



Types of Handicrafts

Hmong Batik



A wax-resist technique or batik is the art of creating a pattern on a piece of cloth. It is another unique Hmong identity exclusively practiced in Trait Hmong or Hmong Lai. It is ancient knowledge that has been continued up to the present time. A pattern is created on a piece of cloth by boiling wax. Then, immerse a bamboo stick with metal attached at

the end into the melted wax to draw a pattern according to imagination. This can be seen from a pattern of Hmong dress that is made of cotton or indigo or hom dyed cloth. All Hmong women learn how to make wax-resist and indigo-dyed cloth from their ancestors. This has made this kind of cloth to be widely known and popular.



Waxing



Pleated Hmong Batik Skirt

Hmong batik: Identity which reflects wisdom and artisan's skills

Wax-resist technique is similar to that of batik cloth. A small stick made of wood and copper, called Lha Jung is immersed into melted wax to draw a pattern onto hemp or cotton fabric. Then, cold dye the cloth with natural blue color from Chinese Rain Bell or Hom (that renders blue color). Once the cloth turns into dark blue, boil it with high temperature to melt the wax, resulting in blue cloth with a white pattern of wax writing throughout the cloth. Plait the cloth to make a skirt or embroider with colorful thread to make a beautiful tribal dress.

Wax-resist cloth has been associated with Hmong. All Trait Hmong women can draw exquisite wax writing to make a beautiful piece of cloth. Mostly it is used for dress making. In the past, Hmong women attentively drew wax writing, had the cloth dyed and plaited before proceeding with dressmaking. Entire dress making process for one skirt took almost one year to achieve the most beautiful Hmong skirt.

Patterns on each piece of cloth vary depending on expertise of a painter. The patterns are ranging from original ones that have been passed on and the ones that are newly created based on imagination. The pattern might be slightly adapted to fit with changing time and market demand. However, patterns that represent Hmong identity are still there in each piece of cloth, such as a cross pattern or a spiral pattern. Hmong pattern cloth is therefore popular among Thai people and foreigners.



Background of Hmong Batik

Wax-resist technique is the local knowledge that has been passed on since the time when Hmong ancestors still lived in China. Later, shortage of food and war broke out in the country. A lot of Hmong people therefore migrated to live in Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and some groups traveled down to Thailand. They settled down along high mountain ranges around the border in the north.

During that time, there was a shortage of everything, including clothes. Migrants had only little stuff along with them. Those having hemp seed, therefore, had it planted. They peeled the bark and pound its thread to soften it in a mortar. Then, the thread was connected to make it longer. Immerse it in wood ash lye water to bleach it white before weaving into a piece of cloth.



Hemp Thread Woven



Hemp fabric is commonly used to make clothes because the bark of hemp tree has strength characteristic which is resistant to scratch. It is also resistant to fungus and can prevent mites. It is good at odor and humidity release and waterproof.

Later, there was a shortage of hemp tree due to marihuana planting or selling prohibition announced by a Chinese government as marihuana was considered as restricted plant due to addicted substance. However, due to misunderstanding of

hemp with marihuana that are botanically resemble, even though hemp does not have any addictive substance, hemp fields were dismantled. Hmong people turned to use cotton instead. Also, with the changes in world social order, young generations of Hmong people are keen to wear quaint clothes. Being observant to see that true indigo, which is a daily herb, renders long lasting indigo color, Hmong people therefore initiated to use it in cotton dyeing.



Hemp





In the old days, Hmong people collected wax in a forest and boil it to melt. Then, a bamboo stick with metal attached at one end is immersed into the melted wax to create a pattern onto a piece of cloth according to a maker's imagination. Once the melted wax is cooled down and sticks with the cloth, proceed with indigo dye that is achieved from a true indigo tree. The wax that is painted on a piece of cloth will block indigo from sticking on the fabric. Then, boil the dyed cloth to dissolve the wax, a beautiful pattern on the cloth will be achieved.

