

they were donned for pragmatic reasons. No one wore them to make a statement - of the fashion or political variety. This type of alternative clothing included school uniforms, factory uniforms, and professional work clothes for teachers, nurses, and other working women. Alternative clothing in Meiji Japan set the stage for the popularisation of Western clothes after World War One, and made it possible for feminists to make a political statement with their choice of attire. Women had become accustomed, as children and as workers, to wearing *yōfuku* at least part of the time. If *yōfuku* was appropriate to women's participation in the public sector, it helped open the door to feminists' struggles for citizenship after World War One.

The institution ultimately responsible for the expanding thrust of the modernising state was the military. Gendered male, its uniforms were a unique type of *yōfuku*. The uniform created a central place in the modernising state for Japanese manhood and symbolised the projection of Japanese (masculine) power in Asia. It rendered Japanese males imperial subjects, a status that could not be similarly fulfilled by women who had no dress that similarly symbolised projection of power. Even while in the colonies, women who wore *yōfuku* were either fashionable in a modern sense or carving out a space for their personal development.

Dress, gender and the public realm

How one dressed was in part determined by one's location. Professional clothes or work clothes, which were often but not exclusively some form of *yōfuku*, were worn in the workplace, and Japanese kimono were more likely to be worn as comfortable garments while inside the home. Because the home was a locus of women's roles as imperial subjects, it was not, however, a 'private sphere' in the Western sense; the public and domestic spheres were mutually interpenetrated, and men and women occupied both. Thus, conservatives in the 1910s and 1920s were not frightened by women's passive existence in the public sphere; they were threatened by women's forceful declaration that the public world was their place, too, and they would define their role in that space as well as the clothing they would wear while in it. These women were not viewed as virtuous daughters in the textile mills, wearing the uniforms they were handed and sending pay packets home to hungry relatives in the countryside. Nor were they the (stereotyped) image of noble nurses or dedicated 'good wives and wise mothers', active in the public sector, it was believed, only on behalf of the nation or their families. Rather, the bright young women of the 1910s and 1920s who challenged the notion of virtuous women in the public sector were part of a cultural shift represented by a number of symbols, one of which was their modern, hip clothing. It was in that climate that feminists demanding the rights of citizenship emerged.

Stylish fashion worn by the New Women of the 1910s and the Modern Girls of the 1920s could be provocative, in both senses of the term, both challenging old norms and being sexually charged, linking power and female gender representation in ways that factory uniforms did not. The Modern Girls of the 1920s were working women of modest means who enjoyed some independence, worked as typists, teachers, nurses, telephone operators, office workers, and sales clerks, and wore the stylish clothing of women of greater wealth. Many had girls' higher school educations. Their independence and disposable income led critics to suggest they were promiscuous. Modern Girls made exhilarating copy in newspaper and magazine articles as well as in novels, scandalised some of the public by claiming some degree of independence as agents of their own lives, and represented most clearly the modern era in which men and women occupied the same space.

Occupying the same space but not sharing the same rights encouraged feminists to intensify their demands for equality during the reign of the Modern Girl. Even if most Modern Girls were more focused on consumption than on politics or militancy, many worked to enhance women's rights in the public arena. Photos of feminists at work throughout the 1920s show them wearing a mix of Western and Japanese style clothing. Street scenes indicate that women in general were as comfortable with Western as with Japanese clothes, and both styles came to be seen as normative by the end of the decade. This changed rapidly with the onset of World War Two. In 1939, women were pushed to wear *monpe* (baggy work trousers) even in the city, a considerable sacrifice for Japan's fashionable women.

In modernising Japan, dress reflected public policy; it was a tool of imperialism and a marker of citizenship, nationality, and ethnicity; and it defined notions of gender and modernity. By adopting Western clothes, Japanese manhood was empowered to build an empire and to project outward both its military and 'civilising' missions; by devising practical (often though not always Western-inspired) clothing to wear in public, Japanese femininity could claim a space in the public sector into which feminists could insert themselves. In both cases, a gendered construction of citizenship was an essential part of a Japanese modernity defined by the state and signified by individuals' clothing choices.

