

# **‘The Arts of Body Adornment of Phlow Karen Ethnic Group in Rachburi, Thailand’**

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## **Background**

Karen people were claimed to live along the western boarder of Thailand since 1581. Around 1773, more Karens fled from Myanmar to Kingdom of Siam. They served Siamese Kingdom as the disguised boarder patrols, keeping eye and ears on what were happenings along the boarder and reported it to Siamese authority. Followed by the political conflict eruption between Myanmar Military Government and minority group, under the name of NKU in 1885 that drove the even more Karen to escape that hardship to neighbouring Thailand. Rachburi was one of the destination among other provinces along the boarderline. There are 2 major clans of Karen who have settled down in Rachburi: (1) Pga K’nyau and (2) Plo. Relationship between Plow and Pga K’nyau were retold through different folklores. Among different details, almost all stories share the same main plot: these two races were once very closed, either as husband and wife, brother and sister, or something else as a pair ( the drum stick and the drum as appeared in Meaw Jai Jung Yu Scripture<sup>1</sup>). The similarities and differences between them are as followed. Plow is considered feminine side or the blood line of the mother side, while Pga K’nyau is considered masculine side, taking the bloodline of the father. Plow expresses femininity quality by taking believes, rituals, religions, customs that reflects cultural dimension very seriously. Feminine characteristics of Plow can be also detected from their love for beauty, womenly adornment, aesthetic aspects of life such as music and dance, and domestic attachment exercising through their home-bound activities such as weaving and crafting. Pga K’nyau, in contrary, expresses masculinity quality such as power, authority, fight, bravery that plays the part in political dimension. According to the folk tales, to carry on the race of Karen, two ethnics must be, therefore, united to complement each other. The dream to return home and prosper together in order to

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<sup>1</sup>Meaw Jai Jung Yu Scripture

build the great nation of Karen ,after all those westerners' colonisation and political turmoils Myanmar, also echoes this concept of unity<sup>2</sup>.

The living style of the two Karen ethnics were similar. In the past, they were considered as the hunters-gatherers. Therefore with such nomadic characteristics, they grow and hunt for living. After the migration ended, they settled down in the villages along the boarders, built up families with both Karen and other raced spouses such as Thai and Laotian. Karen families occupied small plots of land and grew their own crops. In 1974, Thai Government granted the concessions private sector to open several mines in Suanpueng District. Karen then were offered a new job opportunity as a low-paid miners from 1974-1985, when the last mine was closed down. When the Minority Camp of Karen was beaten in 1995, more Karen to Thailand. Later during the Cold War period, Thai Government pushed the minority groups including Karen back to their home countries as they were suspected as communism who undermined national security. As a consequence, the status of Karen in Thailand is considered suspicious and submitting to Thai race domination.

### **Tension between being Karen and being Thai**

However, through out those times, Karen have already built up families and communities both in Thailand side and Myanmar side. Today, when the time all the political turmoil periods ended, these Karen, who settle down in Rachburi, still keep going back to Myanmar to visit their cousins , working in their fields seasonally and trading stuffs occasionally. This connection plays **key role in sustaining the original culture** of Karen community around Sunapueng Area.

However, quite a number of migrated Karen still live outlawed because they cannot prove their identity document to Thai authorities. Thai citizenship is suspended. Instead, they are categorised as special case: Hill tribal , refugee, minority group and immigrants. From time to time, Thai government delivered the policy to push them back to their homeland. Without Thai citizenship, they are unsecured in many aspects: they are subjected to live and work in a confined areas, they have no equal access to standard social welfare, and sometimes they illegally exploited by authoritative officers. Karen young generation can acquire Thai citizenship more easily than their ancestors and parents. The record from Thai school that they attend

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<sup>2</sup>Wudhi Boonlert, Truth be Told by the Karen of Suanpueng (เมื่อกะเหรี่ยงสวนผึ้งลุกขึ้นพูด) , page 9

is very important proof. Therefore, most Karen children whose parents wish for them **the Thai Citizenship**, attend Thai schools, study Thai curriculum in Thai language. As a consequence, **some aspects of Karen culture is gradually disappearing from their daily lives and somehow replaced by Thai culture**. From interviewing the Karen informants, they mention that “Young people are shy to speak Karen or even wear Karen dresses. They want to sound and look Thai”. From their perspective, being blended as Thai is less suspected and humiliated.