With regards to equipment used in wax drawing, nowadays, Hmong people have developed a mold of various patterns in substitution of manual wax writing. Modern graphic patterns are printed and well mixed with original patterns that have been inherited from ancestors. Advantages of using a mold include convenience, quickness and constant patterns can be achieved. More than ten molds of patterns have been newly created, including traditional Hmong styles or modern and popular graphic patterns which are mixed together to generate a lot new designs.



Block printing



Lai Kue



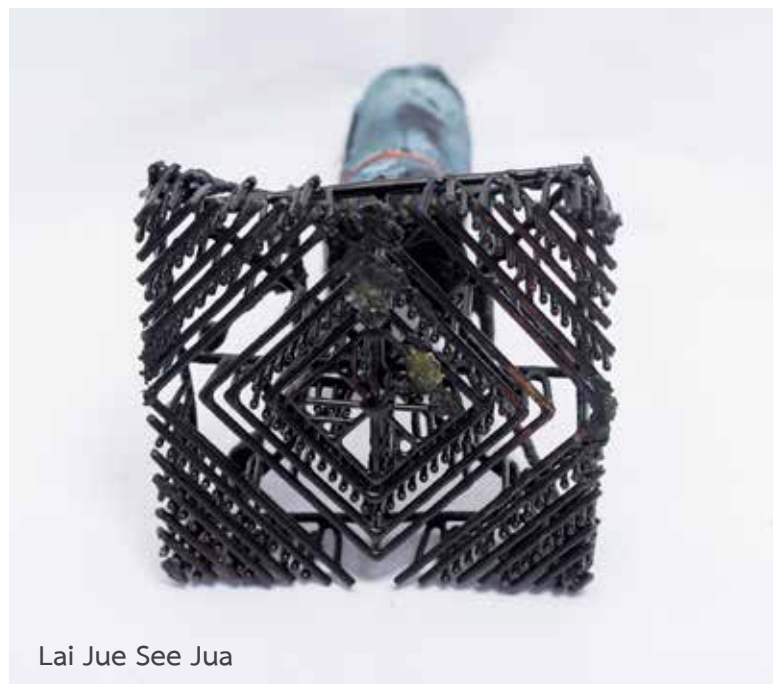
Lai Ja Khor Mhua Chue



Lai Jang Mee



Lai Jang Lu



Lai Jue See Jua





Hmong batik shirt or blouse



Wax resist cloth has been associated with Hmong people for a long time since the time when a pattern was initiated to be painted on the fabric for dressmaking. All Hmong women are capable of drawing a wax pattern onto a piece of cloth of which this skill has been passed on from generation to generation for hundred years. This is because Hmong people have still kept embroidering and doing wax writing on the cloth for dressmaking.



Belief and Stories Related to Way of Life of Hmong People

Initially, embroidery was regarded as tradition and culture of Hmong people. All Hmong women were taught to embroider since they were young. While farming and forging works were meant for men to do. Women were supposed to take care of catering and attire of all family members.

Therefore, there is a saying about Hmong way of life since the past that “women embroider cloth, men forge a blade”.

Women who cannot weave or do embroidery would be neglected by men as they are deemed useless and likely to cause troubles to the family in the future. Eventually, they will end up not getting married and having lower social status in a community and nobody would like to connect with. For any

women who are good at textile work, be it weaving, embroidery and textile drawing, will be praised that their husband and children will have abundant clothing. They will gain high rate that men have to pay. Therefore, there is no doubt to see a picture of Hmong young women working on weaving as a reflection of Hmong way of life. In the past, a mother must finish making a shirt for her child within 1 day. The significance is on the first cloth which is to put Hmong spirit into a child from that day towards a date of death. This will help ensure a child to live his/her stable life on a suitable way throughout the life.

Hmong batik cloth is mostly used to make skirts. In the past, Hmong women attentively painted with wax, had the cloth dyed and plaited before proceeding with dressmaking. Entire dress making process for one skirt took almost one year to achieve the Hmong skirt.