Barbara Molony

Santa Clara University, USA
bmolony@scu.edu

In spite of the nationalist claim to have escaped Western colonialism, Thailand (known until 1939 as Siam) was exposed to Western influences as much as colonial Southeast Asia. It is thus no surprise that portraits of King Chulalongkorn, (Rama V), dressed in western-style suit or uniform act today as signifiers of Thailand's status as a modern nation. Becoming modern in the high imperial age, when nations were ranked according to social and technological progress, required not only the demarcation of territorial boundaries, the establishment of a civil service and standing army, infrastructures and public education, but also acceptance of Western standards of public decorum and self-presentation.

Refashioning civilisation

Dress and bodily practice in Thai nation building

MAURIZIO PELEGGI

The domain of bodily practice - encompassing personal hygiene, dress, deportment and language - was central to the nation-building project initiated in the 1890s by the Thai monarchy and continued, after the change of political system in 1932, by the bureaucratic-military elite. The royalty selectively adopted since the 1860s Victorian corporeal and sartorial etiquette to fashion 'civilised' (Thai, *siwilai*) personas, which were publicised both domestically and internationally by means of mechanically reproduced images (photographs, book engravings and postcards). In the early 20th century Western dress and accoutrements became popular with Bangkok's embryonic middle class, who increasingly defined what was fashionable or 'up-to-date' (*samai mai*). Under the authoritarian government of the early 1940s bodily practice was policed through legislation so to discipline the body politic while pursuing modernisation.

Although the early-20th century reform of bodily practice made social and geographical distinction within Thailand more marked, selection and hybridisation were part of the very process by which Western dress and etiquette were localised. As a result, both the adoption and the occasional rejection of foreign corporeal and vestimentary norms enjoyed local legitimation. So, while Asian nationalists rejected Western dress as a symbol of foreign domination and fashioned instead a 'national' dress to express the cultural soul of the oppressed nation, no 'Thai' dress was codified until the 1970s, when a neo-traditional costume was fashioned in accordance with the self-Orientalising that underpinned Thailand's new international visibility as an exotic tourist destination.

Restyling civilisation's accoutrements, 1870s-1920s¹

The diffusion of the Western bourgeois regime of corporeal propriety by the agents of imperialism (colonial officials, missionaries) in Africa, the Pacific and parts of Asia in the course of the 19th century, determined the global standardisation of bodily practice. But in Siam, where Christian missionaries made only marginal inroads, it was the court that led the way to civility. By 1897, when King Chulalongkorn journeyed to Europe with a large retinue, the body of the Thai royalty had become a living - indeed, travelling - advertisement of the modernising mission by which the Chakri dynasty asserted its legitimacy in Southeast Asia's new colonial order. In fact, reliance on cultural practices and materials as a means to connect to the dominant civilisation of the day was not a novelty for the Thai royalty.² In Central Thailand's Indianised courts corporeal techniques of self-presentation, from deportment to speech, were highly developed. Tropical climate discouraged elaborate dress except for Brahmins and royalty; still, sumptuary laws regulated clothing's usage as late as the mid-1850s, as attested by the British envoy John Bowring.

The court dress reform saw a fundamental shift from wrapped to stitched vestimentary regime. In the reform's initial phase (1870s and 80s), hybrid court attires were created by matching a high-necked lace blouse (for females) or colonial-style jacket (for males) with the unisex lower wrap (*chongkrabaen*), now often of European silk; import-

Inventing sartorial traditions: King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit, late 1950s



ed shoes and stockings complemented the outfit. Accordingly, the partial bodily exposure of the traditional female attire was avoided. Later on, full Western-style military uniform replaced the king's and princes' Indic garb at official ceremonies. The unisex close shaven haircut was also abandoned in favour of longer hair, and males start growing moustaches too, in accordance with European fashion. Still, external expectations about a civilised body were negotiated with personal taste and inclinations, as in the case of the chewing of betel (areca nut), which continued to be practiced at court despite its blackening (and, to the Europeans, repulsive) effect on teeth.