### **Basic traditional Karen body adornment**

In the past, body Adornment of Karen in Rachburi, both of Pga K’nyau and Plo, shared the similar characteristics. Basically there are 2 pieces that mature Karen women always wore : one was a square blouse and another was a Sarong or tube skirt. For Karen girls, they wore knee-length white sack skirts. For Karen men, they wore similar square blouse with wrapped trousers. Karen wore some silver jewellery such as earrings, necklaces and wrist laces. They carried long-striped square bags ranging from large scale, containing stay-over-night gears such as blanket and pillows, to small scale containing personal nicknacks such as metal palm leaves, tobacco leaves and lighters. Both men and women had long hair that were bunned up at the frontal part of their heads. The reason why their blouses and bags had to be square were easily detected. The Karen wove their own cloth using body loom as major tools. The weavers tied a series of warp with the pillars of their houses at one end, threaded all the warp yarns through a wooden comb, helping control the even gaps of each yarn, between two ends , another end was tied with their own waists. The hurdle that controlled the creation of the extra patterns were flippable wood bands, or sticks, that would be flipped or raised up and down where the weavers wanted those patterns to appear. The body looms therefore limited the width of the woven fabrics. Normally the width turned out to be between 32-37 cm. To make a blouse big enough to fit the wearers’ sizes, Karens needed to stitch two pieces of long woven fabric together, leaving the v-neck line of the front and the back sides unsewn. They normally threaded a combination of coloured warps in stripes and wove the plain weave. Some tapestry weaves in a small areas could be inserted for the making of a bag.

### **The differences between Plow and Pga K’nyau dresses**

Despite the similar principles of how their costumes were constructed, there are an obvious difference between Plow's and of Pga K'nyau's traditional outfits. For Pga K'nyau's woven fabric, it is more plain. The little extra weave such as tapestry weave was added to make blouses and tube skirts, while Plow's woven fabrics appeared with fully details of handcrafted embroidery, doobby weaves, tapestry weaves, tied dyed techniques and beading embellishment.

This paper will focus on Plow women's garment and their changes, rather than the ones of Pga K'nyau because we feel an urgency of archiving the evidences of the disappearing crafts wisdom and the introduction of new crafts techniques found in Plow's craft communities before they are untraceable. Eventhough Pga K'nyau's garment's simplicity makes it more flexible and adaptive to new changes, we have found that the traditional ones can still coexist because of that same simplicity. The original garment is still remade and is daily worn by locals along with the ones influenced by today fashion trend . However, the study of Pga K'nyau's garment and its changes is planned in the next phase of our research.

### **Microscopic investigation of Plow's body adornment**

As mentioned earlier, the weavers' bodies are transformed into the weaving tools. The width of Karen fabric is confined by the weavers' body sizes. As a results, the weavers must assemble both a blouse and a tube skirt(sarong) from separate pieces of the woven clothes. The blouse consists of 2 pieces of fabric sewn together while the tube skirt consists of 3. The diagram below show the assembly of each item.

### **Colours for the blouse**

In the past, the weaving yarns were natural dyed. A Plow's blouse was conventionally dark blue. The pigment came from ebony fruits, which was fermented until it juiced, then crushed to make a dye bath. The fabric was woven from natural hand-spun cotton, then they piece-dyed it in the ebony dye bath. After acquiring 2 pieces of evenly dark-blue-dyed 160-centimetre-long fabric, the weaver would sewn them together to form the square blouse. Last tedious process was to embroidered the delicate patterns onto the blouse. In old time, the embroidery yarns came in limited colour range. There were only red, white and yellow to form a colour scheme of stripe-based needlework that covered up almost all surface of the blouse.

