



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



Types of Handicrafts

Bamboo Basketry



Bamboo basketry is an art of cutting and whittling bamboo into long - thin stripes, and interlacing and weaving bamboo stripes into desired shapes and appliances. Bamboo basketry is a kind of local arts and crafts that closely related to lifestyle of Thai people for a very long time. It depicts the culture and wisdom of our ancestors that we have inherited from the past. Bamboo basketry can be found in any regions of the country as it is used to produce household's appliances, whether for using in the maker's home or selling for additional income.

Bamboo basketry requires some level of wisdom, delicacy and meticulousness, and skillful craftsman. The craftsman must first learn about properties of each kind of bamboo, in order to choose appropriate material for the purpose and usage of the products. The bamboo stripes must be prepared specifically for each type of products and formats. And most importantly, the weaving process requires some dedication and concentration, in order to create finished products that can be used to serve their purpose. Bamboo basketry is a kind of local handicraft that is still inherited and passed on, from the past to today.



Pai See Suk (*Bambusa Blumeana*),

Bamboo Basketry: the unique identity that reflect the craftsman's wisdom and ability

Bamboo is the main raw material for creating workpieces in bamboo basketry. There are many kinds of bamboo that can be used to create the products, and different bamboos are specifically appropriate for different handicrafts. Therefore, the craftsman must choose which bamboo to use appropriately, for example, the most popular of bamboo used for basketry is Pai See Suk (*Bambusa Blumeana*), which grows on the plain on every region of the country.

Bamboo used for basketry must be of not less than 2 years old. It must be sufficiently flexible, of appropriate length, in order to produce long enough 'Tork' (bamboo stripe) after whittling.



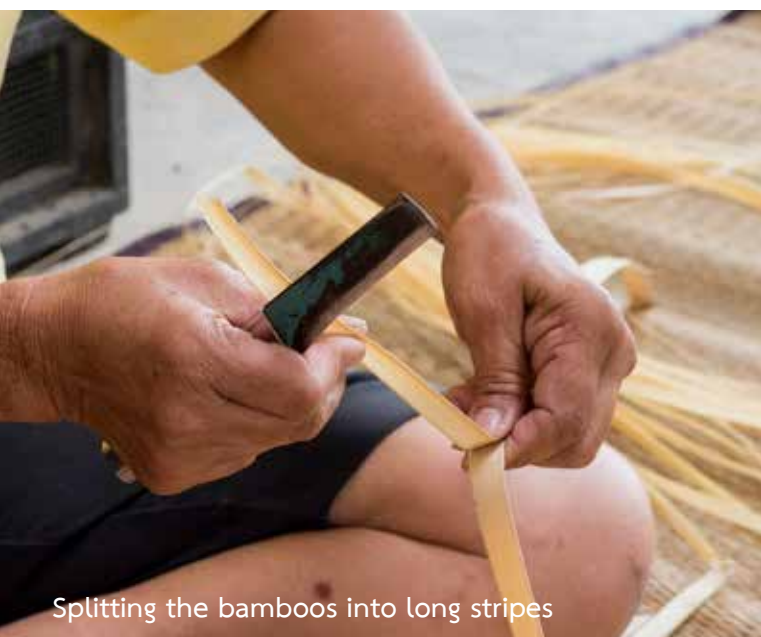


The wisdom on bamboo basketry of different communities may follow the same or different procedure, method, and format, pertaining to the knowledge and skill that craftsman of such community has inherited. But, normally, procedure and method of bamboo basketry are quite similar in any regions of Thailand.

Preparing raw material for bamboo basketry is another important step that requires some knowledge and wisdom, in order to produce high quality bamboo stripe that is free of weevil and mold, at regular size and beautiful color, and appropriate pattern for the desired products. The craftsman has to constantly find creative way to enhance the workpiece' beauty and durability, and develop method to prevent the bamboo basketry product against mold and weevil, such as, smoking; in order to make sure that the finished bamboo basketry product will be in a good condition, dried, and free of mold.

