



## Empowering Women for Economic Development: The Case Study of Thai Fabrics Women Groups

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### Abstract

This study provides an example of the first and oldest Thai women NGO, The National Council of Women of Thailand [NCWT] representative, who works in collaboration with government agencies in reaching out to women most in need to empower the Thai women group by engaging the Thai fabric grass-roots weavers as informants. Aiming to understand the situation of weaving skills of Thai women in each region and how they develop their current skills, the research data based on semi-structured interviews included 40 informants. 4-5 informants were from each representative province in each region. This paper analyzes and recommends the Thai fabrics commercial pattern to support the marketing program for their higher incomes to sustain grassroots economic growth, the expected result of women's economic empowerment as a whole.

**Keywords:** *Thai women NGOs, Women's economic empowerment, Grassroots economic growth*

### 1. Introduction

Since ancient times, women have a role in economic development. When talking about the economy, it has numerous different informative scopes for the case of conventional financial focus on markets, regularly bargaining and exchanging, but feminist economic aims at women and children's well-being in local, national, and transnational communities. Feminist economic had recognized in the economic book since the 1990s (Peterson, 2001). Traditional economic nations in rural areas are usually farm-based. The Sum of excess will be given to the landowner or government authority. Women's role in economic development started with their agricultural tasks in many parts of under developing regions. Farming systems that are exceptional fundamental without any assisting modern tools are depicted as 'traditional' systems passed on from one generation to another with no alter. Margaret Mead proposed the difference between two systems as male and female farming systems (Boserup et al., 2013). The female farming system is where agriculture is mostly done by women, with some help from the men and male farming as the food is produced by the men with little help from women. Many basic features of male and female farming are different. Before the European conquest of Africa, Africa is the region of female farming where women were found to do agricultural work for around 25 hours per week. (Boserup et al., 2013). In Latin America, both Indian and Negro communities' women workers were found in the field, the agricultural work is entirely in female hands. In Asia, many examples of female farming systems are unknown. Despite that, they are widespread among tribal people in India, where women working more hours in farming than men (Boserup et al., 2013). This paper focuses on 1) Thai women's ability and knowledge of weaving the traditional Thai fabrics in rural areas to understand how they earn their living as a grassroots weaver in different regions of Thailand and 2) long histories of each local traditional design/pattern, grassroots women' weaving skill cultivation, which highlights women's role in Thai traditional economic blossoming, especially in fabrics business that confirms the women's role in economic development. This achievement would impact the feminist economy that aims at women and children's well-being. Grassroots women's better income will also reflex their family well-being, which supports the feminist economic theory.

#### *Patriarchal Society:*

The greater part of Southeast Asian countries is a male farming system with the use of draught animals to do land preparation, leaving harvest works, cares of the cow, sheep, chicken, and domestic works to women. Despite language and cultural differences, it is a relatively favorable position of women in



comparison with neighboring east or south Asia. It has been clarified by few components that are traditionally and customarily, and family relationship was followed even though both mother and father believe that a girl was not a monetary burden. Because of the accepted practice of the bride's price, a married couple regularly lived with or close to the wife's guardians. Over time, the rise of centralized nations and the spread of imported doctrines and religions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity) progressively privileged men and overbearing female subordination (Andaya, n.d.). Within the nineteenth century, Southeast Asia's financial resources and vital position between India and China were driven to expanding European involvement. By the 1890s, the whole region excluding Thailand was beneath the European's control. In a few area's women were selected as cheap wage workers on agricultural (tea, sugar, tobacco, rubber) and in processing manufacturing plants. At the suburb level, colonial administrations reinforced the male position as head of the family and "reformed" standard laws that had given women significant independence. Comparable patterns can be found in Thailand, these improvements energized a desire for sons instead of girls. However, women were still powerful in community life, at the time of driving anti-colonial uprisings.

*Educational Accessibility and Career path opportunity for women:*

Expanding female education, particularly within the Philippines, and the introduction to Western women's liberation empowered women to stand up for gender imbalance. It is not simple to generalize the financial position of Southeast Asian women since the hole in advancement between Timor Lorosae, Cambodia, and Laos, which are among the poorest nations within the world, and the richest nations like Singapore and Brunei Darussalam. From the mid-1960s, as Southeast Asian nations steadily moved to export-oriented economies, lower-paid women have gotten to be necessary to production line work. Subsequently, women have been more dynamic in work developments. As abroad residential laborers, they have moreover been progressively vital to national economies, dispatching huge sums of cash to their families. Since of worldwide deficiencies, qualified women can search for overseas jobs in gifted occupations such as nursing. Getting professional abilities and scholastic capabilities is far more conceivable until now as Southeast Asian women can approach education. With the special case of Cambodia and Laos, the number of women advancing to post-secondary education is rising. In Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, more women graduate than men. The rates for Vietnam and Indonesia are rising too. The legacy of generally favorable gender relations and the flexibility and practicality of neighborhood nations show that Southeast Asian women can have a promising future (Andaya, n.d.).

**Table 1** Adult Literacy, Female Labour Forces and Urbanization of Selected Asian Countries

	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-1999
<b>Adult Illiteracy Rates</b>				
Thailand	19.7	15.4	9.5	5.9
ASEAN3	33.9	27.9	18.9	12.7
Indochina3	61.8	58.3	51.2	43.7
<b>Female Labour Force (% of Total Labour Force)</b>				
Thailand	47.9	47.8	47.0	46.4
ASEAN3	30.1	33.2	35.9	37.9
Indochina3	48.4	50.4	51.7	50.8
<b>% Urban Population</b>				
Thailand	12.9	15.3	18.0	20.1
ASEAN3	25.8	31.2	38.9	47.7
Indochina3	12.1	13.9	16.0	18.2

Source: World Development Indicators 2000/2001

ASEAN3: Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines.