## **Colours for the tube skirt**

It was more complicated to acquire the colours for the skirt. The main colour scheme of the skirt were yellow and red. The yellow dye came from vernacular Pradoo trees while the red dye came from shellacs. The skirt could be divided into 4 separate parts that were later sewn together. Each part was crafted from different textile techniques.

(1) the top hem (know as the head of the skirt) was woven with the doobby weaving technique

(2)and(3) the body parts were Ikat weaving (Ikat is a tied dyed technique that applies the colour dye to either the warp or weft before weaving the piece)

(4) the lower hem(known as the foot of the skirt) was tapestry weave. The extra colour yarns were inserted to create several specific patterns in the provided spaces.

After all parts were completely made, they were assembled by hand stitching. The last process was to decorate the lower hem with beading frills.

## **Meanings behind the intricate patterns**

There are a few different assumption about the meaning of the patterns on Plow's blouse and skirt. The dominant pattern on the blouse is obviously the circular patterns which was assumed to symbolise the sun. Even though a few references mentioned the meaning of the sun as growth and prosperity<sup>3</sup>, from our interviews with the 80-year-old weaver, that assumption did not familiar for her. Most of weavers we come across in the study only followed what the older weave without concerning or questioning the meaning behind what they wove. However, each embroiderer has her own favourite pattern. They tend to have their own ways and have their own characteristics for such patterns as their signatures that can only be spotted and identified by whose hand it is made by the keen eyes of other skilful weavers.

For the skirt, the association with water-based living dominates the narrative behind most of the patterns. Karen lives are associated tremendously with nature, similarly to other hunter-gatherer ethnic groups. There are plenty of superstitious believes,

animism and respect to mother nature, that were communicated through their folktales and songs which portray forests , water ways , trees and wild lives as the main scenes and actors. These characteristics were expressed through the Plow's skirt patterns too. It is found that several embroidered patterns were named after the elements associated with water. The patterns inspired by Fish tails, fish scales, water insects are the examples that are commonly acknowledged by most of the weavers in this study.

### **Occasion to wear**

Karen new-born babies were wrapped with hand-woven cotton-spun fabrics that they mother made for them. Growing up in white sack skirts with a little red stripes until the puberty age was reached, the Plow girls had to undertake the big ritual when the traditional Plow dress played the crucial part. Those girls were given the dress, owned by respectful family members, either their mother or grannies, to wear 3 nights before the first menstruation came. It was believed as an inauguration ritual for Plow girls's coming-of-age life event. It was logically explained that the white sack dress of young girls would not be able to bear or conceal the blood stains during her first period, as well enough as the dark blue dress. This 3-day ritual was also believed to be completed before her first period actually comes, otherwise the bad circumstances would happen to the her and her family.

### **Some believes behind the making of the dress**

From the interview, one of senior weavers has recalled the dyeing ritual of those days in the past. To gain the dye pigments for skirt exact colours, they needed to fetch the raw materials in the deep jungle. The iguana's and frog's fat would be gathered and chanted for, in the middle of the full moon night, before bringing them back for yarn dye. For the weaving process, some weavers recalled the memories seeing their grannies help each other weave the dresses as it was believed that if any bad news come in between the process of weaving, that would signify the bad omen and the making process needed to be cancelled and restarted. That was the reason why they needed 2 weavers to make sure the work would be done fast enough before any bad news visited. Even though lingering on the weaving process seemed unmatched with this believes, the dresses from the past we have witnessed are still intricate with very fine stitches and neat tapestry weave picks.

## **Changes and the factors behind them**

### **(1) The change of working context / Self sufficiency was replaced by consumerism**

Instead of making their own fundamentals: food, shelters, medicine and cloth like the old days, buying these supplies from others are much more economical these days. In the past, Plow women would prepare the traditional dress for their daughters or nieces since they were still the little girls. They wove those clothes after farming for a few hours. Day by day. During the after-harvesting period, they could weave more. Timing was not limited and restricted. Rather, the weaving time synchronised well with their routines and seasonal schedule.

