



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



Types of Handicrafts

Yan Lipao Basketry



Yan Lipao Basketry is handicraft made with Yan Lipao. Lipao is a plant in a climbing fern family. Generally, it is 1-2 meters long and even as long as 5 meters. It propagates in rain forest in tropical and subtropical area around the world. There are around 34 kinds of which 7 types have been found in Thailand, especially in forests in the South. (In a southern dialect, a climbing plant is called “Yan”). An old trunk turns black and glossy. Yan Lipao is mostly found in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Satun, Songkhla, Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat.



Yan Lipao



Yan Lipao betel box

Yan Lipao is considered as a special industrial crop, which is tough and has a long useful life. It can last for hundred years without being bitten by insects. Thai ancestors used it as material to weave into appliances, such as a betel box, a bag, a tobacco box, a teapot, and a bowl for flower, incensed stick and candle, etc. Product made of Lipao weaving looks quaint and unique which is different from other kind of basketry.

A unique Yan Lipao product of the South has been carried on from ancestors for hundred years. It is assumed that it originated as folk wisdom since the Ayutthaya period during the time of Chao Phraya Nakhon Si Thammarat. It has been mentioned that a governor of Nakhon Si Thammarat used to offer this Lipao product to the royal family in Bangkok but it was not widely spread. Until Chao Phraya Yommarat (Pun Sukhum) once taking a position of Phraya Sukhumnai Wipatsamoon, an intendant of Monthon Nakhon Si Thammarat, promoted this Yan Lipao basketry until it became well-known among upper class in Bangkok. It reached the highest popularity during the reign of King Rama V thanks to high demand of Yan Lipao bags from ladies of the court and noblemen from the city.



Woven Yan Lipao bag



Presently, Yan Lipao has been adapted as appliances that match with the time, such as a handbag or a handbag decorated with silver or golden niello ware. It becomes a prestige of Thai handicraft. Nakhon Si Thammarat is a famous source of Yan Lipao production.

Many Yan Lipao weaver groups are established to produce unique and exquisite product which is specific to each group. It is an excellent craft that Nakhon Si Thammarat people are proud of, not less than nielloware of Muang Nakorn. At present, Yan Lipao product is famous domestically and internationally. It is a handicraft that creates occupation and generates income for villagers, and contributes to a better regional economy.





Yan Lipao work: characteristics which reflect the local wisdom and artisan expertise

To make Yan Lipao work requires much meticulousness, fineness and patience as the weaving process has to be gradually done strip by strip. Even though it is a time-consuming production process, a finished work itself is unique. Moreover, nowadays a work is applied in various forms and mixed with silver and golden niellowares of Nakorn that creates exquisite patterns, resulting in a more valuable and pricey finished work.

In the old days, Yan Lipao was made as appliances, such as a fruit tray, a tray for food to offer to a monk, a tobacco box or a betel box for household usage. Choosing Yan Lipao for weaving is another important characteristic. There are 2 kinds of Yan Lipao, namely 1. Black Yan Lipao which is short and in black color and 2. Brown Yan Lipao which is long and in brown color. Suitable Yan Lipao must be tough, the inner vine is dark brown and the outer part is in dark green color. Generally young Lipao is rarely used as it is not quite flexible causing it to be ragged while weaving and its color is not beautiful.

Woven Yan Lipao bag



Woven Yan Lipao bag

Forming a rattan structure according to a design is another important craftsmanship skill. Meticulousness is required to make rattan and Lipao strips into a smallest size. Upon weaving, seam of Lipao strips will blend into a homogeneous texture.

Another characteristic is creating a pattern. Value of each craft work partly comes from a pattern. Apart from developing own skill, a craftsman must keep practicing and applying creativity to create new and modern patterns. Most popular patterns nowadays are developed from old patterns, such as, Pimthong, Med Taeng, Med Mayom, and Dao Krajai patterns.



Yan Lipao tray



Woven Yan Lipao bag

Yan Lipao Basketry in the Past

Yan Lipao basketry is a superb craft of Southern people. Nakhon Si Thammarat is the most well-known source of production. It originated from being made as various kinds of local appliances that have been passed down from ancestors for many hundred years, such as a betel nut set, a betel bag, etc. A result of an exquisitely and patiently-woven work is not defeated any other kinds of fine arts. People in the capital city got to know about Yan Lipao when it was brought to the royal court by aristocrat from the South. Then, it was spread among royal-blooded persons during the early Rattanakosin Period since the reign of King Rama II. It reached highest popularity during the reign of King Rama V when ladies of the court and noblemen liked to order a lot of Yan Lipao handbags from Nakhon Si Thammarat. Decoration of Yan Lipao has been developed up to a higher level. It was decorated with metal or valuable materials, such as gold, copper alloy, silver and ivory.

