



The SUPPORT Arts and Crafts
International Centre of Thailand
(Public Organization)



Types of Handicrafts Pha Lai Nam Lhai



Pha Lai Nam Lhai is the knowledge and identity of woven fabric of Nan Province, originated from creativity of local weavers. Pha Lai Nam Lhai is woven using a combination of “Kor Luang” (Tapestry), “Chok” and “Khit” techniques. Its pattern of flowing stream originated from imagination of weaver ancestors to imitate the winding Nan River rendering beautiful waves. Hence, the cloth is called “Pha Lai Nam Lhai” or flowing water. Pha Lai Nam Lhai has been, therefore, the art and cultural asset of Nan Province from the past up to the present time.

It is assumed that Pha Lai Nam Lhai weaving follows a style of Tai Lue, an ethnic group from Xishuangbanna Prefecture in China. Some Tai Lue people migrated to settle down at Tha Wang Pha, Nan Province. This has been reflected through the mural painting at Wat Phumin and Wat Nongbua, featuring Lue artisan family. Pha Lai Nam Lhai as a female’s skirt is demonstrated in the murals there.



Lai Nam Lhai: Identity that reflects wisdom and knowledge

Lai Nam Lhai refers to the wave-like or flowing stream motif inspired by the winding Nan River in Nan Province.

Pha Lai Nam Lhai is woven using “Koh Luang” technique. The word Koh Luang comes from an English word “Tapestry Weaving Technique”. In tapestry weaving, weft yarns are typically discontinuous. Artisans use their fingers to interlace each colored weft back and forth in its own small pattern area. This means that the weft, which weaves in and out of the warps, is pushed or beaten down so firmly that it entirely covers or hides the warps. The created patterns look like water flowing, hence the name Lai Nam Lhai, which means literally that.



Lai Nam Lhai or wave-like motif has become one of the most beautiful and charming patterns. The traditional Lai Nam Lhai has been developed and new patterns have been created. Pha Sin with Lai Nam Lhai motif is still woven and worn by women in Nan province for both informal and formal occasions.



In Khit weaving, the supplementary wefts are continuous from one side of the fabric to the other and the weaver inserts them by lifting the appropriate warp yarns in a pre-determined sequence.

To create the beautiful patterns of Chok, the weaver raises the warps with a pointed instrument to create a space to insert the colored supplementary patterning threads.



Unique Features

Color Harmony: gold and silver threads are used to complement its yellow background.

Small wave-like motif is more popular than a big one.

Lai Nam Lhai motif is also used for other textiles of Nan Province to indicate the city's identity. Any Pha Sin with this pattern will be included in Sin Nam Lhai group.

Each piece of cloth has Lai Nam Lhai design in 5 colors or less.

White stripe is used to separate Lai Nam Lhai motif from other patterns.

In the past, bamboo stripe is used to measure the space between each pattern.

Each color is used equally.

Kor Luang or tapestry weaving technique is employed to create Lai Nam Lhai pattern. In the past, it was one of the traditional basic patterns of Pha Sin. People at that time called each piece of cloth according to its weaving technique, for example, Pha Chiang Saen Dook, Pha Sin Plong, and Pha Sin Man.



However, Lai Nam Lhai is now mostly woven with bigger geometric designs such as square and diamond, based on the imagination of weavers.

- Rocket pattern: a wavy pattern is added into a flowing water pattern to create a rocket-like or a soaring torpedo pattern.

- Floral pattern or spider: Lai Nam Lhai with surrounding lines looks similar to flower or spider.

