

Thailand: Students stir up controversy by going to school out of uniform

Wednesday 2 December 2020, by [PRACHATAI](#) (Date first published: 2 December 2020).

Thailand's first day of the semester has been different as students in at least 23 schools countrywide attended class without uniforms, confronting one of the most controversial issues in Thai society: Do uniforms really matter?

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The no-uniform plea started from Bad Students and KKC Pakee Students, activist groups calling for students to wear clothes of their choice to schools on 1 December. They state that they want to reclaim students' freedom over their own bodies.

Bad Students reported later that students from at least 23 schools in Bangkok, Chonburi, Chanthaburi, Pathum Thani, Udon Thani and Khon Kaen joined the movement.



(In an orange shirt) Kwankhao Tangprasert talking to a teacher at the school entrance. (Source: Atitthep Chanted via The Isaan Record)

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In Khon Kaen, where students from 4 schools joined the movement, Kwankhao Tangprasert, a Kaen Nakhon Wittayalai student and representative of KKC Pakee Students, wore an orange T-shirt to school along with several others who shared the same view.

According to the Isaan Record [1], Kwankhao told a teacher from the student affairs department that not wearing uniforms represents freedom of choice in dress. Students also raised the 3-finger salute, an anti-dictatorship gesture in the Thai pro-democracy movement. Teachers then took the students wearing clothes of their choice to a meeting hall, separating them from others in uniform who attended the flag ceremony.

At 11.46, Kwankhao stated that the school allowed those not wearing uniforms to attend class as normal. He said Sakdadach Tasai, Principal of Kaen Nakhon Wittayalai, said that there would be no

points deduction and wearing clothes of one's choice is deemed a form of self-expression.

Kwankhao said that today's activity is an experiment and symbolic expression to see what will happen if students wear their own clothes to school. KKC will submit a petition to the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) to propose a 1-semester trial in which students are free to wear either uniform or their own clothes to school.

Regarding other schools in Khon Kaen, a KKC representative said that Kanlayanawat School collected the names of students for statistical purposes while Khon Kaen University Demonstration School and Holy Redeemer School Khon Kaen took the no-uniform students to the student affairs office.

KKC announced that they will conduct another non-uniform experiment on 2 December [2].

One Channel [3] reported that the Principal of Udonpittayanukoon School, one of the leading schools in Udon Thani, did not object to the no-uniform campaign as the numbers were not large and their clothes blended in with those in PE outfits and winter sweaters.

In Bangkok, Matichon [4] interviewed Boonyaphong Phothiwatthanat, Principal of Samsenwittayalai School, who said that students can attend class out of uniform and they would not be subjected to points deduction.

A student from Samsenwittayalai told Matichon that wearing their own clothes is a right they deserve.

Thai PBS [5] reported that about 20 out-of-uniform students at Bodindecha School were not allowed to attend the flag ceremony. They were put in the school museum building to wait to talk with the principal and parents' representative about the issue.

The school made an announcement on 30 November requiring students to wear uniforms in line with the Student Uniforms Act 2008 and school regulations.

The students said that they knew that they were violating regulations, and wore their own clothes as an act of civil disobedience. They also questioned the necessity and financial burden of uniforms.

Debate over necessity

Uniforms have been mandatory for students in Thai schools since around 1885 during the reign of the King Rama V [6]. Uniforms resembling today's were introduced after World War II.

Thai students wear one of a set of uniforms: regular uniform, physical education kit once a week and boy scout or girl guide uniforms once a week. Some schools have introduced other uniforms representing local or Bangkok-centric Thai culture.

Debate runs deep in Thai society. over school regulations on uniforms, haircuts, the colour of backpacks, etc. Some people believe that it is a part of teaching students discipline, reducing observable inequality within schools and showing student status outside the school.

But many people think that uniforms are costly for low-income families, are irrelevant to educational proficiency and represent authoritarianism along with other regulations which dictate to students, instilling obedience and undermining freedom.

The 2019 OBEC database shows that 3,481,632 out of 6,600,745 students under OBEC, or 52.75%, lack access to uniforms [7]. OBEC is responsible for almost all schools in the country.

Punishment is limited

The Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) published a legal observation on the Student Uniforms Act 2008 and the Ministry of Education Regulation on Students Uniform 2008, which mandate uniforms.

TLHR notes that the punishments allowed by law for students who do not wear uniforms are: warnings, parole, points deduction and behaviour adjustment activities. Other punishments, like searching students' belongings, corporal punishment or excluding students from class, are not legally allowed.

Section 14 of the Ministry Regulation states that schools can submit a request to the school regulator to make uniforms differ from what is stated in the regulation. Section 16 of the Ministry Regulation also enables schools to exempt students from wearing uniforms when necessary.

Prachatai

P.S.

- Prachatai. Submitted on Wed, 2 Dec 2020 - 11:44 AM:
<https://prachatai.com/english/node/8941>
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Footnotes

[1] <https://www.facebook.com/IsaanRecordThai/posts/3552895701426904>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/kkcpakeestudents/posts/183283333499086>

[3] <https://www.facebook.com/onenews31/posts/3783425485079232>

[4] https://www.matichon.co.th/education/news_2466517

[5] <https://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/298806>

[6] <https://www.pptvhd36.com/news/%E0%B8%9B%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B0%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%94%E0%B9%87%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%A3%E0%B9%89%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%99/96247>

[7] <http://www.bopp.go.th/?module=table11>