Indochina3: Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia



In industrialized countries, numerous educated young women took up clerical jobs when they after primary graduation. In the United States, 7 million women do clerical work and they account for 68% of clerical staff. Additionally, in other industrialized nations, women account for 60 to 70% of clerical jobs. Various of these young women resign to residential life not many years after entering administrative occupations, which gives such great prospects for the young men who do enter the clerical segment, that does not become completely 'feminized.' In developing countries, ladies were not discovered within the larger part of the demanding occupations. A report by the universal work organization suggested in 1964 that it will be 20 years before enough African boys and girls are available to fill the occupations that require a university degree, such as doctors, secondary school and university teachers, higher civil service posts (Analdez, 50). Nursing and teaching seem to be the favorite occupations for educated girls in Africa. As long as the attractive nursing and teaching jobs are easily obtained by a girl with the required training, there will be little pressure to give the girls access to clerical jobs.

Moreover, the number of educated men aspiring to clerical jobs tends to be in excess of the number of clerical jobs available. So, it will probably take some time for the historical profession in Africa to become 'feminized' to any large extent. Turning to the Arab countries in western Asia a similar surplus of men for office employment is founded. Indeed, this excess of labor for clerical occupations seems to be unavoidable when the number of children enjoying general school education is increasing. The empowerment of women is not only an incredible result but also vital for the development of society and the nation. Women empowerment refers to increasing the psychological, political, social, and financial quality of women as personal and society. In every aspect of their life assuming unequal position and status. It is necessary to empower them to deliver equal opportunities. The subject of "women empowerment" has gotten to be a central point within the programs and exercises of the joined together of the United Nations and other Government and Non-Government Organization. Women's economic empowerment is at the summit of the worldwide plan and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development particularly gives report highlight the poverty confronted by the underprivileged women, which incorporate the challenges of casual work and the burden of unpaid work and care, and the effect of oppressive laws on women. Studies demonstrate that young women are more likely to discover themselves in hardship with altogether less chance for their future than young men. Young women confront special challenges to get minimal education, live a life free from violence, delay marriage and pregnancy until adulthood, and find any alternatives that influence their lives. In Asia, young women in the lowest 20 percent income quintile and the opposition groups tend to have less chance for education and have fewer work opportunities. In east Asia and the Pacific, one in five girls gets married before 18 years old, while over half the young women in South Asia (56%) will be married before they turn 18, which ordinarily interprets to the conclusion of their education (Adireksombat et al., 2010).

Verifiably, women in Thailand have been energetic in a variety of financial activities. During the era of the Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350-1767), every freeman had to be enrolled as a worker with the nearby rulers, under whom the prime-age men were forced to be absent from home to work for the crown or to serve armed forces services (Jermsittiparsert, 2016). Women were left behind to take care of their families, domestic and agriculture jobs and it became traditional for women to be in charge of household work and financial exercises while men are in charge of economic and political activities (Adireksombat et al., 2010). Women and men, together, have proceeded to have high economic cooperation since at that point, which is reflected in the high female work drive cooperation rate of Thailand, which is one of the pre-eminence in the world in the last decade (Adireksombat et al., 2010). In 2010, the female laborer participation rate of Thai female over the age of 15 years was announced to be at roughly 64% and in 1990 was disclosed to be as high as 76%. In 2011, the women's work participation rate of Thailand was 65.5% while men's laborer participation rate was 80.7%. World Bank (2012), Thailand experienced the basic social and financial changes into the cutting-edge society in which financial exercises are in the extraordinary struggle with household tasks that persist as the major responsibility of women. Thai women were confronted with modern challenges and were opened up to new challenges to take part in the social and financial expansion of the nation (Adireksombat et al., 2010). In general, Thai women are in a more distraught financial position than men within the workforce market as



illustrated by their concentration in low-paid, low-skilled occupations, contradictory to those of men (Ngermparsertsri, 1996).

Thailand's financial change from a rural agricultural to an industrial economy within the 1960s reduction in the demand for the workforce on the plantation and, meanwhile, expanded the demand for unskilled workforce in manufacturing (Ngermparsertsri, 1996). In this way, unskilled female workers move from destitute provincial zones to the urban regions to work for the least compensation or less, as can be seen in female workers' inclination to concentrate in low-paid, low-skilled occupations. In 2011, the biggest share of the Thai women workforce concentrated in rural farming, wholesale and retail trading, and fabricating segments, which utilized around 39.17%, 16.22%, and 14.63% of the full female work drive, respectively (The Prime Minister's Office, 1997), in comparison to 69.6%, 8.1%, and 2.3%, respectively in 1980 (Adireksombat et al., 2010). These figures outline the large-scale reallocation of women laborers from the rural division to the retail exchange and manufacturing divisions. As of 2011, nearly a third of ladies within the work drive were unpaid family workforce, in differentiate to 16% of men. Out of the overall female workforce, 50.78% are locked in within the casual division (The Prime Minister's Office, 1997). Numerous of these laborers work part-time or are for the time being utilized in family businesses (Adireksombat et al., 2010). In 2000, 7.5% of utilized female laborers were declared to work as part-time workers (Kaewmala, 2011). As of the first quarter of 2012, 43.93% of Thai women, adjacent to those who were too young or too old, were out of work for family obligations and 22.21% were studied (National Statistic Office, n.d.).

The above data about women's poor access to education and career path opportunities. Worldwide, Thai silk is well recognized and renowned for its finest and smooth quality with a luxurious look, natural shine light-reflective shimmering. Thai silk can be one of the top economic products that contribute to the wealth and prosperity of our nation. It was made by hands by Thai grassroots weavers. The researchers are interested to conduct this study because of the impression of the classic beauty of Thai silk and the interest of assisting grassroots weavers, aiming to understand the overall situation of weaving skill of Thai women in each region and understand how they develop their skill and/or enhancing their current skills, analyses and recommend the commercial pattern of Thai fabrics to support the marketing program can empower grassroots weavers for their higher income. The researchers plan to fulfill the study's expected results by asking and getting for participation from government organizations whose works are related to.