Cut hemp trees and tie them together into a bundle and dry it in the sun.



Tie the peeled bark into a big bundle.



Bleached and cleaned thread

To Create Hmong Wax Writing Cloth

At present, even though ready-to-use-cotton has been employed, hemp fabric is still used for wax writing. This has been a traditional identity of Hmong wax writing cloth, which has been still popular nowadays. A process of Hemp thread preparation for Hmong cloth

weaving is as follows:

Cut hemp trees and tie them together into a bundle. Dry it in the sun for 1 week.

Peel the bark off from the dried trees.

Tie the peeled bark into a big bundle.

Pound it in a mortar until soft strips are achieved.

Connect the soft strips to make them longer. Rub at the end of both strips to have them separated. Then, stick the separated threads together and make it into one thread without knot.

Bind the connected thread with “Teen Tua” to make a bundle.

Spin a bundle of thread into a spiral and put it into a flature.

Spin it around a cross wood to measure the length and make it into a skein.

Boil it in wood ash lye water to bleach it white and dip and throw it in clean water.

Press the bleached and cleaned thread to soften it again. Place the thread on a piece of wood or a cylinder stone and then press it with another piece of wood or stone. Tread on it alternately with left and wrong leg so that a cylinder stone will not roll.

Once the thread is getting soft, roll it around a cross wood to dry and prepare for further weaving.



Wax drawing

Sketch a pattern as desired on a piece of cloth with a pen or a pencil. Make space at an equal size on a piece of cloth as the preparation for wax drawing.

Prepare wax. Put it in a utensil and boil it until it melts. Be careful not to let the wax in a pot too hot or too cold. If the wax is too hot, it will be melted and cannot form a pattern. However, if it is boiled with too low temperature, the wax will not stick on the cloth. Hmong people test the temperature by dropping water. If it generates “fu” sound, that means it is too hot.

Place a piece of cloth on a board and tighten it properly. Initially, Hmong people immersed a pen for drawing (Janting) into the melted wax and drew a pattern on the cloth. Hmong people have their own unique pattern. Nowadays, a process is changed to immerse a mold into a wax melting bowl and print it on the cloth according to defined proportion. Press a mold throughout the cloth.

Dry the cloth that has been done with wax drawing.

Immerse the dry wax drawing cloth for 1 night before cold dyeing. If dyeing is done by boiling, that would cause a wax pattern to peel off and melt in the heat.

Boil the water and dissolve indigo in boiling water. Mix it well and leave it to cool down. Pour it into a jar or a bucket. Immerse cotton that has been done with wax drawing in a bucket. Stir it thoroughly. And leave it for 30 minutes.





Squeeze the indigo dyed cloth to be half dry. Dry it in the shade. Do not expose it in the sun because a wax pattern might be melted.

Repeat the same dyeing steps for the dry cloth for many times to get darker color. Repeating for 5 times will make a wax pattern stick longer, even for a period of ten years, a wax pattern still affixes on the cloth. Once done with dyeing, dry it in the shade.

Boil the water. Immerse the wax drawing cloth into cold water and then boil it thoroughly in hot water. Wax will gradually melt completely.

Immerse the cloth that has been through boiling into cold water to cleanse remaining wax on both sides. Check by moving the hands along to ensure that all wax is removed. Then dry it in the shade. The cloth can be adapted into various products as desired, such as making a blouse or a skirt.





As the time goes by, raw material has been changed but that does not devalue Hmong wax writing cloth. We still see Hmong people wear their native fabric and that has become their distinctive identity. Their native fabric is also adapted into product for sale that helps generate income and

makes reputation for the community. Hmong wax writing cloth is valuable handicraft that has been associated with way of life, culture and belief for a long period of time. Production process has been also inherited to the young generation to preserve and continue their ancestors' work to live on sustainably.



Lai Ker Lu



Lai Khi



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