While the Thai court's new hybrid outfit shared an aesthetic affinity with the neo-traditional dress of Asian nationalists, it carried none of its political valence because in Siam there was no need to signify, sartorially or otherwise, autonomy from the West; conversely, the absence of colonial domination prevented the rejection of Western dress. One significant change concerned dress as a marker of social identity. As a result of the opening of tailor workshops and stores selling European fabrics and garments in Bangkok, the civilised aura emanating from Western-style dress became available to professional urbanites too, such as the attorney and journalist Thianwan Wannapho, who prided himself on having been the first man in Siam to sport a Western hairstyle, grow a beard and eschew betel chewing. As for Bangkok's ordinary population, a royal decree issued in 1899 in preparation for a Prussian prince's visit, ordering women to cover their breasts and men to wear their loincloth at knee length, suggests widespread indifference to 'civilised' bodily practice among the lower social strata.³

The spread of Western fashion in Bangkok was stigmatised by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910-25), the official 'father' of Thai nationalism, who ridiculed Thais in 'shabby Western clothes' as imitators of Europeans. The targets of the king's class-based sarcasm were in fact the writers and journalists that animated a nascent public sphere and denounced, from the pages of newspapers, periodicals and novels, Siam's social inequalities and women's subjugation. Modern fashion promoted the redefinition of social and gender boundaries through its link to new democratic social spaces, such as dancing and cinema halls, and the representation of women as sophisticated consumers in magazines, advertisements and films.⁴ Some, like the editor of the literary magazine 'The Gentleman' (*Suphaburut*), questioned however the assumption that 'universal suit' (*suit sakorn*) was certain proof of the wearer's civility: "Dress is only an outward symbol. ...On the surface a man might appear to be a gentleman when in fact he is not."⁵

Ad-dressing the Thai nation, 1930s-40s

The main concern of the government that came to power by a bloodless coup d'état in June 1932 was establishing its legitimacy as heir to the absolute monarchy. To this end several initiatives were launched, including Constitution Day (10 December). In 1934, the festivity was paired with the new Miss Siam beauty contest, which identified the physical body of female citizens with the abstract body politic. Under the authoritarian regime of Marshal Phibun Songkhram (1938-44) the state sought to standardise bodily practice as a way of disciplining the citizenry in the name of national progress. In 1939 the government started issuing state edicts (*ratthaniyom*) to prescribe "the proper type of etiquette to be observed by all civilised people." The tenth such state edict (15 January 1941) mandated that Thais should adopt a dress code in accordance with civilisation and further instructions were provided by the subsequent "Royal decree prescribing customs for the Thai people".⁶

These prescriptions followed in spirit and content the attempts by the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany, for whose dictators Phibun expressed open admiration, to mold the body politic through mass regimentation and propaganda. Yet, while militarism became a prominent trait of Thai politics, nothing compared to the cult of uniformed masculinity that characterised the Italian Black Shirts and the German Brown Shirts. Emphasis continued to be placed on the adoption of Western dress and accoutrements as an index of civilisation: "The Thais are a well dressed nation" and "Hats will lead Thailand to greatness" were prominent slogans of the period. State propaganda notably privileged women over men as physical embodiments of Thai civility. Even the change in the official spelling of the country's inhabitants from *tai* to *thai*, to make use of the homographic word meaning 'free', was conveyed in terms of the difference between an ordinary and a fashionable woman. Men, on their part, were encouraged to kiss their wives before going to work and compliment them as 'flowers of the nation'.

The state policy on dress heightened the socio-economic disparities between Bangkok and the provinces, where district officials found it impossible to enforce the dress regulation on villagers. Such policy partook, however, of Phibun's overall nation-building programme, which sought to standardise cultural practices across the country as well as across classes in a challenge to the established social hierarchies: mobile units of the National Institute of Culture were dispatched to the provinces to publicise the government's sartorial, as well as linguistic, reforms. But all ended with Phibun's fall in 1944 and the tumultuous period that followed. In the postwar period the cultural divide between city and village grew even deeper as Thailand was brought into the 'Free World' by the alliance with the US and the consequent cultural Americanisation.

Commoner dress: Woman studio portrait, ca. 1900.