Nowadays, the Plows families own less land than before. Suanpueng is considered quite a fertile land for farming and scenic areas for local tourisms. Investors, both locals and from afar, have asked the Karens to sell their land and become the labours employed in their own land that are turned into massive farms for vegetables, animal corns and sugar cane. The capability of financially self-support is therefore ceased and replaced by dependency on low-paid wages. Most of their time is dedicated for earning that money. Then they spend it on daily supplies including dresses. Industrially made ready-to-wear cloth is obviously cheaper than weaving their own, which additionally requires time that is no longer available.

However, the persistence in tradition is very strong. It is found that many Plow women have the strong will to acquire the traditional dress, for themselves and for their children, from other weavers no matter how expensive it is. Instead of wearing the dress regularly even in the working context as before, the traditional Plow dress is now worn only on the culturally important occasions such as Karen New Year ceremony called 'Angmeetoh', or important receptions such as royal and authoritative visits.

### **(2) Home schooling was converted to formal education at school**

In the past, home and community were the places where children were cultivated. When the concept of formal education was introduced through government-supported schools, and having official schooling records is a crucial guarantee for the success of their Thai citizenship applications, the learning space of Plow children was gradually shifted to schools more and more. At schools, Karen culture could be introduced

through a variety of forms: Few schools teach Karen language, while others encourage students to learn Karen through music and dance. For textiles weaving and silversmithing, some schools bring them in as extra curricular and vocational-based activities that can cater only a few students for only a period of time, according to availability of the local textiles and silversmiths artisans. The local cultural centres also plays the key role in supporting and sustaining this cultural heritage. They set up the same activities during weekend. However, the reflection of P' Jean, the teacher at HinSee Cultural Centre ensures the conclusion that formal education is the key factor influencing disconnection of cultural transfer. "There used to be quite a number of girls and boys who come to learn weaving, and they did it well. But soon after they went to continue their college level in town, they stopped weaving. Perhaps they need more time to focus on their harder study" Young generation of Karen, both Plow and Pga K'nyau in Suanpueng seem to share the common goal. They want to seek for better life opportunity in order to uplift their social status. They are convincingly attracted to formal education, especially the ones provided in developed areas in town or in big cities, and pursue it, believing that it will help them achieve those goals.

Besides, Aunt Klueng, a senior weaver of Baan Tahka remembers her childhood clinging on her mother while she was weaving at home. "My mother gave me the left-over yarns and small wooden sticks, so I could play the kids-version body loom next to her" She added "Our kids these days play mobile phones all day. They do not care about learning weaving anymore" The new obsession with social media updates and on-line gaming appears to completely take away their interest from this tradition.

### **(3) Pro-ethnic era: Creative Economy: when cultural artefacts are commercialised.**

#### **For others and for themselves**

In Rachburi, there are 8 ethnic groups: vernacular Thai, Chinese-Thai, tai-Yuan, Mon, Khmer, Tai Dam, Laowiang and Karen<sup>4</sup>. Their settlement has scattered around Rachburi.

Not long ago, Rachburi, as other second-tier provinces in Thailand, Rachburi Province has promoted itself as one of tourism destination for its advantages of short distance from Bangkok, its scenic locations as well as its multicultural heritages.

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<sup>4</sup> 8 เชื้อชาติ

Suanpueng district has also adopted the same policy. The domestic tourists visit Suanpueng for its hilly scenery, natural attractions such as waterfalls, adventurous trailing, trekking and biking with the flare of exotic Karen culture. Under the concept of creative economy that influences the strategic tourism campaign across the nation, cultural artefacts which were once made for own usage become souvenirs for sale. The Karen bags with various colours and simplified Karen square blouse are among the top items representing Karen-ness that tourists can shop and bring back home. However, the traditional Plow dress is not considered sellable products as it is rather expensive. A pair of square blouse and tube skirt costs as much as 14,000 Baht (460 US dollars) and the design of the dress does not seem to fit the different tastes and contemporary usage of tourists.