Thailand's women empowerment organization and worldwide:

Many organizations are working on empowering women but not specific to grassroots women weavers. The Department of Skills Development under the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare work to improve job opportunities for ladies since 1992. The objective is to move forward the abilities of the female workforce (modern labor-market participants, current specialists, and rural workers) by offering programs that will assist numerous NGOs and give essential information and on-the-job training. These programs generally come from the demands of employers or the laborers themselves through studies created by the department. In this way, the program can as well lower the deficiency of specific-skills required workforce at the same time (The Prime Minister's Office, 1997). In expansion, the Division of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives that aims at domestic financial training for women moreover has been supporting women in the agricultural division so that they ended up with more efficiency and productivity, which can increment their wage and decrease the contrast between them and other women group within the society. Different branches of domestic production are created locally (e.g., mulberry production, silk weaving, workmanship making, food nourishment) in which expertise and experience are shared between individuals. The Department also gives Agricultural Housewives Funds to empower income-generating exercises and to teach women how to get to monetary assets with disinterest for their business exercises extension (The Prime Minister's Office, 1997).

In the country regions, numerous ladies in Thailand were mostly deprived, affected by segregation and unjustifiable treatment. They are generally concentrated in uncertain and powerless employments within the casual division. They are largely concentrated in insecure and vulnerable jobs in the informal sector, including in agriculture and unpaid family worker, with only a small minority in senior positions. counting in horticulture and unpaid family workforce, as it were a little minority in senior positions (OECD, 2018).



According to the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women, unfair treatment against ladies still exists in numerous rustic regions in Thailand such as the treatment of women laborers on the way and means to get to assets or funding support. Particularly, there's a need for the arrangement to advance financial strengthening and monetary access related administrations to bunches of impoverished ladies. Data from the world bank reported only 13.67% of women have borrowed from a money-related institution (World Bank, 2017).

In the Thailand 20-year master plan, target to maximize the utilization of computerized innovation overall socio-economic exercises. Numerous ladies in provincial territories, in any case, are not able to completely advantage from advances in data technology as the number of web clients in rustic territories are low, and online trade aptitudes ought to be progressively developed (OECD, 2018). The researchers view government 20-year master plan of digital technology as a beneficial asset, which can initiate grassroots weavers commercialized new pattern for their higher incomes. Also, privatization and advancement arrangements interpret into more challenges for ladies particularly those living in rustic or conflict-affected zones, in picking up get to common and financial assets especially those living in rural or conflict-affected areas, in gaining access to ordinary and economic resources.

Thailand has transformed into an upper-middle-income nation where sexual orientation uniformity and women's empowerment challenges persist, especially for certain bunches and topographical districts along with ethnic minorities women. Internationally, many women NGOs' missions are fighting for women's rights for reasonable compensation and open more opportunities for women (Rossen, 2018). Three major international women's organizations, International Council of Women, established in 1888; the worldwide women's activist union for ladies, initially called the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, established in 1904; and the vanguard Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which developed out of the Worldwide Congress of Ladies that met at The Hague in 1915. These organizations' histories about their participation and competition, shed a modern light on the worldwide women's development. Since its establishment, ICW has been an unopinionated and unbiased universal organization. Its concept of woman's rights could be a wide commitment to change every viewpoint of life to make a more agreeable and cheerful life for ladies. Examples of many international women NGOs that recently emerged are, firstly, the Women's Global Empowerment Fund after setting up in 2007, has been engaging under-privileged ladies in Uganda by contributing trade preparing and offering microloans to assist and encourage their proficient autonomy. Secondly, AnitaB.org, established by Anita Borg in 1987, this organization has followed Anita Borg's mission to put ladies in a brilliant position within the innovation field. The organization gives assets for education by classifying different qualities. In India, they organize career fairs for ladies, providing business entities the chance to improve workforce gender differentiation. Thirdly, providing monetary resources to poor people areas of Guatemala, Friendship Bridge gives education opportunities, how to be an entrepreneur, and something else that is unavailable including microcredit loans, women participate with other individuals with strong believe and take instructive sessions as a portion of the terms of the financial loan. By combining capital with assets, Fellowship Bridge can encourage better working conditions for women. Fourth, Share & Care Foundation, making a difference ladies flourish in provincial India within the center of nonprofit, which prioritizes instruction, wellbeing care, and sexual orientation equality. Emphasized self-defense preparing for ladies as well as monetary-related administration abilities.

In Thailand, there are many women organizations whose objectives aim at raising women's economic status and/or support women's empowerment. The first and the oldest is The National Council of Women of Thailand being nonpartisan nonsectarian and non-profit that has the objective to develop Thai women's roles, abilities, and capability in building peaceful, equal opportunities and justice for women in local, national, and international levels. Most of the activities focus on finding strategies and work towards improving the standard of living, status, and capabilities of Thai women, search for methods to eliminate or solve problems that are obstructing the development of women and women organization members, creating jobs and economic security of Thai women, preserve and protect Thai culture and environment to create the better world for next-generation, develop the potential of Thai women to grow in ASEAN region and the rest



of the world by working in cooperate and collaborate with public and private sectors, nationally and internationally to advance the beneficial work for women and society.

