been reduced by the manufacture of textiles. Therefore, local women of the community did not see that it could be a job. Hence, the weaving

community then collapsed and disappeared for almost 20 years until he brought it back and established the Wat Pa Bong weaving community.” (Abbot M, personal interview, November 2019)

He told a story of how he established the museum, and turned the abandoned school building into a local museum for a collection of local working pieces of equipment and machines in the community, whether for harvesting or weaving. Whilst collecting tools from various houses in the community, he found out that almost every house had a loom. He found out the reason and realised that women in the community used to weave for use within their household and for small sales. However, they stopped weaving because there were many factories opened nearby the district as they wanted to work in factories instead. Due to these circumstances, Abbot M had a passion for re-building a weaving community once again. Running a weaving community within the temple was Abbot M’s aim as he wanted to continue preserving heritage textiles. He believed that as long as he was alive, local traditional textiles would still exist. He began finding existing masters and weavers who could weave and formed a Wat Pa Bong weaving community. His mother was a weaver, so she managed to find women in the community who could still weave traditional textiles. In addition, all the looms in the temple were donated by the community, as most local people did not weave for household purpose anymore.

In terms of finding customer orders, Abbot M was the person who dealt with middlemen, as the ‘Sankampaeng Sin’ can be adapted with other traditional patterns. He believed that heritage textiles and the traditional process of making textiles could continue as long as the right customers could be found. Abbot M explained “we have to love what we do. There are always new things coming into to our life, new developments, technologies that comfort us”. He examined the reasons why some customers, like his community’s customers, are willing to pay for local textiles even though they are more expensive than manufactured textiles. He suggested that customers know the difference between our textiles and those textiles, and they are not the same.

4.2 Outsiders with local practitioners

4.2.1 *Fashion designers*

Whilst doing fieldwork in the Lanna Kingdom, I observed local weavers and their local culture, and I found a connection between local weavers and Buddhism. Local weavers have continued practising Buddhist activities, and temples are still the centre of their communities. Therefore, traditional weaving textiles have been related with Buddhism. Likewise, local weavers have connections with outsiders to their communities in terms of working on producing heritage textiles. Since traditional weaving can be either their first job or second job, women can finally earn income independently. Those outsiders are individuals from both the public and private sectors. As a result, local weavers are a link between traditions, local culture and contemporary knowledge from different group of people, including fashion designers. In this section, I present how fashion designers have been

part of safeguarding and developing heritage textiles and working with organisations and directly working with local weavers.

Fashion designers are people who local weavers have experiences of working with, as designers are always chosen as part of both public and private projects. Leepayakhun, the head of safeguarding and developing local wisdom of silk in the Queen Sirikit Department of Sericulture (The Silk Department), explained

“the reason for working with fashion designers is to show Thai textiles’ abilities in various design and occasions.” (Leepayakhun, personal interview, December 2019)

Kumpanuch, a weaver, also said fashion designers brought contemporary ideas into local communities to find alternative ways for local weavers to produce textiles products to earn more income from traditional weaving, so weaving heritage textiles would continue to exist. Therefore, fashion designers played a major role of bringing their design expertise into the heritage textiles, which are made by traditional methods. Limbipichai, Head of Knowledge Management Division, The Support Arts and Crafts International Centre of Thailand (SACICT), shared an idea for bringing fashion designers to work for heritage textiles:

“Before, we only weaved textiles for ‘Noong Hom’ (นุ่งหมี่). If we would like to develop textiles whether for Thai people or international markets, we have to create internationalised garments, to look more stylish. Therefore, developing textiles have to use fashion design expertise, which are younger generations, while weaving textiles just let older people continue making it.” (Limbipichai, Personal interview, December 2019)

4.2.2 Businesswomen

In this section, the paper presents a case study of the Premier Group, which holds assets in real estate, transportation, consumer goods, IT, and environmental products, as well as the luxury hotels of Rayavadee in Krabi, and Raya Heritage and Tamarind Village in Chiang Mai. Phongsathorn, CEO, Real Estate and Hotel Group Business, the Premier Group of Companies, mentioned that her father, a founder of the Group, and herself always considered local communities, although they have worked in real estate and hotel businesses. She examined the ‘Raya Heritage’, a new boutique hotel which opened in 2018, and her research team did in-depth research and fieldwork in the local area for two years. She focused on knowledge management whereby the company has a concern for preserving heritage. This encouraged me to explore how the hotel business has been involved with cultural heritage preservation.

Phongsathorn explained that in terms of safeguarding local heritage textiles, weavers have to earn enough income.