Before it can be used for basketry, bamboo must be soaked under water for at least 7 to 10 days, in order to get rid of any bugs. Bamboo will be dried in sunlight, in order to get rid of excessive bamboo oil, and to enhance the bamboo's durability, strength, and beauty.





Splitting the bamboos into long stripes

The next process of raw material preparation is **'Juk Tork'** (bamboo stripe whittling) and it requires some level of skill and experience as well. Juk Tork is an important technique from the ancestor's wisdom that craftsman must learn. It involves using thin knife to whittle bamboo into a thin stripe of regular thickness. Skillful craftsman can create long thin stripe with regular thickness. Thus, this is a very important skill and job in bamboo basketry. Most skillful craftsmen in Juk Tork are elder craftsmen.

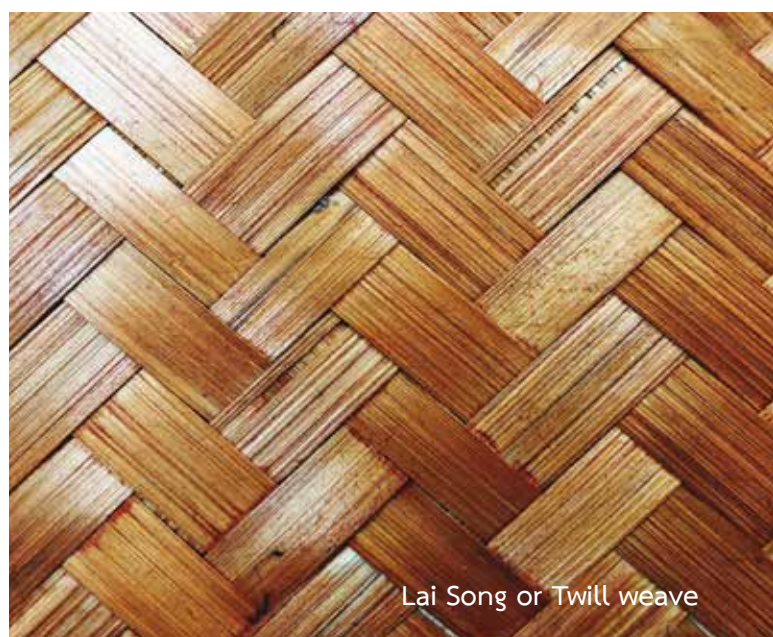
Next step is weaving the stripes into desired shape and pattern, and to create the products. There are 3 main parts of weaving, namely.

The base or bottom of the product; the craftsman usually starts from the base, as this part affects the next portion of the products. The base must be made into a strong structure, in accordance with the basketry product's pattern and shape.

The body of the product; some products may require either thick or sparse body with space in it, pertaining to function and usage of such product. The body is an important part, as it has to withstand the weight of the load. Good weaving of this part allows the product to withstand and support the weight of the load.

The mouth or top of the basketry product; this part must be in line with the product's overall shape and functionality. The mouth or the top of basketry products is an important part that maintains the product's shape in long term.

Besides delicacy and meticulousness in weaving, another important aspect of basketry is the pattern of the products, as pattern increases the product's value. General patterns are Lai Kat (Interlacing pattern) and Lai Song (Duo pattern) in which the novice craftsman must first learn. More advanced patterns are, for example, Lai Lop Num, Lai Dee Lom, etc.



Lai Song or Twill weave



Pattern and dressing are important components of basketry handicraft

pattern can be categorized into 3 groups in general, as follow.

Basic patterns or Master Patterns; these patterns follow strict rule, such as, Lai Kat, Lai Song, Lai Sarm, Lai Taliw, Lai Kor, Lai Bong Yong, etc.

Advance patterns; these patterns are improved from basic patterns, such as, Lai Ba, Lai Tee Darn, Lai Chalao Gled Tao, Lai Dork King, Lai Dee Lom, etc.

Creative patterns; these patterns are created by the craftsman' imagination, such as, Lai Kat Ta Mark Ruk (Checker pattern), Lai Kat Ta Tayang (Zig Zag pattern), Lai Chalew, Lai Kat Tork Koo, Lai Kat Kroang Wai, Lai Song, Lai Sarm, Lai Ta Liw, etc.