Later on, in 1970, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit initiated an idea to conserve and develop this Yan Lipao producing as a part time job for people in the South. She ordered to arrange training courses on how to make Yan Lipao in the SUPPORT FOUNDATION. She advised, developed this kind of skill and bought products for further sales. It has become widely popular both in a local and national level. Apart from exhibiting as exquisite craftsmanship, those who own Yan Lipao will also be proud. Her Majesty also concerned about using a lot of Lipao vines as raw materials. Therefore she advised people in the South to grow Lipao plant in return to nature, so that it is not extinct. During her visit to Thaksin Ratchaniwet Palace to pay a visit to local, she also visited Lipao plantation. Since 1974, Yan Lipao craft has been developed and become popular and accepted among upper class all along.

Yan Lipao is similar to bindweed for toughness, durability and useful life for hundred years. Lots of Yan Lipao works were discovered in Nakhon Si Thammarat. All pieces are still in good condition as they are more enduring than being produced with water hyacinth or rattan.



Yan Lipao Khao



Lipao Yhong



Yan Lipao can be categorized into 3 types:

Yan Lipao Khao is similar to rattan with a big trunk. It is normally used to tie stuff.

Yan Lipao Yong, its leaf is wavy, its trunk is small. It is not commonly used to transform.

Yan Lipao growing along grove wood or edge of forest, its trunk is tapering, its husk is tough, which can be divided into 2 types, namely a black trunk and a brown trunk. Generally, a brown one is longer, bigger and tougher.



Peeling off Yan Lipao



Making Yan Lipao strips at the same size (Chad Liad)



Yan Lipao Preparation

Peeling off is to get a husk to make Yan Lipao
Chak liad process is to make Yan Lipao strips
at the same size

Scraping is to make Yan Lipao glossy and tough
Weaving is to cross against a frame to make
a pattern



Materials Used in Producing Yan Lipao Basketry

Lipao is classified into 2 types, namely a brown and a black one.

A white material called lan is used to make a pattern.

Rattan is used to make a handle or an edge of a structure.

Bamboo is used to make a line of a bag as an anchor to make a pattern.

Softwood is used to form a structure of a bag or a product.

A knife is used to scrape Lipao vine as desired.

A spike or a needle is used to make a hole at a bag structure to insert bamboo and it is used to help arrange a pattern.

A metal sheet with holes is used to scrape Yan Lipao and bamboo strips to make a product consistently all at the same size.

A thimble is made of thick cloth to cover a finger while scraping Yan Lipao.

Latex glue is used to glue Lipao butt with a structure of a model or it is used to affix components of a bag.

Lacquer is to coat a pattern to make it outstanding and more durable.





Making Yan Lipao strips at the same size (Chad Liad)



Bending a structure

Step to Produce Yan Lipao Product

Yan Lipao is adapted to make into various forms of product. Thanks to its toughness, it can be used as appliances, such as a handbag, a betel nut set, a basket, etc. There is no short-cut to make each item of work, patience and skill in craftsmanship are required. It is considered as a complicated handicraft which is second to none.

Preparation Process - Strip away the outer peel of a big vine of Lipao. Dry it in the shade. Rip it into a strip at a desired size. Immerse it in the water until it gets soaked. Then, tear it into fuzz. Make five holes from the biggest to the smallest size on a tin plate. Gently pull each vine of Lipao through each hole in a tin plate from the biggest to the smallest one. This is known as “Chak Liad” process. This Chak Liad process will create consistently thin and glossy strips. Many Lipao strips can be conveniently and quickly done in each time. Chak Liad process is commonly used for

small bamboo strips that are difficult to sharp with a big knife. Therefore materials to be sharpened through Chak Liad process should be soft and tough, such as rattan and Yan Lipao, otherwise it will get torn easily. Hence, in order to get a beautiful Yan Lipao product, it requires meticulousness starting right from material preparation process. Keep Yan Lipao that is not used yet in a plastic bag and put it in a refrigerator to keep humidity. It will be easier to weave compared to the dry one.

Bending a Structure Process - Forming a structure of a product starts from weaving a base by bending it into a form as desired by a craftsman. It can be in a round or an oval shape or in a form with angles.

Select proper rattan vines to make a structure before proceeding with Chak Liad process to get strips that are suitable for weaving. Once Chak Liad process is done, cut the strips into the length and size of a product as designed. Then, make a hole onto the rattan and insert Yan Lipao along the hole to weave a base of a product. Take into account angles that would require more meticulousness.