History and misadventure of the Thai fabrics:

Thai silk can be one of the top economic products that contribute to the wealth and prosperity of our nation. Nevertheless, in the mid-19th century, Thai silk faced with tragic experience and almost disappearing from the market. But the situation is now gradually recovered and turn to a positive trend. Looking back to the myth/history of Thai apparel and fashion through the centuries, women's daily wear is a wrapped loose shawl called "*Sabai*" with *Sarongs* and *Chong Krabens*. Women frequently went topless when they were out of their homes. There were also loose-fitting outfits that fasten together in the front similar to a robe nowadays. The imperial women were putting on the finest silk woven by residential weavers, this daily wearing didn't change until the Thai government had to deal with European power control and Colonialism. The Europeans wore sewn outfits while Thai women wore wrapped loose *Sabai*. In that period, The Europeans who visited the Royal Authority were stunned that Thai ladies frequently went topless. The Europeans couldn't cover up their disdain for conventional Thai dress. The Government started a campaign to prohibit the uncovered breasts from any open scene and announce a decree against the wearing of *Chong Krabens* or *Sabais* and promote sewn blouses and sarongs for ladies and sewn shirts and trousers for men. The Royal family began to dress in European style. Ladies of the Illustrious Court wore puffy-sleeved/mutton chop bind pullovers and unsettled dresses, which was the costume pattern of Victorian Europe.

By 1900, the campaign to modernize Thai clothing was well beneath way and having a few victories in Bangkok and other parts of Thailand. Within the 1930s, with the conclusion of the supreme government, Field Marshal *Plaek Phibulsongkram*, a previous Thai president issued strict dress codes, which emphasized western clothing over conventional clothing. This government-sponsored transformation to western clothing of course had a negative effect on demand for conventional Thai textiles and dress. Imported western wear got to be favored over the conventional sarong. Other than that, numerous textile industrial facilities are rising, giving cheaper textiles to the market affecting handwoven Thai fabrics and traditional Thai silk to fading and almost disappear. The information, knowledge, and abilities required for traditional Thai silk weaving were being overlooked by entire towns. In the 1950s, it is very fortunate for Thai people that Her Majesty Queen Sirikit encouraged and helped village women to resume their weaving traditions, re-energized demand to help them sell their fabrics for secondary family income. Queen Sirikit began to design and wear Thai silk gowns to important official occasions, utilized special designers' teams to form a line of conventional Thai outfits made from Thai silk/cotton. The Queen would wear Thai silk with elegant design at the exceptional worldwide social events so it was the first period that the world was being presented by Thai silk.

Right now, the quality of handwoven cotton or silk is appreciated among Thai people and foreigners, however, better quality has been requested by customers, which challenges Thai weavers. The great news is that conventional Thai textiles have kept pace with the most recent patterns and are utilized with elegant costumes especially for both cotton *mudmee* and silk *mudmee*, where you'll discover a boundless assortment of attire and embellishments made from this antiquated weaving technique. Since then, the Thai government has gotten concerned much more to assist grassroots weavers to deliver better handwoven Thai silk. The government has cultivated expansion programs to educate and prepare grassroots women to produce superior crude silk. The government has created modern breeds of local Thai silkworms that deliver way better silk fiber and offer these unused species to the villagers. Moreover, the government has created better species of mulberry trees that deliver more leaves and are more resistant to drought. In the last 10 years, Thailand has become a tourist attraction country. Many tourists want to buy Thai silk but the fake Thai silk that is synthetic silk fabrics mixed with polyester available in almost every tourist place with a similar look but a much cheaper price that draws the traveler's attention, result in a recognizable drop-off in weaving Thai fabrics. It all comes down to grassroots weavers' financial matters. However, grassroots women will proceed with their weaving action, only in case of the conventional productive cost, if not, Thai traditional textiles may be terminated.

The research restriction is before the Thai fabrics commercial pattern to support the marketing program had been done to raise grassroots wavers' financial status, unfortunately, the government locked down policy from the outbreak of coronavirus infection 2019 affected their normal commercial patterns. The



researchers have to find out other effective channels for Thai fabrics' commercial pattern that is currently available and bring in that knowhow such as OTOP exhibition event, OTOP Midyear Online, and the Half-Half project that are operated by government bodies. The study eventually incorporates digital technology for commercialization recommendation for domestic weavers to overcome grassroots women's difficulties.

## 2. Objectives

- 1) To present the overall situation of weaving skill of Thai women in each region and understand how they develop their skill and/or enhancing their current skills.
- 2) To analyses and recommend the Thai fabrics commercial pattern to support the marketing program.

## 3. Materials and Methods

The research focuses on the overall situation of Thai women weaving skills in different regions and the knowledge management on the production of the traditional Thai fabrics patterns. The study of Empowering Women for Economic Development: The Case study of Thai fabrics women groups, was descriptive and qualitative research that explores and develops an initial understanding of women's grassroots economy related to native Thai fabrics from a small, under-researched population. The study period was from February 2019 to April 2020. This research used two types of non-probability sampling techniques. The first technique was the convenience sampling method by recruiting informants from a rural community who were easily accessible and convenient for the researchers to interview. The representative provinces of the four regions, north, north-east, central, and south of Thailand, should stand in the center/midway of its region plus commercialization data about their renowned cultural fabrics or their cultural fabrics potential. The representative provinces in each region had been chosen accordingly as follows: *Chiang Mai, Lampoon*, and *Mae-Hongson* representing the north region, *Ayutthaya, Chainart*, and *Anghong* representing the central, *Nakornrajsima* and *Udorn Thani* representing the northeast, and *Suraj Thani* representing the south. There is a total of 9 selected provinces. The second technique is the purposive and selective sampling method, informants were selected based on non-random criteria, with three selection criteria by approaching local governors for his/her recommendation; (a) the informants must be an active weaver, (b) the informants must have at least 5-year experience in weaving native fabrics in that geographical area to ensure informants similar foundation, and (c) the informant has the ability to provide detailed information about the local native Thai fabrics for note-taking and investigation. Consultation and validation to reaffirm initial selection. The researchers contacted local government employees for a second opinion. They were the office of the Chief Administrator of the Subdistrict Administrative Organizations (SAO), Chief Executive of the SAO, and head of Subdivision (Section) of Occupational Promotion and Women Development. They were potential assistants because they worked very closely with the rural people, thus they could effectively introduce appropriately experienced weavers that met specifications required by the research's guidelines as to proper informants and kindly assisted in coordination between the researchers and the informants. There were 4-5 informants per province, resulting in a total of 40 informants from 9 provinces. The interview is based on interview guide questions: 1) background of informants, 2) how they weave their native fabrics and their skill, 3) their economic market, how they sell their products. It was open-ended questions in which informants had the right to answer questions or refused to provide information. Researchers encouraged informants to express their views freely. The interview could stop at any time if the informants felt uneasy or uncomfortable. The time frame for visiting remote areas was 14 months. Data were gathering from knowledge management transfer from generation to generation about the history of their local native fabrics as a continuous successor, substantiated compiling from all informants in each region from a door to door visiting the rural communities in four regions, north, north-eastern, central, and the south of Thailand. The identity of the informants was protected. No informant names and personal data were disclosed. The research limitation was,- due to difficulty in approaching the informants, so the number of informants was small. Sometimes compelling questions were asked to help the informants to recall their memory, stimulating story extension to reach the