“When working with local communities, we thought about how to motivate local people to continue working in craft again. Therefore, we have to educate about business to them. We taught them how to set prices for their products. (Phongsathorn, personal interview, October 2019)

She explained the reason for bringing designers to work with local makers:

“...We have tried to set a trend of ‘mix and match’ for using local craft products with fashion products... Things have to be made in an artistic way, not only to think about the purpose of using those objects, or for daily usage. Our hotels have ordered those things that once used to be ordinary objects and turned them into decorating objects within our hotels, because ‘functional benefit’ no longer exists.” (Phongsathorn, personal interview, October 2019)

Unlike public sectors, the Premier Group has an in-house design team. Phongsathorn recruited a fashion stylist who was born and lived in Chiangmai, the local province where both Tamarind Village and Raya Heritage hotels are located. She explained that working with designer who has a background of where the hotels are located, helps in the work with local communities. The fashion stylist is a leader to work with the team by considering both mood and tone, the expectations of the hotels and the match with each local community that suits each part of the projects. Phongsathorn said the team had never changed ‘the core of local wisdom’, but they made only slight change designs such as small details of products whether colours, or sizing. Nutsati, the manager of the Tamarind Village and the Raya Heritage hotels, said that the method of bringing designers to work with local makers creates a ‘new knowledge’ from each other. She explained:

“One thing we would like to make it happen is creating a combination of the old techniques of local makers and the new ideas from designers. Therefore, our designers have opportunities to design and develop local products, creating new innovations whilst at the same time safeguarding those local heritage skills” (Nutsati, personal interview, November 2019)

Jitsukummongkol, a social enterprise (SE), said private businesses could see their businesses as social enterprises. They can work with local communities as a long-term business partner. Hirunpruk, a textiles expert who retired from working as the head of the Thailand Textile Institute, and is a consultant for various projects, added that no matter what people do, ‘economics’ is crucial for both local weavers and preservers. Therefore, preservers need to work with local communities with a business mind, which can help local weavers to be able to work in heritage textiles as a stable job. Pongprasit, a fashion designer, shared her work experience with local communities, whereby she said her brand could not work as an SE business. Nevertheless, her VinnPatararin brand created ‘collaborative working’ with local communities that she used to work for public projects. Pongprasit said the

brand had worked with local weavers as a 'business partner' for creating exclusive textiles for special collections. She aimed to strive to create a 'win-win situation' following Hirunpruk's explanation that everyone needs to consider economics. The local weavers received a 'well-fair trade' pay, while Pongprasit gained ideal textiles for her brand's collections.

4.2.3 working relationships between local communities, and fashion designers and businesswomen

Working with designers and local weavers also creates a 'shared knowledge' between each other. Nutsati added that some local makers want to develop their local products. She examined one community which had created pillow covers for the hotels; they had learned a design concept and methods from the design team. Therefore, the community had adapted from the pattern design for a pillow to create a new patchwork for their bag products.

In terms of the perception of Thai heritage textiles, Pongprasit taught textiles should be divided into two; those heritage textiles that require to be fully conserved without changing anything in order to portray their history, or those heritage textiles that can be changed by experimenting with yarns, patterns and techniques which are traditional textiles. She clarified that we can preserve and promote through products or techniques and skills. She explained the relationship between fashion designers and local makers who, despite 'conversations' between them, suggest that the key to working with local communities is 'communication'. While other designers might consider local textiles makers are suppliers, Pongprasit thinks they are not, as she believes in 'developing something together'. Nevertheless, she said it also depends on local makers' perceptions of fashion designers. She shared her experiences:

"One project I worked with the other ten fashion designers, and we did fieldwork, where we spent times with local communities as we wanted to know how local makers work. From this point, designers were divided into two groups, those who think they do not need to understand the processes of local makers' works and see them as suppliers. On the other hand, the other groups of designers think those complex skills are heritage, and they want to tell those stories. They want to continue developing products with local makers. They are willing to stay with local communities no matter how long they have to spend until local communities have accepted them." (Pongprasit, focus group, December 2019)

Similarly, during the focus group, Leepayakhun, an authority, said:

"fashion designers are divided into two groups, those designers who are keen to working from the starting point which is producing yarn, and those designers who only see heritage textiles as a type of material for using in their design." (Leepayakhun, personal interview, December 2019)

4.3 Circular fashion with heritage textiles

Local heritage textiles have been compared to slow fashion as they favour slow production in their commitment to traditional methods. However, this does not necessarily translate into heritage textiles, where craft may have been practised without much change for many generations, to be relevant to today's demands and therefore finding buyers alongside contemporary fashion products. 'Preserving' valuable heritage textiles methods and local communities' businesses should therefore consider 'developing' heritage textiles to be a relevant proposition to today's customers in a competitive market.