The craftsman will choose the appropriate patterns from the list above, based on their knowledge or wisdom, to create basketry products, in accordance with the product's functionality.

Some of the most famous and popular patters are Lai Dork Pikul (Bullet Wood Pattern), which is extended into Lai Jork Dork Nae, Lai Dao Lorm Doen, Lai Waw Mayura, Lai Dao Krajai, and Lai Pikun Ruang. There is also Lai Ta Chalew, which is developed from Lai Ta Chalorm.

Woven basket



Woven basket with bulletwood flower pattern



Bamboo basketry and lifestyle of Thai people

Bamboo is an important resource. All parts of bamboo, such as, shoot, clum (trunk), leaf, root, pulp, and seed, can be used for various benefits; especially for basketry handicraft, where bamboo is used to create many appliances, such as, Kraboong (widen basket), basket, litter, Krajard (flat basket), photo frame, food cover, handbag, etc.

Important types of bamboos found in Thailand that are frequently used for basketry handicraft are, as follow.

Pai See Suk or Pai Joad (*Bambusa Blumeana*); this type of bamboo can be found generally in the Central and the South. It grows into large grove. It has hollow trunk, thick wood, glossy surface, and long internode. The trunk has thick and quite durable wood. Products made from this type of bamboo are beautiful and durable. It is more popular choice of raw material for basketry products, in comparison to other types of bamboo. It is used for basketry products, furniture, and construction.

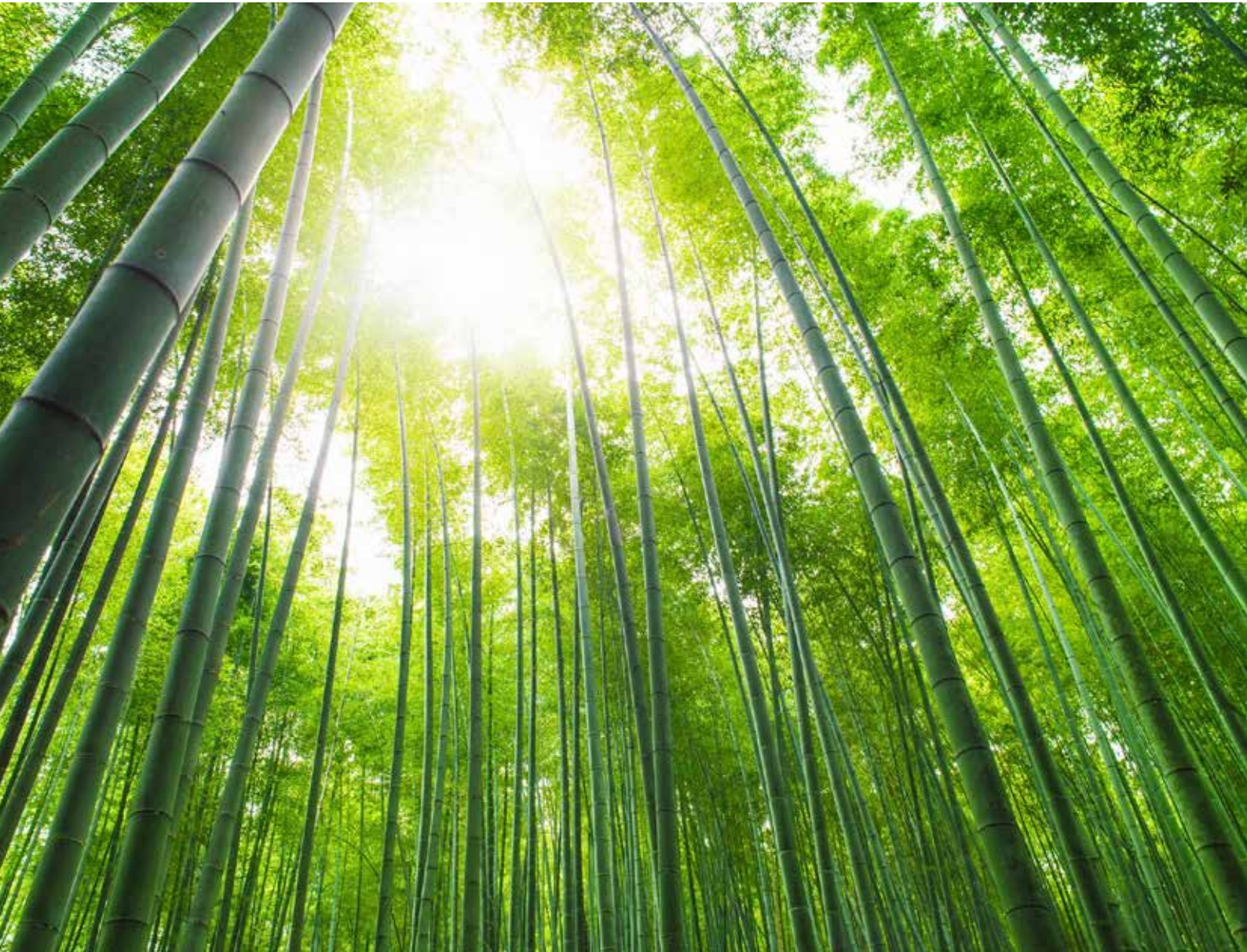
Pai Sang or Pai Sang Doi (*Dendrocalamus strictus*); this type of bamboo can be found all over the country, but prominently in the Central and the North of Thailand. It is popularly used for construction and basketry, such as, Keng (a kind of basket), basket, Kraboong, hod, and for furniture.