furthest information behind. The research data was not sound recorded to avoid the informant's discomfort. The research data was note-taking in Thai and translated into English by the researchers.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

##### *Thai fabrics culture and their succession:*

From the research data on the background of informants, the age range was from 45 to 80 years old, education background varies from non-grade to grade six. Informants' weaving experiences varied from 10 to 55 years. Some informants started their career as a weaver when The Queen promotes and educates Thai traditional fabrics production. The findings of this study helped the researchers to understand the situation of weaving skill of Thai women in each region from the semi-structured interviewing of forty local weavers in rural communities in nine provinces in the four regions, north, north-eastern, central, and south of Thailand, which revealed many aspects that grassroots weavers produced their local Thai fabrics patterns according to each region culture. In the area that produces Thai silk, most local weavers raised their own silkworms fed with mulberry leaves. In some villages, they fed their silkworm with other kinds of leaves so the outlook of the silk thread would be different from mulberry leaves and was less shiny but softer touch. When silkworms turned into cocoons, they boiled the cocoons to make silk thread by hand. In some areas, they spun and dyed cotton thread themselves. Then, using a loom to weave thread to make silk fabric, mostly produce shimmering fabrics for sale in the markets. A rural silk weaver at work in northeastern Nakornrachasima still utilizes ancient teak loom and essential weaving procedures. The beginnings of Thai silk could be followed back to an archeological location called *Baan Chiang* closed to *Udorn Thani* where archeologists found ceramics that were beautified with silkworm themes and mulberry leaves. *Mudmee* silk is the foremost popular silk in this area and it could be a social treasure of Thailand. The researchers strolled through their village seeing ladies weaved natural colors silk thread with a colored *Mudmee* design.

In central Thailand, grassroots weavers normally produce cotton. Within the 12th century, the ruins of spinning whorls for cotton thread in *Sukhothai* evidenced that *Sukhothai* people were developing cotton and making cotton fabric. The very famous cotton fabric design called *Jok/Chok*, which may be the most beautifying weaving procedure utilizing irregular supplementary wefts needed the finest ability weaver and was exceptionally exhausting. It was the foremost enduring bequest acquired from *Tai Yuan*, *Tai Phuan*, and *Tai Lue*. A chunk of *Jok/Chok* can be utilized as *Sabai* or put at the foot of the cotton cloth as an enrichment to create a *Sarong*. *Chainart* and *Angthong* are well recognized for cotton fabrics. Turning cotton into a usable textile is easier than making silk fabric. In the north, the researchers visited *Chiang Mai* and *Lumpoon*. *Chiang Mai* and *Lampoon* silk weavers used teak treadle loom whereas Thai Hill Tribes used backstrap loom or foot loom. Today, almost all Thai weavers used a treadle loom. This loom worked by raising and lowering the vertical threads or the warp threads by pressing a pedal with your foot. The main reason was to form pressure on the vertical strings, which permitted the weaver to interlace a horizontal thread or the weft threads over and beneath the vertical threads. There are a few diverse between loom types that is the progression in innovation for the most part on the speed but not the quality. Basic wooden looms were simple to build and access to numerous families. Talented weavers may deliver special quality silk fabric with traditional old looms. Nowadays Thai weavers are regarded over the world since they can create the finest handwoven silk especially *Lumpoon*, which is a silk weaving center of *Lanna* style utilize great quality gold threads for their exquisite brocades, which this high-class finest silk was utilized by the royal family within the reign of Ruler Rama IV, V and VI. In the south of Thailand, *Suraj Thani* weavers were Moslem and the weaving pattern was the same as *Lanna* style even though the gold threads and silk threads were a bit different.

From research data showed that the weaving techniques and patterns differ from one region to another. It comprises carefully embeddings weft threads of diverse colors through the warp thread to form compounded colorful design either cotton or silk. Another finding was that there were numerous sorts of domestic silk fibers. The first type called "Bark silk or Loose silk" "ไหมเปลือก หรือ ไหมหีบ" came from an external portion of the cocoon, so the quality was not so great compared with other silk fibers. Bark Silk thread was not consistency fine and looked puffy compared with "Mai Noi" "ไหมน้อย." *Mai Noi* is recognized as the most excellent quality domestic silk fiber with a softer touch and much brighter color. Another two



lower quality domestic silk fibers are “*Mai Lang*” “ไหมแดง”, and “*Mai Sao Loei*” “ไหมสาวเลย”. The quality of *Mai Lang* is not so good because residual pieces of cocoon and remnant of silkworm attached. For *Mai Sao Loei*, weavers used single wire in yarning process and its silk fiber was much larger than *Mai Noi* but the quality was better than “*Lang Silk*” and “*Bark Silk*”. It was considered as a medium quality silk thread, and always normally use in weaving silk fabric for clothes. If anyone is supposed to apply a quality star to grade and standardize each type of folk silk thread, “*Mai Noi*” would get 5 stars while “*Mai Sao Loei*,” “*Mai Lang*,” and “*Bark Silk*” would get 4, 3, and 2 stars, respectively.

