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# RAJAPASTRAPON: THE INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION FROM HISTORICAL IMAGES OF ROYAL COSTUMES OF LADIES OF THE COURT IN THE RATTANAKOSIN ERA

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## ABSTRACT

The research of Rajapastrapon: *The Interactive Exhibition from Historical Images of Royal Costumes of Ladies of the Court in the Rattanakosin Era* aims to investigate the historical photographic records of the attire of Ladies in the Court Lords during the Rattanakosin era, and subsequently curate a vibrant exhibition in the form of a fashion show. The research methodology encompasses the collection and analysis of relevant data, including historical photographs and academic documents. The study involves observational analysis of exhibition design vitality through the collaboration of the curatorial team and university students from Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Methods employed include interviews, observations of live fashion show presentations, photographic and video documentation of fashion showcase events. The research findings indicate that: 1) The exploration of historical photographs of Ladies in the Court Lords in Suan Sunandha Palace from the Rattanakosin era can reflect the societal lifestyle changes and adaptation of clothing to contemporary trends. 2) The implementation of a live exhibition featuring a fashion show within a historical venue creates a direct experiential engagement, igniting a desire among viewers to explore Thai societal history through traditional Thai attire. 3) The integration of knowledge in history, photography, performing arts, music, cultural preservation efforts, and fashion showcases fosters interdisciplinary collaboration among various university departments, facilitating mutual learning and collaborative creativity towards the sustainable preservation and development of cultural heritage.

**Keyword** : Interactive Exhibition, Historical Images, Fashion Show, Royal Costumes

## INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Thai attire has been developed for centuries, with distinctive characteristics emerging in each historical era. These unique features serve as reflections of the lifestyle, beliefs, and regional attributes specific to each locality. Transmitted through the art of weaving and fabric crafting, these attires are meticulously designed to harmonize with the nuances of everyday life, as well as to facilitate cultural exchanges with people from diverse backgrounds. This interplay has resulted in a distinctive form of clothing that yields a unique and characteristic style of attire.

During the Rattanakosin era, a period marked by the highest of societal prosperity, art experienced comprehensive development across various domains. The monarchy played a pivotal role in propelling societal advancements, particularly in matters of attire that evolved into customary practices and relayed to the common population. Throughout the reigns of the first to the third monarchs, clothing traditions persisted from the Ayutthaya period, where fabric patterns and garment designs served as clear indicators of the social status and occupational roles of the wearers. Subsequently, starting from the fifth reign onwards, as the country

embraced modernization, the integration of imported fabrics such as silk, satin, lace, and European-style shirts became widespread. This cultural combination, influenced by increased Western interactions, has established a distinctively blended form of attire (*Fine Arts Department and National Museum, 2002: 49-55*).

In this context, Suan Sunandha emerges as a captivating historical venue for the examination of the attire of Ladies of the Court Lords. This period signifies a transitional phase from the traditional court attire of the old era to the modern era during the reigns of the sixth and seventh monarchs. It serves as a focal point for the concluding phase of the monarchical regime in an increasing democratic setting. Additionally, it is a central hub for the upper-class female society and a pivotal center for Thai cultural traditions (Suan Sunandha College of Education, 1980: 64). This significance is corroborated by abundant historical evidence found in photographs portraying the attire of Ladies of the Court Lords, offering a wealth of historical information for those interested in exploring various dimensions of Thai society through clothing. This information has the potential to contribute to academic research, creative endeavors, and entertainment industrial applications, exemplified by the cultural phenomenon driven by the television drama "*Bupphesanniwat (Love Destiny)*" This drama has ignited interest among Thais and foreigners alike in wearing traditional Thai costumes at various historical sites, capturing and sharing self-portraits online. Consequently, this has significantly boosted the thriving business of renting and purchasing Thai traditional attire over the past decade.

Given these reasons mentioned above, the researcher perceives that the study of the attire patterns of Ladies in the Court Lords during the Rattanakosin era through historical photographs provides an opportunity for dynamic representation. This can be accomplished through the staging of exhibitions and fashion shows held at Saisuddha Nobhadol Building, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University—a historically significant venue. This location not only offers a valuable historical setting but also allows the audience to engage with the exhibition beyond visual observation. The activities carried out in the exhibition are not merely spectacles; rather, they constitute events that can elicit varied responses from the audience, providing a unique platform to convey insights into the regimes, beliefs, and history of the society.