Pai Ruak (*Thyrsostachys siamensis*); this type of bamboo can be found all over the country, and it is mainly used for making wooden furniture.

Pai Ruak Dum or Pai Ruak Yai (*Thyrsostachys oliveri*); this type of bamboo is mostly found in the North. It is mainly used for making umbrella stick, fan, accessory, ladder, fruit and vegetable basket, and furniture. This is because its trunk has strong and durable wood.

Pai Rai (*Gigantochloa albociliata*); this type of bamboo is found mostly in the North of Thailand, and generally found all over the country. It is widely used for making broom stick, walking cane, fence, raised platform for vegetable farming, etc. Because this bamboo's wood is quite similar to Rattan, and it is quite flexible, it is a perfect material for making chair and other furnitures.

Pai Park (*Gigantochloa densa*); this type of bamboo is found mostly in the South and in Kanchanaburi Province. It is mainly used for making charcoal basket and household' appliances.



Pai Khao Lam or Pai Karb Dang (*Cephalostachyum pergracile*); this type of bamboo is found prominently in the North, and the northern area of Kanchanaburi, and partly in the Northeast. It is widely used for making Khao Lam (Glutinous rice roasted with coconut milk) and basketry products.

Pai Hear (*Cephalostachyum virgatum*); this bamboo is found in the North. Its trunk is used for building's structure and basketry products.

Pai Hok or Pai Nuan Yai (*Dendrocalamus hamiltonii*); this bamboo is found in the North and Kanchanaburi Province. Its trunk is used for constructing temporary structure, paper and basketry products.

Pai Bong Dum (*Bambusa tulda*); this bamboo is mostly found in the North and Northeast, and it is widely used for making floor mat, basketry product, furniture, and umbrella stick.

Pai Bong (*Bambusa nutans*); this bamboo is found growing among other types of bamboo in the mixed forest in the North and the Central. Its trunk is mainly used for construction and basketry products.

From the past, lifestyle of Thai people is closely related to appliances made from bamboo. Bamboo basketry is therefore necessary for almost every people's life, for example.



Bamboo basketry products used as utensils and containers, namely, Kraboong, Kratai, Kraba, Krator, Kraporm, Kracher, Krachao, Krapork, Chalorm, Takror, hod, Lua, basket, Keng, etc.

Bamboo basketry products used as measuring tools, such as, Krachoo, Sud, Kraboong, etc.