The grassroots weavers informed the researchers that apart from domestic silk thread, factory silk was another kind of Thai silk with a longer yarn length. It came from the crossbreed silkworm that was the crossbreeding between domestic silkworm and foreign country silkworm. People normally called factory silk as “*Jul Silk*” “ไหมจูล” because it was produced from the factory name Jul Thai Silk Factory. Jul Silk thread was better than *Mai Noi* because it was a more smoothy uniform thread line but less light-reflective, thinner, and easier to crumple than *Mai Noi*. Sometimes, the production capacity of hand-woven silk cloth was insufficient to meet the demand of customers the factory silk would be used instead. Another demand substitution was artificial silk or fake silk due to price concerns. It was much cheaper. It looked like silk but not real silk. It was synthetic silk fabrics mixed with polyester.

During the visiting and interviewing each community about the origin of the different styles of weaving processes, one of the informants in the north (informant’s code number 03) informed the researchers that for one piece of local designed Thai native silk fabrics, the weaving time spending for the fabric size of 2 meters long with 1.5-meter width is ranging from one month to three months depending on the complexity of the patterns. It is why the price of Thai fabrics, especially silk, is considerably expensive since, apart from the difficulty in preparing silk trade patterns like *mudmee*, it is very time-consuming to finish weaving one piece.

#### *Skill development:*

The researchers got information from almost all informants on how domestic weavers in each region developed their weaving skills and/or enhancing their current skills, Mostly, their weaving knowledge was from their ancestors, coming down from generation to generation. Some of them got additional advanced weaving knowledge about the patterns and fabrics styles from the Royal Development Projects. the Royal Development Projects representative coordinated with the local government community development department organized the knowledge sharing and learning for grassroots weavers in each region by inviting gurus in dyeing/coloring to demonstrate the difference between organic and synthetic dye fabrics. Most informants informed the researchers that they learned about the new patterns and new designs of Thai fabrics from gurus in weaving and designing from the knowledge-sharing workshop. In the knowledge-sharing workshop session, there were representatives from grassroots weavers from some regions to share the history of their ancient patterns, which in turn, demonstrated Thai fabrics as the unique cultural heritage and gurus inspired and motivated grassroots weavers to initiate their pattern. This was a real example of the un-ended Thai cultural heritage preservation. Informant’s code number 014 in the northeast told the researchers that after she was enrolled in advanced weaving knowledge from the Royal Development Projects, she could earn a lot more for her children's educational support, and two out of five children graduated from Khon Kaen University. The study was getting well support from all involved parties. Knowledge-sharing workshops could reenergize small entrepreneurs and local grassroots weavers. The researchers can reiterate that Thai folk silks are unique with their exquisite patterns that vary from one region to another.

OTOP and the Thai fabrics commercialization:

One Tambon, One Product (OTOP) is a local entrepreneurship stimulus program under the responsibility of the Community Development Department (CDD), Ministry of Interior, which aims to support the unique locally made and marketed products of each Tambon all over Thailand to distribute income to local people. Normally each year CDD organized three commercial exhibitions for OTOP, which are OTOP midyear, OTOP City, and Silpacheep PrateepThai OTOP Kaoklai Duayprabamee (ศิลปาชีพ ประเทปไทย OTOP ก้าวไกล ด้วยพระบารมี), which has commercial products exhibition from The Foundation for the Promotion



of Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother. OTOP midyear normally organized in June, Silpacheep PrateepThai OTOP Kaoklai Duayprabamee normally organized in August, and OTOP city normally organized in December. Many small and medium entrepreneurs from many provinces are waiting to have a chance to be one of the shops being selected by CDD. However, only good quality products will be selected to ensure the renown of these commercial exhibitions. These exhibitions attracted a lot of Thai buyers, which can demonstrate from the sales data below.

**Table 2** Total sales (Baht) from OTOP commercial exhibition per year

Y2017	Y2018	Y2019
3,003,093,572	3,611,275,693	3,488,683,852

Source: OTOP yearly sales data from CDD, 2020

**Table 3** Thai Fabrics and costumes sales (Baht) from OTOP commercial exhibition per year

Fabrics/Costumes	2017	2018	2019
18.67%	560,377,261	673,864,044	650,988,407

Source: figures in table 3 sales of Thai fabrics/Costumes, Compiled from Secondary data, 2021 (Community Development Department on OTOP exhibition yearly sales data, 2021)



**Figure 1** Graph showing sales in Baht of Thai fabrics/Costumes sold from OTOP commercial exhibition per year, data from CDD 2021.