However, the Plow traditional dresses are recently highly demanded by locals, both the Karens and Thais. Rachburi Municipality has also promoted cultural spaces and events for its people to express their cultural routes. Instead of completely suppressing the minority groups, the governmental agency has seen the opportunity to assimilate them with more compromising manners. Recently, there are the emergence of several Hilltribe's Cultural Centres supported by Thai Government through local Authority and Royal Patrons in Rachburi to preserve and promote ethnic cultural pride, along with the launch of Thai Nationalism agenda. For attending authoritative local events which happens almost monthly, Plow and Pga K'nyau would wear their tradition outfits. Local Thai schools spare one day in a week for their students and teachers to wear their ethnic costumes. During the major Karen cultural events such as New Year Week, Thai authority wear Karen outfits to join the celebration with their Karen fellows. These practices raise the demand for Karen traditional outfits among locals, both Thai and Karen. However, the making of traditional Plow garment is time consuming. To serve the needs of more wearers, there are some changes in the materials and crafting process that have been applied.

### **3.1 introduction of new technology and materials**

Since 1980s, the industrially-made yarns, synthetic dyes and shuttle looms gradually pervaded the communities of craft-cottage industry around Thailand. Plow Bodyloom weavers have adopted these new materials and equipment without hesitation. The industrially-made yarns not only came in variety of colour palettes, but they also guaranteed the unbreakable treads that helped smoothing the weaving process. Synthetic dyes were easily accepted among the dyers because the colours are vivid

and the fastness was at high level. Besides, to find the raw materials for natural colour dyes were also time consuming and the know-how about it was very few among the weavers today. From our field survey, the weavers mentioned that new colours such as green has made an appearance as stitching threads on the blouse. Another new material that became popular among the weavers are acrylic knitting yarns. These yarns provide endless colours options with fluffiness. They make the woven patterns look graphically bold and vivid while the bigger yarn size makes the weavers complete their fabric faster.

It is the co-operative production among weavers that help faster the making process. One skilful weaver, Aunt Klueng of Tahka, weaves not only the plain dark blue fabric as what they normally do, but she also inserts a series of linear stitches, using crochet needle, across the fabric width simultaneously. The result is a piece of cloth with the guideline for another artisan to fill those blank space between the lines with her needleworks. The price of the fabric with guidelines is higher than the plain ones. The supply chain of Plow textiles is created through this value addition and co-operative production ideas.

The same concept of distributed workforce based on individual skills is also applied to making of the tube skirt. One weaver do not need to complete all the separate parts by herself. Instead, different weavers can make their own parts and assemble them together later. The Ikat tied-dyed part is a good example showing that only skilful dyers will produce it for others who lack of Ikat tied-dyeing know-how.

The shuttle looms have been introduced to many weaving community across Thailand including the ones in Suanpueng district. The semi-automatic tool enhances the weaving speed and allow weavers to weave wider fabrics. The Plow weavers see the new way to reduce the blouse making steps. While weaving, using their own body as looms, they need to weave two long thin pieces and sew them together at the end, with the shuttle loom, they can thread the warp for the entire width of the blouse, and weave it in one go without joining any parts together later. The same principle is applied to the making of the tube skirt. Moreover, P' Jean, the Plow weaver creates her own weaves, using tapestry techniques(inserting extra threads to create the floating patterns above the fabric surface), with the shuttle loom for the tube skirt,

aiming to create more fanciful striped texture than the ones of the originals. From afar, her tube skirts still seems in line with the traditional skirts, but with slightly unusual details and colourful gleam. She mentioned that “ For Karens, it is important to blend with the group. No one wants to be a black sheep in the flock. As long as we look in line with the rest, it is ok.”

### **3.2 New design to cater users’s needs and to differentiate themselves from others**

Original Plow dress was rather thick and oversized. It is assumed that there were Karen who used to live in the northern parts of continent, of which the climate was cold. The dress was created to give the wearers warmth and protect them from harsh weather. After a long period of migration and relocation, the dress was with them here in western part of Thailand where the climate is rather hot and humid for almost all year round. The very first adjustment of the dress to fit wearers’ need is that they weave the thinner cloth. Thank to the industrially made yarns that came in fine size. When compared with the almost-100-year-old Plow blouse made from hand-spun cotton yarns that we have found, the new blouse is obviously finer and thinner.