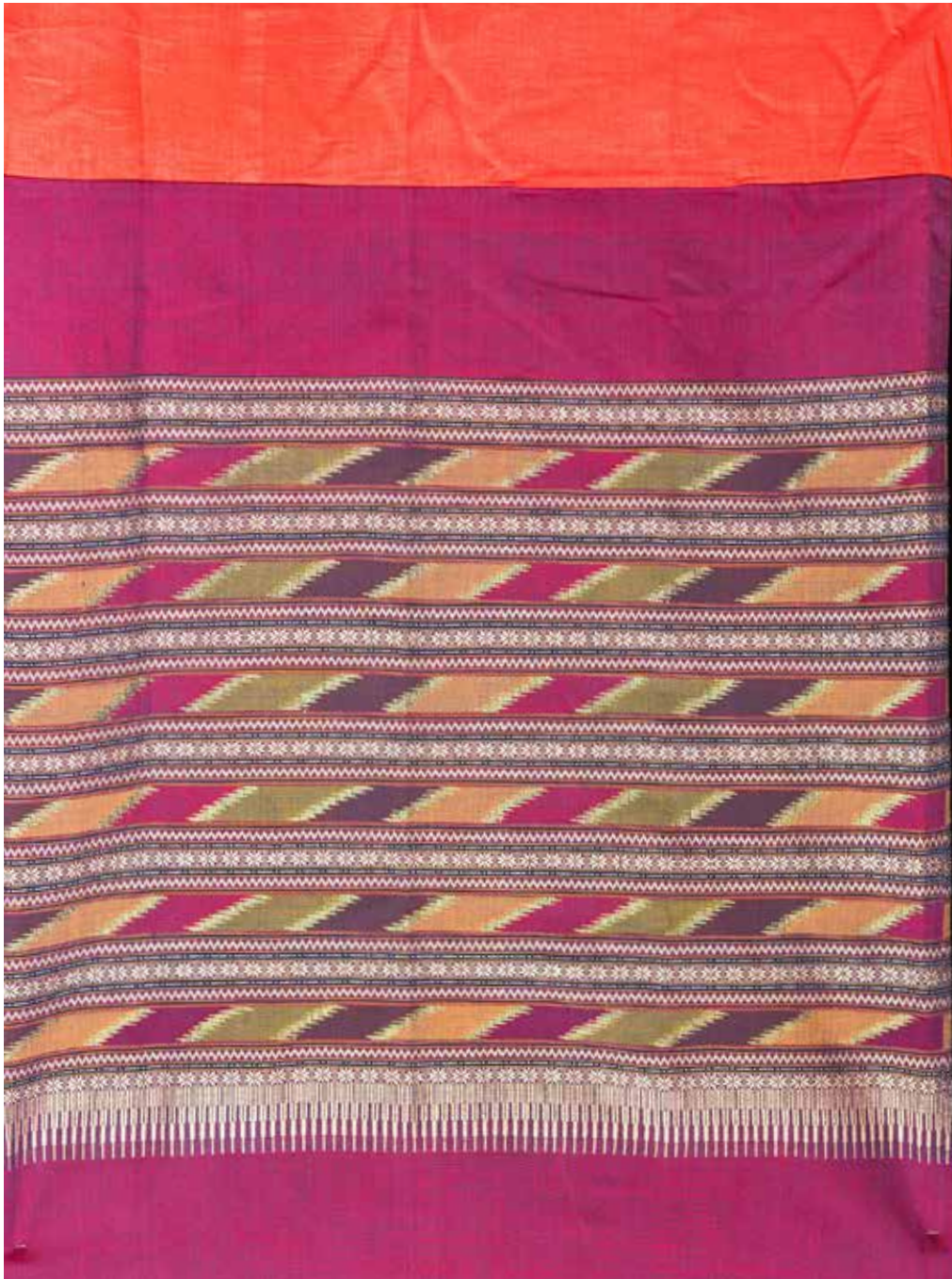
- Squid pattern: it resembles a spider, but its tail is longer than that of a spider.

- Leb Mue Nang (lady finger): this is Lai Nam Lhai with curved corners.

- Lai Tat: it is inspired by a several-tiered pagoda.

- Lai Kab: this motif is woven using colorful threads to form layers which look similar to a bract.

- Lai Bai Meed: it is woven using colorful threads to create a blade-like motif.



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Pha Sin Lai Nam Lhai is consisted of

Hua Sin or a head part is a waistband, which is usually made from white, red or black cloth. It is added to match the height of the wearer. The waistband is stitched to the skirt properly because it is always tucked in at the waist.

Tua Sin or body is a middle part of Pha Sin. Its width depends on a beater or reed. The popular patterns include yellow and black horizontal stripes, square, and small diamond.