Source: Secondary data calculated from 18.67% of the number of product contribution share of fabrics and costumes (Community Development Department on OTOP exhibition yearly sales data, 2021)

The information about Thai grassroots weavers' commercial patterns that the researchers got from the informants divided into two patterns. The majority of the grassroots weavers sold their product to "silk weaving women group" (กลุ่มสตรีทอผ้าไหม) or OTOP office in their communities. The minority of them sold to the small shop in their hometown (small entrepreneurs). Two informants sold directly to the customer who visits their home. The study was interrupted during Thailand's national lockdown policy on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020, which impacted the lives of people across the country, especially for the incomes of low-income people and

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small-scale entrepreneurs like grassroots weavers' women group. The researchers had to insert digital commercial technology to support them by getting coordination and cooperation support from the local and head office of the Community Development Department (CDD). OTOP midyear that is normally organized during June, could not be done due to the pandemic of Corona Virus 2019 as well. Director of Community Development Department organized project named "OTOP Midyear 2020 online" to sell and promote OTOP product on online platform for a total of 90 days from June 1st, 2020 until August 29th, 2020. The researchers made a contact with one government employee (project head) who runs OTOP online program ask for his support to offer this online platform to informants who can perform a digital commercial so that they can commercialize their product during this crisis. Normally, the project committee of the Midyear OTOP online selected only top starred OTOP products qualified from the best of 2019. The researchers could recommend some of the informants' products to be included in. CDD made an electronic manual for traders, suggest a one-page microsite for promoting only OTOP shops. Coordinate with the website to make a graphic banner and promote on the main website and make a graphic banner and promote on the mobile application, select 3 social media influencers to promote and present OTOP product selling by doing picture, video or live stream through Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, or Twitter. Having a big online market website in Thailand to sell and manage a server to fit all of the 300 traders and the website must have a mobile application. There are many operators used in this project, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and website, <http://shoppee.co.th/otop>. CDD expecting that it will be able to alleviate the suffering of regional and local residents in the outbreak of coronavirus infection 2019.

Since the last decade, the Thai government provides many women economic empowerment projects about traditional Thai fabrics. Facing the pandemic of the coronavirus interrupted the normal OTOP Midyear event, to solve this tragic problem, CDD put a financial investment of 0.5 million Baht on the online operation. 459 traders joined with Midyear OTOP online project, nevertheless, sales consolidation could not be summarized yet because sales amount did not pass via only one operator. The researchers could recommend some of the informants' products to be included in. However, the informants did not suffer much because the government provided financial support to them during the first 3 months of the pandemic. Followed by the Half-Half project that stimulates money flow in the market, which helps some informants who join the program in time.

The pandemic of coronavirus economic situation management:

The Half-Half project was initiated by Economic Situation Management Center, Fiscal Policy Office, Department of Finance in Bangkok, focus mainly on the economic impact of the outbreak of coronavirus infection in 2019. The first objective of the Half-Half project is to restore the foundation economy for retails/small entrepreneurs especially the hawkers and stalls, to increase small entrepreneur's revenue. The government will co-pay for food, beverage, and general goods at 50% of the price through the registered buyers. However, this co-pay will be at a maximum of 150 Baht/head/day and the total amount of spending throughout the project is capped at 3,000 Baht/person for the first phase of the project and increase up to 3,500 Baht for the combined amount of the first and second phase. Secondly, this project will help fill up people's purchasing power. Thirdly, it can help low-income people to reduce their cost of living during this difficult period. The budget for the first phase is 30,000 million Baht to have the cash flow of 60,000 million Baht spending continuously to reach retail entrepreneurs. In the second phase, the government expanded the coverage bandwidth of both sellers and buyers, hoping that a cash flow of 81,000 million Baht will be injected into the economic system. Expecting to drive the economy to grow during the rest of 2020 and continue to drive to the first quarter of 2021. For shop operators, registration is available through the website [www.halfhalf@fpo.go.th](http://www.halfhalf@fpo.go.th), ("www.คนละครึ่ง.com") or register via Krungthai Bank at any branches across the country.

The Krungthai Bank will support all sellers to set up the application namely "Money Bags" ("ถุงเงิน") where they can get the money from the buyers when the goods were sold. Low-income people and 18 years old who have a Thai ID card, if interested in this project can sign up to join in through the website ...or Krungthai Bank. The Krungthai Bank will support all buyers to set up the application name "Wallets," "Paotang," ("เป่าถัง"). Nevertheless, they have to verify their rights identity through g-Wallet after that SMS

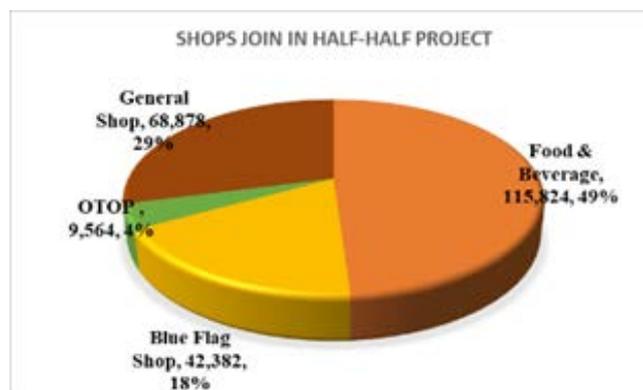


notification of the right had been sent back to them with the obligation of their first spending within 14 days after receiving it otherwise that right will be ineligible. The exercise period was from October 23rd until December 31st, 2020 and the second phase ended end of March 2021. Spending system via application name “Wallet” and “Money Bags” with authentication for the benefit of the user, ensure that no other person shall exercise their rights. OTOP is entitled to join in this project but it has to be OTOP that is registered with the Community Development Department and has proof of receipt as described by the Revenue Department, showing the name and information of the buyer or a full tax invoice contain with the name and information of the buyer together with the product name as purchase identification. There were 9,564 OTOP shops signed in (Fiscal Policy Office (2020) ed. 111/2020).