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Weaving a Pattern Process There are 2 kinds of weaving, including sparsely weaving which must be formed with bamboo or soft wood. The weaving is done by a technique of crossing a pattern like weaving a mat. The second method is called thick weaving which starts from weaving rattan as a base of a utensil into a spiral shape. A shape is defined by rolling a strip up along a crucible, which is commonly made of soft wood. It can be in various shapes, such as a round, oval, angle, hexagon and cambered shape.

Then, use a needle to make a hole and proceed with weaving each Lipao strip using a twining technique. This is a difficult step which requires meticulousness of a weaver. Alternate side of Yan Lipao is used to make a pattern of a product. Yan Lipao features different colors, with a brown inner part while its exterior surface is green. It can be woven alternately between the two colors, depending on how to make a design. Palm leave and black a Lipao vine can also be used to create a pattern, such as a rectangular flower pattern, a cursive design alternately consisting of concave and convex lines, and Mexican daisy pattern.



Lining with cloth

Lacquering Process Polish a surface with sandpaper and examine a work. Then, coat it with lacquer to make it shiny (In the old days, clear dammar oil was commonly used to prevent weevil and other insects) before lining with cloth or assembling with neilloware to add more value to a work.



Decorated with silver

Decoration Process The final step is to decorate a frame or the edge with silver and golden neilloware to enhance value of a work. Especially, a women's handbag is commonly decorated with golden neilloware at a handle. This is another step of Yan Lipao product development.

Moving back to the past 20 – 30 years, raw materials to produce Yan Lipao could be found in local area. However, it become scarce nowadays. This is because Lipao plant takes 6 months to grow again after being cut. This causes Yan Lipao to be more expensive, so is its product. Price of Yan Lipao varies. Brown Lipao is more expensive than the black one since the strip is smaller and shorter.

Yan Lipao normally goes short during summer. It is normally hoarded and must be well stored in the shade, not exposed to the sun. This will keep Yan Lipao to be always bright and beautiful. Weave by alternate side to show both a green outer part and a brown inner part. Weave into a pattern as desired.



Inheritance and Transfer from Generation to Generation

Apart from the beauty of an exquisite pattern as created by a craftsman, Yan Lipao also features beautiful colors by nature of Yan Lipao vine and color of bamboo strips. This creates beautiful alternate colors.

A craftsman must have passion for this kind of work as not much work can be produced in 1 day. Even though a budget to produce this work is not that high, a production process is very time-consuming. To make 1 basket would take 15 – 20 days, of which 2 small bags can be produced. All in all, for a period of 1 month, only 1 – 2 works can be produced. It takes pretty long time to produce a work. However, it is worth the effort once compared with the value received.

The SUPPORT Arts and Crafts International Centre of Thailand (SACICT) has therefore supported the production of Yan Lipao into various forms of product to expand a consumer base to young generation who favors luxurious and modern handicraft that also reflects Thai identity. The focus is on a bag and accessories so that these can be applied with dressing in an international way.

Once a product becomes popular, but number of craftsmen is getting less, this hinders the work production to meet a target. Therefore, members of Yan Lipao basketry producers in a community established Ban Na Kien Yan Lipao Basketry Cooperative Women Group in 1991 to strengthen potential of the group to produce valuable products. This has been managed through allocation and dividing up the work for each member in the group as well as coordinating with neilloware craftsmen and craftsmen who works on lining. Thus a network of related parties has been built to help generate circulating income for members in the community.



Yan Lipao handbag (modern style)



Market for export has been also expanded. Products for domestic sale can be classified into various levels of quality, depending on meticulousness and varying prices according to demand of each consumer group. A collector consumer group looks for quaint and exquisite handicrafts. While a consumer group with focus on utility would require a stronger and more durable work rather than meticulously-made product of a collector group. The price should not be too high. General foreign tourists normally do not pay much attention on meticulousness and production process. They normally buy stuff as souvenirs or gifts for the closed ones. Since each product could cost from a moderate to high price, so many tourists cannot buy it. Yan Lipao is therefore adapted to be produced in a smaller size to sell as a souvenir at a cheaper price.

If this knowledge of producing Yan Lipao had not been transferred to younger generations, this kind of handicraft would have disappeared. Therefore Yan Lipao producing knowledge has been passed on to the youth in local area to revive and sustain this wisdom. It also

helps foster appreciation of Thai handicraft among children. At Wat Tham Kud School, Na Kien District, a process on how to weave Yan Lipao has been taught to children aged from 10 – 15 years old so they can produce Yan Lipao product. The pride of Yan Lipao basketry producer is to create a beautiful and valuable work and to pass on the knowledge to young generation.



Yan Lipao basket



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