Teen Sin is an end border of the Sin. It is usually a beautiful decorative hem band which is called differently based on its weaving technique. Sin Teen Chok has a decorative Chok ham band. Teen Sin for royal family is popularly decorated with silver and gold thread. Plain or cotton Teen Sin is used by commoners.



Background of Pha Lai Nam Lhai

The mural paintings at Wat Phumin and Wat Nongbua in Tha Wang Pha District, Nan Province depict way of life, culture, and important events of people in Nan Province in the past. Traditional houses with an exceptional and very rare teakwood roof and the palace compound are painted in the mural. The stories behind the painting are also interesting as they reflect the bravery of men with tattoos and the weaving skill of Nan women. These ladies are wearing beautiful sabai (shoulder cloth) or Pha Thaeb (breast wrapper) and Pha Sin in the murals that was painted in 1862.

According to the murals at Wat Phumin and Wat Nongbua, Pha Lai Nam Lhai can date back hundreds of years. Chao Sompratthana Na Nan, grandchild of Chao Maha Phrom Surathada (the ruler of Nan in the reign of King Rama VI), inherited many pieces of Pha Sin Lai Nam Lhai and realized how precious their patterns are. In 2008, she allowed local weavers to copy and remake those traditional patterns to help preserve the local wisdom of Nan textiles. Nan people always think that they all own this exquisite fabric. Pha Lai Nam Lhai is now considered “the Queen of Northern Thai Textile” and becomes the unique textile of Nan Province.



There are a lot of ethnic groups in Nan. Their cultures reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the city.

Tai Yuan or Khon Mueng: most of them migrated from Chiang Saen and Lanna Kingdom into Nan.

Tai Lue (Tai Yong): a border dispute and a civil war set off a series of forced migrations from the Lao states into Siamese territory. People from Xishuangbanna Prefecture in China and the Lower Mekong Basin also migrated into Northern Siam during the reign of Chao Kavila of Chiang Mai, and Chaofa Attathaworn Panyo and Chao Sumonthevarat of Nan. They have inhabited a large area of Nan Province, including Pua, Tha Wang Pha, Song Kwae, Chiang Klang, Thung Chang, and Chalerm Phra Kiat Districts.

Lua or Thin people is believed to live in this area before.

Khamu people live around the border of Nan and Laos.

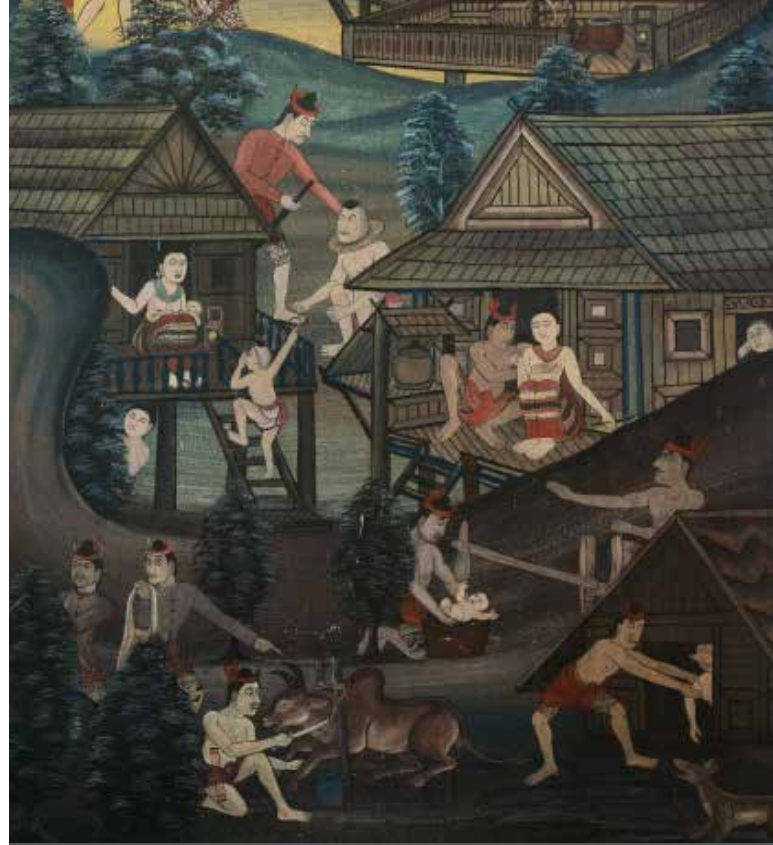
Hmong (Maew) migrated from Tibet, Siberia and Mongolia into China, Laos and Thailand.