## **OBJECTIVE**

To organize a dynamic exhibition in the form of a fashion show inspired by the study of historical photographs depicting the attire of Ladies in the Court Lord during the Rattanakosin era.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research constitutes a qualitative study, employing a case study approach to investigate historical photographic records of the attire of Ladies in the Court Lords during the Rattanakosin era. The researcher gathered relevant data encompassing historical photographs of Ladies in the Court Lords from the Rattanakosin era and academic documents. Interviews were conducted with fashion designers and scholars specializing in Thai traditional attire. Data analysis and synthesis were carried out, including the design and conceptualization of a dynamic exhibition in the form of a fashion show. This involved the precise selection of distinctive costumes representative of various periods within the Rattanakosin era, totaling 20 ensembles. The presentation was executed by university personnel from Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, alongside professional male and female models. Upon the completion of the showcase, data collection and analysis with a qualitative inquiry focus were undertaken.

## RESULTS





In regards to *The Interactive Exhibition from Historical Images of the Royal Costumes of Ladies in the Court Lords in the Rattanakosin Era*, the researcher applied the concept of museum exhibitions to provide knowledge to exhibition visitors through experiential learning gained from encountering objects and environments in the temporary exhibition format. These exhibitions are designed to align with the public's interests, aiming to generate interest and attract museum visitors (Kriengkrai Sampatchalit, Editor, 2553: 74, 77-79). This approach emphasizes narratives related to the historical origins of imported fabrics used in the attire of the royal people during the Rattanakosin period. The exhibition design places importance on the displayed artifacts, arranging the content in a sequential and interconnected manner to create a lasting impression. The emphasis is on imparting knowledge, instilling a sense of value, and preventing viewer fatigue, even with repeated visits (Jira Jongkol, 2532: 177-179). By reconstructing historical costumes from ancient photographs, the exhibitions strive to present a realistic image consistent with the exhibition content. The use of media is crucial in making museum presentations intriguing and facilitating the seamless transmission of narratives to visitors. The adoption of hypothetical role-playing in presenting exhibition narratives (Surasak Srisamang, Editor, 2553: 727) was applied, particularly in the form of fashion shows showcasing the attire of Ladies in the Court Lords within the royal palace, the birthplace of the attire of the royal people during the Rattanakosin period.





Upon studying the history and ancient photographs, the researcher discovered that the attire of the royal people during the constitutional monarchy period remained closely tied to the institution of the monarchy, acting as a central authority in governing the country. It served as a prototype for lifestyle related to beliefs and norms before being transmitted to the general population. In the first reign, the clothing traditions persistently inherited from the Ayutthaya period, with various fabrics imported from India. Patterns and designs for the attire were strictly prescribed, indicating the social status and occupational roles of the wearers. In the second reign, clothing customs adopted auspicious colors based on beliefs related to celestial deities, known as "*Sawasdiraksa*," eventually becoming the traditional daily attire for ladies in the palace, believed to bring blessings and luck to the wearers. During the third and fourth reigns, active trade relations with China led to the widespread importation of Chinese silk. In the fifth reign, the country embraced modernization, resulting in the abolition of class-based cloth-wearing traditions. This period marked the introduction of European-style shirts. Additionally, distinctive identities were crafted through the attire of the royal officials, such as the adoption of Northern-style woven fabrics and Eastern-style sarongs. In the sixth reign, due to the king's preferences, the adoption of long hairstyles, woven silk sarongs, and a shift from wearing traditional woven trousers to sarongs were applied. In the seventh reign, Western culture played a significant role, influenced by foreign films and the popularization of Western fashion trends. The prevalent use of fashion magazines became widespread during this period.

Regarding the exhibition setup, there is a systematic arrangement of antiquities and artworks to align with the exhibition's content, aiming to emphasize the significance of the display. For instance, the exhibition features intricately patterned fabrics worn by royal officials, allowing for a clear comparison with the patterned fabrics worn by the general populace. The showcase of Indian block-printed fabrics illustrates the historical evolution of textile weaving and printing techniques in ancient times. Additionally, the exhibition includes ancient Chinese textiles and models showcasing attire based on historical photographs of royal officials during the Rattanakosin era. This method aims to evoke realistic and educational experiences for exhibition visitors.