When focusing on 'traditional textiles' or 'heritage textiles' in Thailand, Asavaprapa, a fashion designer, told this research that they often have been limited to and by using for traditional ways, while Panchiracharoen, a fashion designer, confirmed that Thai textiles have used the same traditional ways as his grandmother and mother did over the past 30 years. Both designers explained that Thai textiles had been reserved mainly as traditional textiles for traditional events such as Buddhist activities, traditional weddings, and special traditional occasions. Panchiracharoen added that older people had worn heritage textiles in traditional ways that are not relevant to today's preferences, but that local practitioners had created 'new textiles' following traditional methods, with small businesses as they usually work within their local communities. An important factor in textiles being considered heritage was the choice of material, with traditional yarns such as silk and cotton still dominating.

4.3.1 Bigger or smaller business scales

While today's fashion is concerned with sustainability, CE is considered a business model for the fashion industry. This research heard from Hirunpruk that CE is usually for a bigger business scale, while SMEs will focus on developing their products with little concern for CE. He examined Thai Num Choke Textile Co., Ltd.; a company focused on sustainability, which accepted to purchase waste fabrics from local textiles makers for their recycling fabrics line. The company only purchased waste fabrics on this occasion and did not develop new products with local communities. Hirunpruk offered that co-working could be a project when more prominent companies were partnered with local communities. One example is a PET monks' robe (called Ji Won จีวัน). According to KaoSod (2021), the Ji Won resulted out of a collaborative project between Jak Daeng temple, Samut Prakarn province, and PTT Global Chemical Co., Ltd.(GC). Pra Ma Ha Pranom, a monk of the temple, said he has always seen countless waste in a Chao Praya river located near the temple. Therefore, he started to find ways to reduce those waste until he met a GC worker who works for the 'Circular Living' project. As a result, they have worked on this project together. The monk robe is made from PET 15 plastic bottles, and a set is made from PET 60 plastic bottles. The textiles are Polyester Rayon, with a mixture of cotton and polyester Zinc Antibacterial.

For SMEs scale or local communities, Hirunpruk pointed to 'silk yarn', drawing from his experience of working in Thai textiles and having a family business dealing in Thai Silk. He said silk is a recognised material for heritage

textiles in Thailand, as is cotton. Silk textiles makers always have been concerned about zero-waste as Thai people consider silk a precious material and do not want to waste any part from production. Silkworms are food and Silk cocoons are used for beauty products such as shampoo and soap or small textiles products. Silk fabrics wastes from cutting are always in high demand, as silk waste can be made to other products, such as key chains and even jewellery such as the La Orr brand. The brand was founded by Limwongse, who considered silk waste. All of her jewellery is made from Thai silk waste.

I discussed with Hirunpruk the possibility of encouraging local communities to start experimenting with alternative yarns made from recycling products. Hirunpruk said it could be only by small projects partnered with those local communities willing to work with unconventional materials. He added that we have to wait until the public sector has considered it a matter worth pursuing. Also, asking local makers to try something new is a difficult task, as was confirmed by Phaeo Phafai. She pointed out that she does not know how to work with new material and suggested local communities require a person who can be a link between the communities and those companies which own advanced technologies if they want to follow CE business criteria.

4.3.2 Merging circular fashion and heritage textiles

VinnPatararin is an example of how a fashion brand has worked with big companies and the local community. Pongprasit, one of the owners of VinnPatararin, shared her experience working with one project relating to CE. Pongprasit said that she and her business partner, Chokkhatiwat, aimed to promote Thai textiles to help local communities. When invited to an opportunity by the state authority, they were curious why the Silk department wanted help from them, and why they wanted fashion designers to use Thai textiles,. Both agreed to work as part of the Silk department's project as they share a passion for experimenting with new materials and design methods. The brand also has worked with several public and private projects that intend to develop heritage textiles products. In 2018, VinnPatararin presented their autumn-winter 2018-2019 collection at ELLE Thailand Fashion Week with very bold, vivid, colourful fabrics using their signature laser cutting technique. The highlight fabrics of the collection are traditional textiles that they produced with local communities in North-eastern Thailand, sponsored by Customer Solution Center (CSC). They used recycled plastic yarns as an alternative yarn to that used traditionally in the communities and co-designed with local weavers to create new patterns mixed with new yarns while still using heritage technique, for example local Ikat of the Surin province. Pongprasit said they avoided selecting heritage textiles that are precious, high value, and full of history as she thought it was difficult to present those heritage textiles through her designs. Instead, she and her business partner preferred to develop new textiles using heritage skills or local traditional textiles that are less precious and more affordable; in this way she felt able to play with her design while "cultural preservers" would not judge her. Another factor had been that one of the staff from CSC has contacted the brand, so she and her partner responded to this external opportunity to experiment in alternative yarn using traditional heritage textiles.