Neo-traditionalism and globalisation, 1950s to the 1990s

In the post-war period Western dress became the vestimentary norm in Thai cities. By the 1960s, however, unease about the US military presence in the country, which was behind the proliferation of bars and massage parlours, found an outlet in the censure of US soldiers' disrespect for local customs, often involving offensive manners and behaviour. Another indirect way of criticising US intrusions into Thailand's foreign and domestic policies was criticism of the Westernisation - equated with moral degeneration - of the Thai youth. But while stretch pants and blue jeans were as popular in Bangkok as in the rest of the 'Free World', the bolder items of 1960s and '70s youth fashion (miniskirts, high-heeled boots and long hair) were demonised by both the bureaucratic guardians of public morality and progressive intellectuals as befitting only social outcasts.

The 1960s in Thailand were marked by a monarchical revival that rejuvenated symbols and rituals discarded after King Prajadhipok's abdication in 1935. After a lapse of some 15 years, Thailand acquired again a resident monarch in 1951, when King Bhumibol returned permanently to Bang-

kok from Switzerland with the recently wed Queen Sirikit. Marshal Phibun's comeback in that same year limited initially the royal couple's visibility, but the situation changed in 1957, when the new strongman, Marshal Sarit Thanarat, fully rehabilitated the monarchy. In the 1960 tour of Europe and the US, Queen Sirikit wore fashionable *tailleurs* to match King Phumiphon's bespoke suits (alternated with uniforms) and project an image of modern, cosmopolitan royalty.

At official engagements back home, however, Queen Sirikit took to wearing attires patterned after the pre-1870 court costume - a sartorial revival arguably connected to the reconstitution of the monarchy's otherworldly aura, yet also following in the wake of the international success of the film version of the Broadway musical, *The King and I* (1959). The costumes for the film had been produced by the Thai Silk Company of Jim Thompson, a US intelligence officer who had settled in Thailand at the end of the war and started reviving the local silk industry. Underscoring Thai 'traditional' costume's origins in pop Orientalism is the fact that it is worn today only by performers of touristy 'cultural shows'. In the 1970s a new two-piece female outfit was designed in order to market silk homespun by northern villagers under the aegis of a queen's charity. The outfit's function as a signifier of 'Thainess' (*khwampenthai*) by virtue of its fabric and design, accorded well with the parallel bureaucratic promotion of national culture and identity for both ideological and commercial purposes.

During the boom time of the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, Thai urbanites fell under the spell of globalisation, which, similar to the civilisational trends that had preceded it, carried a characteristic sartorial dimension - the 'executive look' adopted by Thai managers, professionals and politicians. Fashion and lifestyle magazines also propagated a transnational ideal of beauty, embodied by the greatly popular models and TV personalities of mixed parentage (*luk krung*). But for all its sociological relevance, in Thailand the globalisation of bodily practice is a phenomenon still limited to the capital's upper strata. As for villagers, they too have learnt how to make public statements through dress: in their frequent mass protests in Bangkok, they don proudly their indigo cotton tunic (*morhom*) as a mark of an enduring social identity resisting globalisation.

Maurizio Peleggi

National University of Singapore
hism@nus.edu.sg

Notes

- 1 What follows is a summary of Chap. 2 of Peleggi, Maurizio. 2002. *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).
- 2 This theme is developed in Peleggi Maurizio. 2007. *The Worldly Kingdom*. London: Reaktion.
- 3 Jottrand, Emile. 1996. *In Siam*, trans. E.J. Tips. Bangkok: White Lotus, [Paros 1904]
- 4 Nawigamune, Anake. comp. and David Smyth. trans. 2000. *A Century of Thai Graphic Design*. Bangkok: River Books; Sukwong, Dome and Suwannapak Sawasdi. 2001. *A Century of Thai Cinema*. Bangkok: River Books.
- 5 Barne, Scot. 2002. *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex and Popular Culture in Thailand*. Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield.
- 6 Chaloeitjarana, Thak. ed. 1978. *Thai Politics: Extracts and documents, 1932-1957*. Bangkok: Social Sciences Association of Thailand.