One traditional Plow dress normally takes weaver 12 month to complete as they do not weave it fulltimely. As it employs 100% hand made quality with intricate embroidery details, covering up both the front and the back, the price is rather high for the locals. One weaver was once requested from a school teacher who needs to wear the ethnic costume once in a week to make one-sided embroidered blouse. That would make the dress more affordable for her.

Another case is a request from school head master asking the weaver of Baan yangnamkladnuer and Tahka to produce hundreds of students’ ethnic uniforms. The key request is that the school identity colours must be present on the gown. Pink and purple, yellow and blue are then designed as stripes or hems of the white square gown for those students. The traditional kid’s white Karen gown with the accent of only the red stripes, is altered to serve the new representation.

P’ Jeane, the weaver of Baan Hinsee has mentioned about her skirt design to create the product selling point. Along the lower hem, there are embellishment of shiny vivid beads. They are purely for decoration. P’ Jeane has assign the specific colour schemes to attract different types of wearers: pastel beads for young women, while

the bluish scheme for mature single ladies. Her skirts portray different narratives for her different customers. She also tailormakes them according to individual requests: if somebody prefer more purple or reddish colour schemes, she would willingly add them as long as the overall look of the skirts still does not too differ from the traditional ones.

### **3.3 New functions / new meanings**

Due to the emergence of monthly ethnic cultural events to attend, Plows have more occasions to wear their traditional costumes than before. There are not only traditional-rituals-based events, there are also local festivals such as fruit fairs / local Red Cross Association Fair and 8 Ethnic Fair that welcome the Plow costumes to the stages. Karen Cultural Centre of Baan Hinsee once sent their representative to the beauty pageant held during the Mango Fair. P' Jeane recalled the costume that the young lady of Hinsee was wearing as "glowing and radiating". They wove the blouse and skirt for her with brighter yarns, so that when the stage lighting strikes on them, they would shine and illuminate the lady's face to stand out from her beauty rivals. Plow dress can be seen as fancy costumes similarly found in other beauty competitions.

According to old believe, ideology about beauty is associated with sweetness, politeness and non-sexual appeal. The oversized garment functions as the feminine body concealing. One of the weavers has once decided to have her own traditional blouse and skirt transformed into modern patterned tops and short skirt when she felt an urge to create the more contemporary cloth for herself. As a result, she was blamed by the senior for shamelessly displaying her body when wearing them. For her, this garment makes her more blended with other Thais and fit into today lifestyle, where her routine is expanded to other territory such as markets, malls, authoritative meetings, than in the farms or at home. It is found that those contemporary cultural events always encourage the weavers to try new designs. On the fashion runway, Baan Tahka presents their re-created Plow costumes as a sleeveless fanciful gowns that borrows complicated patterns from modern dresses. Sis.Aree accepted that "It worked only on the runway, as in daily life, we have no places and occasion to wear such dresses for"

While the weavers with creative minds struggle to get their re-interpreted cultural outfits accepted for wider audiences, on the other hand, it is observed that for conservative weavers, they make traditional Plow dress even more elaborative than in the past. The dress becomes status identification, as well as symbol for pride, of the persons who can own such elaborative traditional costume.

## Analysis

### **Consumerism is over Self-sufficiency Economy**

In general, the challenges that Plow traditional costume has faced is similar to the ones that other craft communities in Thailand face : consumerism<sup>5</sup>. As the new working condition, to which local have subscribed (the capitalists' massive farms, factories and service industries) to earn monthly wage, crafts making could therefore hardly done or possibly be done in the shorter after-working-hour period, let alone the disconnection with the crafts know-hows.

Some textiles artisans who still regularly weave the fabrics also shift the making purpose from making them for their own family members to making them for sale. They rather buy ready-made clothes from markets as they are cheaper, more fashionable for the youngsters, while keeping their time-consuming crafted costumes for sale.