Pongprasit shared her experiences working between a big organisation and local textiles communities describing herself as the middleman who linked these two actors together by using design approaches. She said she was already familiar with 'design methods', but it is something new and challenging for her when facing heritage textiles. She found one major challenge to be to convince local textiles makers to try new yarns and new design patterns. Local textiles makers have often worked in almost the same way for their entire life; even Kumpanuch said it is hard to encourage weavers willing to experiment with new approaches as they think their traditional methods are good enough and do not require them to develop new products. Therefore, she wanted to use her design expertise to work with local communities, especially when both designers brought new ideas to traditional textiles makers. Pongprasit reported that she and her partner visited various local communities, spent time with local weavers, and built their interest in Thai textiles and felt thus enabled to experiment with new designs. This included not only designing clothes with Thai textiles but also trying new yarns with traditional methods that can be part of the fashion industry in the long term.

4.3.3 How to scale circularity in fashion

Junniwas, a fashion designer of Circular Club Thailand, said that they have to consider how to produce and where those materials come from to make new products. If those materials are purely new, they will be hard to claim as CF, especially if those products will be landfilled at the end of their life. Sugsaisakon, a Climate Change and Energy Attaché of the British Embassy to Thailand, also supported Junniwas's thought that CF needs to consider everything from the producing to the ending process, meaning that the silk production is not currently a closed-loop cycle and could not be claimed as part of CF. He explained that if unused silk fabrics or waste fabrics will be landfilled in the end, the silk industry could merely claim reduce waste. At the same time he taught that Thai silk has been used by people in ways that almost cover the whole circle life of the circular system. Sugsaisakon agreed by suggesting that in the end it depends on customers' perceptions as much as on how producers will take action to reduce waste and pollution from the fashion and textiles industry. Interestingly Sugsaisakon did not consider the earlier mentioned projects as examples of CE since they had not considered the final stages of the textiles involved. Both Junniwas and Sugsaisakon opined that the global fashion trend for responsible environmental behaviour had incentivised fashion and textiles companies to start and change their business model to sustainability. They proposed to consider in detail whether they only change for reasons of showing Corporate social responsibility (CSR), whether they were involved in greenwashing, or whether they genuinely intended to solve environmental issues caused by the fashion and textiles industry. These views from within Thai crafts echoes concerns in the wider fashion industry on how to genuinely achieve CF.

5 Conclusion

The local weaving communities in Northern Thailand have largely continued to work in traditional ways, shunning advanced technologies in favour of heritage methods and materials. But while managing to keep a level of local businesses afloat they are starting to connect more with design projects concerned with CE and CF. The study of the Phaeo Phafai community is a case in point as local practitioners have continued working in traditional ways while the head of the community pursued co-working opportunities with “outsiders” from the world of fashion. As these designers bring expertise in delivering on public or private projects they play a significant role in developing heritage textiles products in Thailand that may help local communities to be able to continue to work as local weavers while their communities connect to wider business and environmental opportunities. We also saw in the Wat Pa Bong weaving textiles community that is located within a Buddhist temple and established by an abbot monk, how within this framework, local people have sought and found ways to integrate local traditional skills into today’s fashion world. Both examples show how co-working between people of different expertise and backgrounds can create a ‘shared knowledge’ space between these that benefits local weavers, fashion designers and businesswomen. Most of these examples favoured a rather preserving attitude to heritage and led to few developments in material, for example.

The paper also presented the example of Pongprasit, however, a fashion designer who brought recycled plastic yarns to local weaving communities to experiment weaving these in heritage techniques but with unconventional yarns, as part of bringing heritage textiles into CF.

As doubts have been cast over claims that Thai silk production is a ‘zero waste’ production and could be part of CF, especially in SMEs, this approach of combining advanced technologies usually adopted by big companies with local techniques and products must be considered as a route worth pursuing further, with a reminder that CF depends on customers’ perceptions and how producers take action.

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