Bamboo basketry products used in the household, such as, Krachorn, grate, food cover, Kradong, Huad, etc.

Bamboo basketry products used as construction, such as, wall, floor, roof, etc.

Bamboo basketry products used as traps and cages for aquatic animals, such as, Chanarng, Lorb, Soom, Sai, Krabang, Krajoo, Krachang, Takhong, grate, Jahn, etc.

Bamboo basketry products used for other purposes, such as, floor mat, fence, bird cage, chicken pen, etc.

At the present, Thailand support bamboo basketry as an alternative source of income and occupation for the community, as well as for exported products that bring quite large income to the country.





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



Believes and tales that are related to the people's lifestyle

Importance of bamboo during Buddha's Lifetime. The first temple constructed and offered to the Buddhism was called 'Weluwanaramaya Temple.' It was made with bamboo wood and offered by King Bimbisara to Buddha. Later, 1,250 Buddhist saints (Phra Keenasop) simultaneously visited Buddha at this temple, with no prior appointment, on the day of the full moon of the third month. On this day, Buddha announced the three core principles of Buddhism in a sermon call 'Ovadapatimokha.' Buddhist hence consider this day an important day for Buddhism, namely, the Magha Puja Day, to this day. The life of Thai people are also closely related to bamboo since the past, as we can see that many households usually plant bamboo in their homes' vicinity, such as, Pai Lueang Thong, Pai See Suk, Pai tia, or Pai Num Tao.

Another belief concerning bamboo considers it to be auspicious plant, and believes that the people in the household that plants bamboo are persons of high moral, honesty and fairness. Some bamboos,

such as, Pai See Suk, are believed to conjure happiness and wealth; as the plant name in Thai is rhymed with the word 'happiness and wealth' in Thai. Bamboo is also believed to improve the prestige of those who live in the house, and help them success in their life.





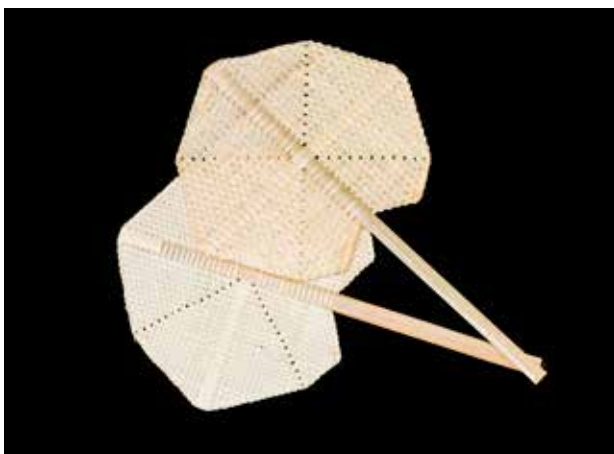
Bamboo should be planted on the east of the house, and most appropriately at the fence, where the Bamboo can enjoy direct sunlight and grow fully.

Besides Thailand, other countries also use bamboo for various purposes. For example, India uses bamboo's seed (Kui) for cooking. During the times of severe calamity, many people lived through that period on eating bamboo's seed. In China, bamboo is used for making paper. Other countries also use bamboo in many other ways, such as, using bamboo to produce lamp, or water pipe, etc.



From the past belief and the lifestyle of Thai people, bamboo is being utilized for many purposes, especially in basketry handcraft and producing appliances for daily life usage. Bamboo basketry also reflects the people's culture, creative thinking, and wisdom as well.

Bamboo basketry is a type of profession that can be found in every region of Thailand. It is used for making various household's appliances, such as, Kraboong, grate, threshing basket, food cover, agricultural tools, fruit basket, fish trap such as Lorb and sai, etc. Bamboo basketry is a local handcraft that any people can do by themselves, and buy for very cheap price.