Yao (Mian) used to live in Yunnan, Hunnam, Guangxi, Guangzhou, and Eastern region of China.

Mlabri (Tong Lheung) is now living in Viangsa. Their own culture no longer remains.

Nan is famous for its exotic textiles, especially Pha Lai Nam Lhai which is woven using Koh-Luang (Tapestry) weaving technique. To create Lai Nam Lhai design, weavers insert the different weft yarn in between the warp and link to another weft yarn during weaving.

According to the characteristics of this textile, it is assumed that Pha Lai Nam Lhai weaving follows a style of Tai Lue, an ethnic group from Xishuangbanna in China. Some Tai Lue people migrated to settle down at Tha Wang Pha, Nan Province. This has been reflected through the mural painting at Wat Phumin and Wat Nongbua, featuring Lue artisan family. Pha Lai Nam Lhai as a female's skirt is demonstrated in the murals.





Belief and Stories Associated with Way of Life

When talking about life, Nan people will think of textiles because they mean a lot to their lives. Women here have lived and breathed textiles. They can get married if they know how to weave. The lady master will get lots of respect from public if she owns a large weaving workshop and has a large number of craftsmen.

Women in Nan Province usually learn how to weave from their mothers or grandmothers. Since they were young, they were taught to prepare and dye cotton. They will then take care of their family's clothings. The fabric reflects the taste and skill of each weaver.



Men are often responsible for dyeing fabric in the family because great skill and patience are required during this painstaking process. It takes long time to get the right colors. They also go find seasonal plants and other natural objects needed for dyeing process. Natural-dyed textiles are more popular now because of its beauty and conservation movement in the society. Natural dyes are colorants derived from plants, such as Ebony bark, ginger, and coconut husk.

Pha Sin Lai Nam Lhai was initially worn for important occasions. It is now produced for several uses, such as table cloth, bed sheet, dish mat, curtain and large cloth.

Every piece of Pha Lai Nam Lhai reflects religion, society, and belief of the community. Lai Bor Suak is believed to bring prosperity. Lai Dao Lom Duen is woven and worn by a charming lady. Lai Maeng Moom is to protect the wearer.



Pha Lai Nam Lhai making process

Prepare cotton.

Dye cotton.

Boil cotton to make it clean.

Wind the cotton threads from wheel to bobbins to prepare the warps and the wefts.

Put the bobbins into a weaving frame. The yarns will be wound on to the frame. Measure the length of the yarns as desired.

Put the prepared yarns into a loom.

Start weaving with a local loom. Weavers use their fingers to interlace each colored weft back and forth in its own small pattern area which looks similar to a star.

Make Lai Nam Lhai patterns employing the tapestry weaving technique. Colorful yarns in small bamboo tubes called “Suai” are woven to create the wave-like motifs.

Create the big wave-like motif with 3-4 different colors. Separate each wave-like motif with Khit patterns.