### **Priceless/Price-less/Less price**

The Plow traditional costume is full of narratives about their own ethnic route and pride which is considered **priceless** among them who migrated, refuged and pushed away from their homeland. The Karen has found quite struggling with their low earning. One of the weavers told us their fellow's stories, who was once asked to sell their Plow clothes. The weaver never concerned the cost, nor calculated the price, when she made it for herself: the labour was free because she wove it in her free time, as well as the materials costed nothing as they could be fetched around her house. When somebody offered to pay for her **price-less dress**, she decided to sell it for only 500 Baht(17 US Dollars)which was reasonable sum of money to get her over the daily hardship. The concept of pricing was never be in her mind. Nowadays, some artisans develop their marketing perspectives. They see an opportunity to sell their craftwork for the new target groups: both Karen and Thais who wants to display

themselves with the Karen-ness symbol. They, nevertheless, seem to prioritise their affordability before the originality. These group of makers actively adopt new materials and assisting technologies to reduce the making time and ease the making process. As the consequence, they can **price it less** to give consumers the chance to own the cloth. Furthermore, they are opened to new design as that would help create the product differentiation in the market.

### **Tension and Compromise between Thai and Karen Identity**

We have found that Plow ladies currently wear both Thai styled cloth more often than Karen ones. Many youngsters concern themselves as Thais with Karen ethnic. They speak Karen at home and Thai in public, enjoy Thai festive ceremony in April and participate Karen new-year-home-coming rituals relentlessly in August. Despite the facts that some other Karen culture especially the intangible ones such as language, legends and songs, are disappearing, the Plow traditional costume is always longed for by the Karen. In spite of the more availability of affordable modified Karen textiles and clothes, traditional Plow dress with even more elaborative fine details are constantly crafted for the local Karen, unlike many fine-crafted indigenous textiles from other areas, which are vigorously sought after by textiles collectors. The submissive mindset and the strong attachment to customs and tradition of the Karen could be the factor that support this tangible culture to live on.

### **Conclusion: Way forwards/ Possible Intervention**

From the phenomenon that can be observed in this study, there is co-existence between the attempts to preserve and to modernise this wearable heritage of Plow textiles. There is also the tension between maintaining the original aesthetics and allowing the functionality to add into this century-long arts and crafts. This findings can be summarised as shown in the following diagram.

We have found that the Plow traditional dresses mostly fills up the quadrant of Aesthetic/ Conservative, and secondarily the quadrant of Functional /Conservative. There are scarcely evidences showing that Plow tradition inspires the the creative options focusing either on Aesthetics or on new functions in the lower part of the matrix.

Based on this findings, the design intervention can play the complementary roles for the weavers community of Suanpueng to bring the equilibrium to their producing/ consuming eco system. **For strategic level**, the experiential occasions, events or campaign can be designed to elevate the Plow costume not only as wearable culturally and historically communicative artefacts, but also the inspiring resources. The new cultural spaces with recollection and communication of rich cultural narratives of Plow culture would assure the appreciation and the transfer of knowledge in crafts wisdoms among the producers and consumers. The celebration of high craftsmanship with new imagination about how to re-interpret the beauty of Plow cultural ideology in the form of wearable art pieces would connect the past to the endless possibility and eventually make this crafts able to gracefully sustain.

Design intervention relating to these quadrants responds to **preserving and innovating purposes that come hand in hand**

**For practical(pragmatic) level**, new technologies or production system that can lower the cost, but still maintaining the co-operation among the community crafts suppliers, should be brought into the ecosystem. The lower cost will make the new Plow-inspired costumes reach out wider consumers due to their more affordable price than the original ones. Design intervention relating to these quadrants: Conservative/ Functional and Contemporary/Functional, responds to **diffusing the cultural artefacts to bigger audiences**. To help them more easily connect to their own route will make Karen cultural return to daily lives, rather than being preserved for only a few special occasion.

By this systematic intervention, it is assumed that Plow cultural-based textiles, dresses and other adornment would withstand the coming challenges. Once they are made present, available, emphasised on their divine glory in the right spaces, and at the same time they are relevant to people's real daily needs, they will continue to last. This is how the re-creation of indigenous arts and crafts could be planned before we entirely lose them.