Time passes, and bamboo basketry products are less popular nowadays, however, making bamboo basketry as profession still remains, though somewhat in smaller scale. Bamboo basketry products are developed, where craftsmen now create products that can be used in the modern - daily life, such as, hand bag, hat, fan, gift basket, etc. Ordinary bamboo basketry is now produced with creativity that also reflects unique identity of Thailand, and applied to be consistent with the local lifestyle. The craftsmen now add more value to their beautiful products which depict unique characteristics of their communities, in order to let the people know where such products come from. For example, bamboo basketry products from the North or the Northeast are quite similar, as both regions share the culture of consuming sticky rice.

Products from the Central and the East are usually made as appliances for daily life and professional usage, such as, Kraboong, basket, Ngorb (a type of wide bamboo hat), mat, etc. For the South, the basketry products are quite different from others, as there are other available raw materials, such as, Yan Lipao, Krajoed (*Lepironia articulata*) and Lumjiak's leaf (*Pandanus odoratissimus*) that the craftsmen can use for basketry instead of bamboo; thus, bamboo basketry products in the south are quite pale, in comparison to other regions. In the East, a region with abundant natural resource where bamboo can be abundantly found in many areas, many people in this region work in bamboo basketry industry, where we can find many basketry products in Chonburi, Chachoengsao, Prachinburi, Sa Kaeo, etc.



Bamboo Basketry Method

The manufacturing method and products of bamboo basketry are finely adapted to the demands of customers and users. In the past, bamboo basketry can be singlehandedly done by a craftsman, or separately done by a group of craftsmen, pertaining to the craftsman's proficiency. The manufacturing process includes raw material preparation, building the core structure, Juk Tork (making bamboo stripe by whittling), weaving, and assembling the finished products.

Materials / tools for bamboo weaving

The tools used for bamboo weaving have not been changed much since the past, though the materials and formats have been, pertaining to the craftsman's demand and advance of technology involved.

Bamboo wood, such as, Pai See Suk, Pai Sang, Pai Boang, or Pai Nuan.

Cleaver, for cutting bamboo.

Thin knife for Juk Tork

Knife for whittling the edge

Scissor

Glue

Hammer

Clipper

Mold for building the structures

Nails





Weaving Process

First, bamboo will be dried under sunlight for 405 days. The outer wood will be scrapped off until the inner wood is seen. The bamboo will be boiled for about half an hour, to enhance the wood's toughness, then left to dry for another 1 month. Then the wood is cut into smaller piece and stripe, respectively. Whittling is performed to make sure that all stripes are of the same size.

Bamboo stripes of desired size will be arranged on the mold to form the shape, such as, square or round, and the craftsman will weave his way up of that shape into the desired product. If the stripes are too dried, they will be soaked under water for a minute or so, in order to soften them down.

Once the stripes are woven into a full shape, the mold will be removed. In case of weaving a basket, craftsman will insert another layer over the structure. The excessive stripes will be removed, and the piece is then put to edge dressing.

Another piece of bamboo will be cut into long stripe, with the width of approximately half an inch, and left to soak under water for 1 night. This stripe will be used for finishing the product's top edge, and it will be clipped with edge's mold for couple days, then attached to the workpiece with hot glue.

For the case of making hand bag, the bottom has to be reinforced with woven bamboo plate of desired shape, which is attached to the bottom with hot glue and the pressed. The handle will be attached using nail. The craftsman will finish the workpiece and then leave it to dry under sunlight.

Finally, the workpiece will be coated with solution of Varnish oil or turpentine, in order to improve the workpiece' durability and to allow longer useful life.



The wisdom of basketry handicraft of Thailand is an invaluable treasure that the people are inheriting from their ancestor, and it serves as the source of income for many generations of people. Though time may change, basketry products are always improving, in order to answer the markets'

ever changing demands. Many of such adaptations lead to sustainable management of basketry handicraft profession. It is safe to assume that basketry profession is not going to die off, and it will continue to fine create craftsman and excellent products, and remains with the country for a very long, long time.



Information sources and referenced documents for preparation of this article

Interviewing. Miss Ratchaneekorn Mamee; Basketry Profession – local handicrafts that become an occupation.

Overview of Thai Wisdom, www.thaitambon.com , www.thidagarden.com