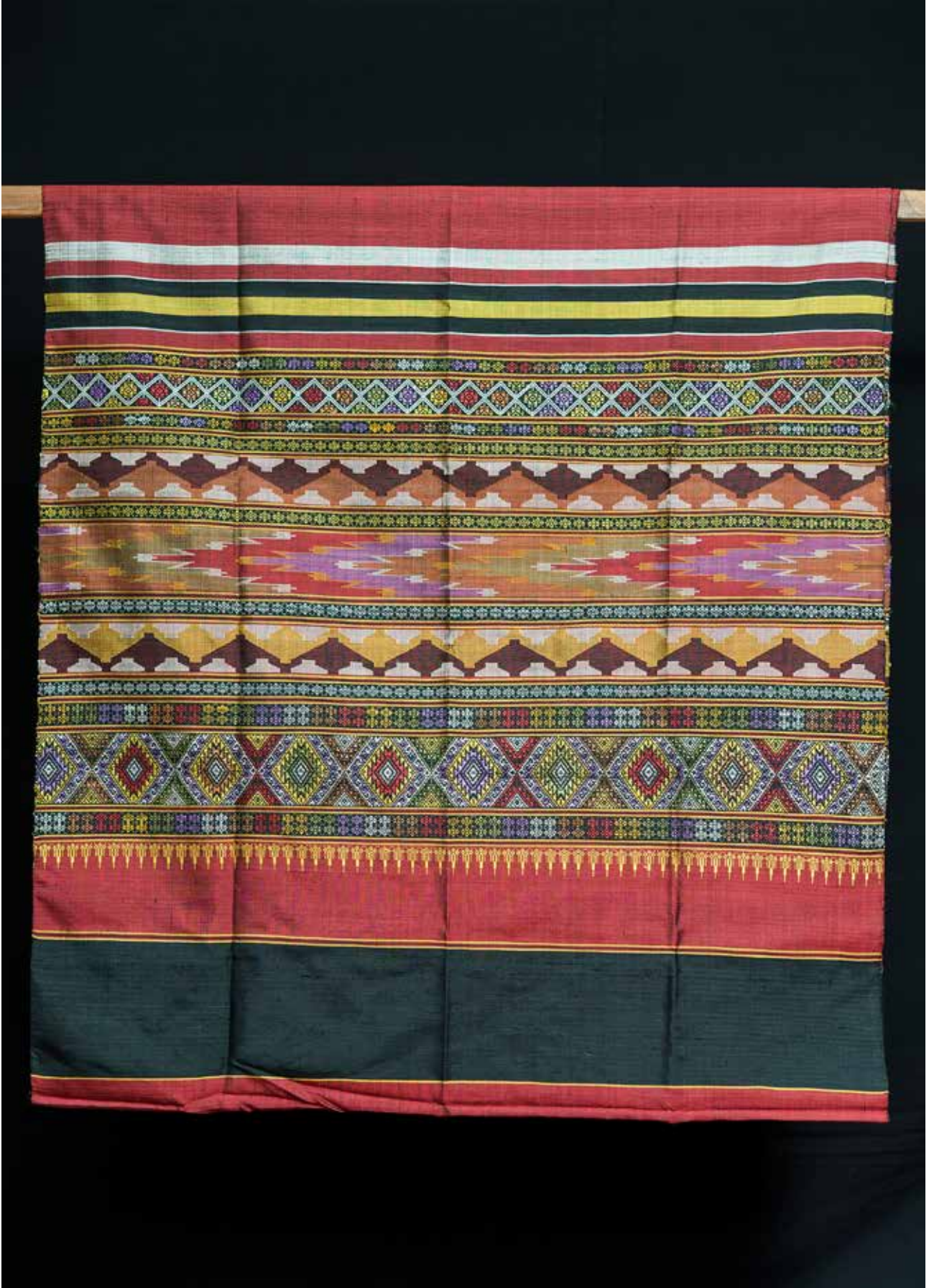


Though Pha Lai Nam Lhai of Nan has been woven for more than 100 years, its value and identity have been still impressively preserved. New patterns have been created based on the original ones. Local wisdom of natural dyeing and hand woven cotton are still made, which makes Pha Lai Nam Lhai still popular and worn by women today.

The elders in Nan always say that young generations will value the art of weaving one day because it represents the wisdom and the identity of the city. If this thing is neglected, young people of Nan may grow up without considering the cultural background of their family.

“Sin of Nan represents the existence of Nan.” This sentence is believed and said by old people to encourage young generations to continue their legacy, especially weaving and wearing traditional Pha Sin.

Pha Lai Nam Lhai Mueng Nan contains the spirit and local wisdom of the city. Its patterns and colors are charming and really attract customers. Those who visit Nan and really arrive in this province must buy Pha Lai Nam Lhai for the beloved ones. Pha Lai Nam Lhai is so famous that it is now formally recognized as the textile identity of Nan Province.





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