In the context of exhibition media, hypothetical role-playing is employed to narrate the exhibition's story in the format of a fashion show, *Rajapastrapon*, within the premises of the *Saisuddha Nobhadol* Building, the former residence of Her Royal Highness Princess *Suddhasininat Piyamaharaj Padivaradda*, located in the historical grounds of Suan Sunandha. This location served as the pinnacle center of the highest-ranking women in the late era of the constitutional monarchy. The showcased costumes are meticulously presented to closely resemble historical depictions, aiming to create an atmosphere of authenticity that transports viewers back in time.

**Table 1.** Fashion show exhibition presentations based on historical photographs

No.	Historical Photographs	Costumes	Details
1			<p><b>Civilization Collection ( Her Royal Highness Princess <i>Suddhasininat Piyamaharaj Padivaradda</i>)</b>            The attire of royal ladies during the reign of King Rama Fifth was a combination between Western-style costumes and Thai-style sarongs. This fusion was a consequence of introducing the country to the stage of civilization, where prominent Europeans were the audience. Performers on the stage thus had to dress according to Western cultural standards.</p>
2			<p><b>Dara Residence Collection (Princess <i>Dararatsamee</i>)</b>            The attire of women from the northern provinces living in the palace was characterized by unique features. They preferred traditional local silk weaving, such as weaving patterns of silver and gold, ancient woven cloth called <i>Luntaya</i>, and having long hair braids. The blouse was tailored according to contemporary fashion trends.</p>

No.	Historical Photographs	Costumes	Details
3			<p><b>Isaan Elite Collection ( Her Royal Princess Bunjirathon Jutadhuj)</b></p> <p>The Isaan women residing in the royal palace showcased their identity through silk weaving, including gold-threaded silk tube skirts, combined with satin blouses or skin-tight laces and covered with a jacket. They often decorated their hair with fresh flowers or golden flowers.</p>
4			<p><b>Modern Era Attire Collection ( Queen Ramphai Phanee, Queen Consort)</b></p> <p>The royal ladies of the seventh reign displayed a clear influence of the West, as the royal leaders of the West, as the royal leaders favored reading Western fashion magazines. This was reflected in their frequent choices of Western-inspired dresses or ready to wear silk sarongs.</p>

## CONCLUSION

1. The study of societal history during the Rattanakosin era reflects the transformations in attire, marked by the integration of external cultures, particularly evident in the wardrobes of the Ladies in the Court Lords. Notably, the study reveals instances of importing fabrics from foreign sources and incorporating locally produced textiles. In a specific period, the patterns and styles of clothing served as distinctive indicators of the wearer's status, accompanied by adaptations in garment design to reflect cultural attitudes in response to altering local circumstances. Moreover, attire not only served as a symbol of identity but also manifested regional distinctions, such as the utilization of Isaan woven fabrics and Northern Thai handwoven textiles.

2. The creation of a vibrant exhibition in the study of historical records and photographs of Ladies in the Court Lords facilitates experiential learning for museum visitors. Attendees become integral participants in the exhibition as they navigate through historical periods, witnessing live presentations of period-specific costumes accompanied by musical performances. This immersive approach conveys narratives detailing the evolution and transformation of the attire within the royal court, marked by a rich combination of diverse cultural influences. Consequently, the exhibition cultivates a readily understandable awareness and elicits enjoyment from the audience, aligning with *Kwissara Udomphon* and *Khwanying Sriprasertphap's* assertion (2023: 18) that lively exhibitions have the capacity to generate experiences that stimulate a broader range of sensory perceptions than mere visual observation. This active engagement creates customized responses depending on individual perceptions of the audience.



3. The integration of historical contextualization, exhibition organization, and fashion show presentations of historical costumes within historical venues generates collaboration among the personnel of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University across various departments. This collaboration involves the Conservation Department in the museum, the Costume Design Department, the Performing Arts Department, and the utilization of professional models who apply influence in the realms of fashion and entertainment within the online media sphere. Such interdisciplinary collaboration contributes to an expanded and heightened awareness, aligning with Sun Tawalwongsri and colleagues' observation (2023: 41-42) that fashion show presentations can introduce new audience groups to easily access Thai cultural heritage, fostering a consciousness that leads to sustainable preservation and development of Thai culture.

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