**Figure 2** Half-Half Project Logo, Ministry of Finance 2020

Source from Ministry of Finance website



**Figure 3** Shops Join in Half-Half Project, 2020

Source: Graphic by the author picking data from Fiscal Policy Office (2020) ed. 111/2020

1.2 million shops were joining in phase 1 and phase 2 with registered rights of 13.66 million people. It would drive a dominant positive impact on local small entrepreneurs who are our country’s grassroots economy. The project helped reduce the cost of living for low-income people, maintaining people purchasing power. The Half-Half project created learning opportunities for people of all levels including grassroots people in rural areas to be able to take advantage of technology to reduce inequality, self-develop, and drive Thai society to move forward to digital society. A reduction of cash usage results in faster, transparent, and effective operation. The data analysis of the provinces across the country showed that the place where the topmost active transaction responses were Bangkok, Songkla, Nakornrachasima, Chonburi, and Chiang Mai. There was a too-small number of active provinces, in this regard, this should be under consideration of the ministry of finance to improve transaction numbers in other big provinces. The rationale behind this should be crucially analyzed for the benefit of other projects in the future. Noticeable problems/ obstacles of this project from the researchers’ view are, there may have many factors involved such as smartphone



affordability, buyer/seller knowledge/awareness, technology dread, and internet access issue. On the positive view, the Half-Half project is a preeminent successful project. It is not true online shopping but a face-to-face transaction with online payment. It is worry-free about not seeing the product like online shopping, which buyer can see only the picture, knowing about product information only provided on the platform, which may not be clear enough, easier for the buyer to make a decision, and convenient payment process by using only QR code. Many grassroots and low-income people may not get used to the other online payment processes comparing to QR code scanning follow by keying accept or non-accept on the amount of money that equivalent to the agreed amount.

The comparable objective of OTOP Midyear online and the Half-Half Project:

Even though the objectives of the Half-Half project and OTOP Midyear online are not the same, nonetheless, there is one matching purpose, which is to help grassroots entrepreneurs. From the researchers' point of view, the bridging comparison on the strengths and weaknesses between the OTOP online and the Half-Half project, which occurred in a similar period with the similar purpose of elevating income for the grassroots economy during the outbreak of Covid-19 can create some initiative strategies. Both projects were supported by the government but at different scales of investment. Comparative analysis of the 2 projects focuses on the number of OTOP traders joined in each project. Data from the ministry of finance news, Half-Half project OTOP traders were 9,564 shops equals 10%, of 87,468 registered OTOP entrepreneurs, using 9,564 divided by 87,468. Compare to OTOP Midyear online traders were only 459, which equivalents to 0.5% of the total using 459 divided by 87,468. This gives an idea for the opportunity to convince and recruit more traders. In fact, it is a golden opportunity for traders to be more familiarized with the online system trading and promotion. They will get wider customer base coverage and sales nourishment outcomes. On the other hand, at the buyer's end, no data available for both the number of buyers and the number of sales. The number of buyers may increase a lot if the government can apply a discount program, funded by the ministry of finance to help the grassroots economy from which the government aims to promote Thai fabrics. The successes and the obstacles of the OTOP online project and Half-Half project during Covid-19 indicated the learning curve that some actions/some activities can be followed through and some need corrective actions. The researchers would like to suggest a "fabrics specification worry-free" program for OTOP online shopping to solve the problem of customer's lacking confidence, validation-seeking for the quality of the fabrics. Besides of product's feature, the OTOP online administrator should provide information on silk thread quality, such as 5 starred domestic silk thread or gold silk or silk cloth made from coarse fibers plus the number of warp threads. Given the same idea that when people go to the department store to buy good quality bed sheet, they can look at the packaging and see several threads quoted such as 500,300 threads and also seeing the other qualification of the bedsheet garment that it makes from pure Egyptian cotton or 100% plain cotton, or cotton mixed with polyester. Open more opportunity for young villagers to learn/develop their hand-woven skill/technique for the advancement of new fabrics pattern, which still preserves local culture and identity. This study showed both implementation gaps and opportunities, successful and obstacle results. The researchers proposed some recommendations that may support progressive grassroots economic growth after the Covid-19 sequelae have been subsided.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper presented the overall situation about the weaving skill of Thai women and the long histories of each local traditional design/pattern in each region across Thailand. Their skills and developments are mostly from their ancestors and lately form the support foundation of Queen Sirikit. This paper demonstrated the opportunities for skill improvement, which the local department of Women's Affairs, Family Development, and The Community Development Department can provide advanced weaving knowledge or develop special speed loom for grassroots women. NGO alone or in collaboration with government body can help elevate the grassroots economy, which highlights women's role in Thai traditional economic blossoming, especially in fabrics business that conforms with the women's role in economic development since the ancient time in agricultural production (Boserup et al, 2013). This achievement would be referred to see its impact on feminist economic, which aims at women and children's well-being in local



and national communities. This study shows that grassroots women in rural areas get better income it will also reflex their family well-being, which supports the feminist economic theory. Women empowerment is a vital tool to create a grassroots economy sustainably. From commercial, marketing, and financial points of view, the situation of the coronavirus outbreak showed both gaps and opportunities and successes and obstacles experienced by both NGO and government parties that provided many learnings and experiences of ways to support grassroots weaver's economic status. OTOP online shopping created during the outbreak of the Covid-19 could relieve small OTOP traders who suffered from the loss of sales opportunity. According to the 20-year of Thailand Plan to maximize the utilization of digital technology across the country even in the rural areas where internet access is provided. Most women in rural areas can improve their internet access skills and online business skill. It was a good starting point because the experienced and learning of each trader during the Covid-19 situation will be beneficial for program advancement in the future. If small Thai entrepreneurs can acquire more digital knowledge, new technology of marketing, and financial management skills, it will certainly drive the country to be a successful digital society in the future. They cannot wait for any hand to reach them, they can also come midway to reach out for their new opportunity. The recommendation to whom it may concern is to analyze the new ways to help them. More consumption of Thai fabrics such as silk, cotton, and other native fabrics can strengthen the economic foundation and diversify income to the community. From to the fabric's usage estimation, if only 35 million Thai people put on the outfit made from Thai fabrics twice a week, there will be a demand for Thai fabric of 350,000,000 meters per year, with an average of 10 meters/person/year and an average price of 300 Baht/meter that will boost Thai economy by 105,000 million Baht per year, which is not only the income of local grassroots people but also the country.

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