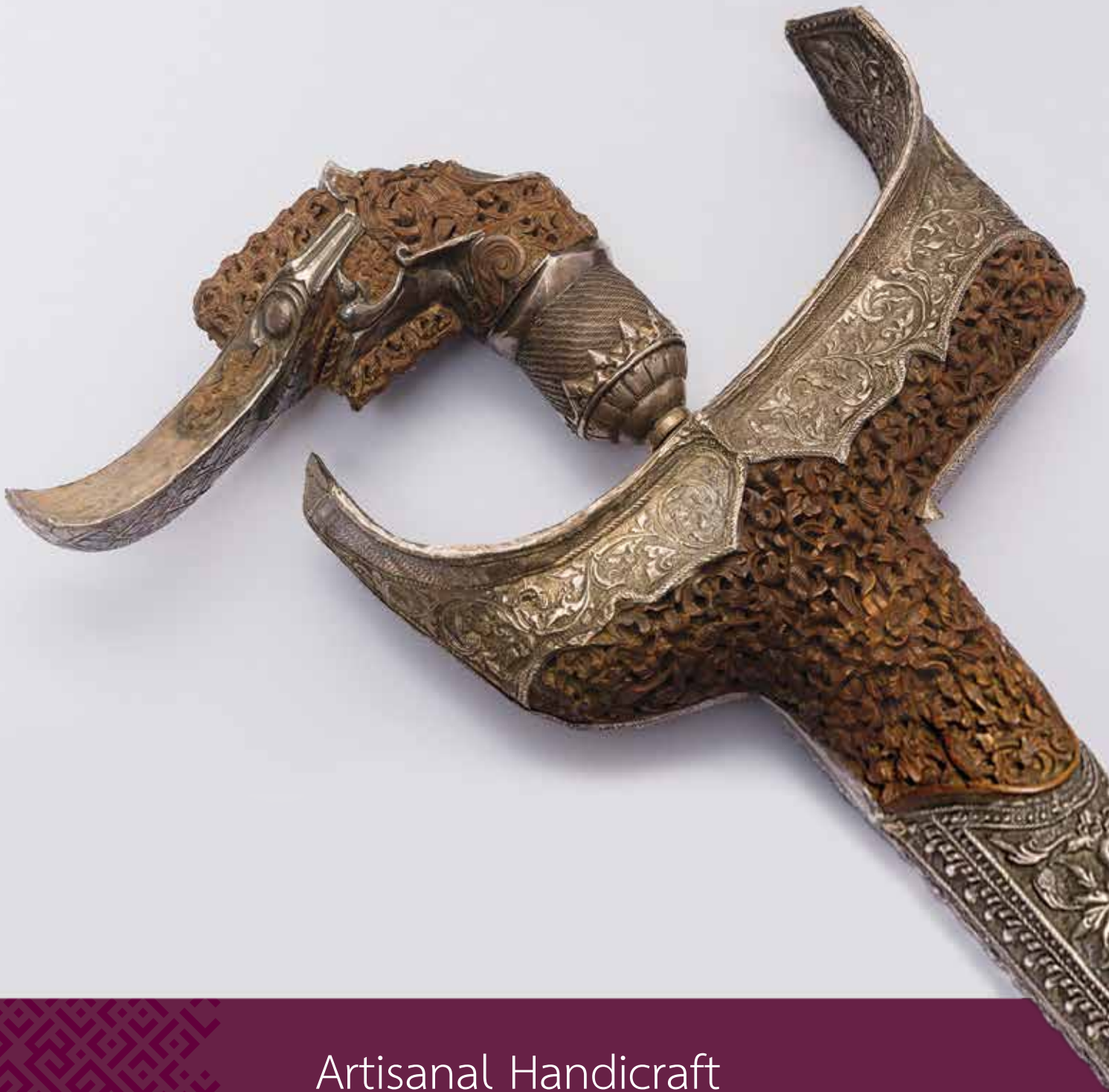




ศูนย์ส่งเสริมศิลปาชีพ  
ระหวางประเทศ  
(จังหวัดสุโขทัย)



# Artisanal Handicraft Kris Head Carving



A **Kris** or Malay dagger is considered as civilization of weapon, indigenous to Malay Peninsula. It has a sharp tapering end, with wavy blade. A hilt is commonly carved from various materials, such as hardwood, ivory and horn, into exquisite patterns or is decorated with silver, gold or copper. The blade is made of melted iron that is forged and formed homogeneously. A Kris is not only a weapon but also represents manhood, an indicator of social status, rank, as well as an order in a family of its owner. A Kris is included in regalia of a king. It can also represent a ruler in case that he cannot attend an event on his own.







## Identity that reflects wisdom and knowledge of Kris

Important features of a Kris include a wavy, thin and tapering blade. A Kris can be categorized based on its form into 2 types as follows:

**A curved Kris** Flexure represents power of its owner. The flexure is commonly made into an odd number. A blade and a hilt are normally carved or decorated with gold, silver or copper depending on status of an owner.

**A Bai Prue Kris** features a long straight blade with tapering and thin end. A ridge is in the middle of a blade. The length of both types of Kris depends on belief of a possessor, which is normally at 6-15 inches long.

It has been said that a complete Kris is as sharp as a tiger's fang and sinuous like flame, representing bravery and power. Hence, it is considered as an auspicious weapon which can help expel bad things from its owner. This depends on metal in a mixture and a production process.



A curved Kris



A Bai Prue Kris



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A Kris head of Chana or Songkhla



A Kris head is commonly made of wood, metal or ivory that is carved into beautiful patterns symbolizing various meanings. Each Kris head is formed differently. However, it is normally divided into 3 parts, namely a head, a body and a nose. A Kris head that is popular in the 5 southern border provinces is classified into 2 forms based on 2 areas, including a Kris head of Chana or Songkhla and a Kris head of Pattani or Pangka. These two are different.

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A Kris head of Songkhla or Chana



It features a sharp-ended nose, carved into Palava pattern. It is mostly made of orange jasmine wood thanks to its fine texture and durability. It is considered as auspicious wood. Other kinds of wood might be used, but not that widely employed.





A Kris head of Pattani or Pangka



A Kris head of Pattani or Pangka

### A Kris head of Pattani or Pangka

It features whiskers. A male Kris is thick whilst a female Kris rarely has whiskers and its body is thin. A Kris head can be featured in various patterns like the one as shown in an example of Pattani Malay Kris head.

The only 2 remaining Pattani Schools of Kris nowadays include Raman School and Pongsta School. Habitat of craftsmen of Raman Kris School is located at Ta Lo Halo Sub-district, Raman District, Yala Province. They might be the last group of Raman Kris School that is still in the area, while Pongsta School does not have any successors any more.



Ta Mue Ngong Kris head

**Characteristics of Raman Kris School include 3 features as follows:**

A blade is in a form of Bundai Sarah.

A side or Sapae of a sheath is thick.

A sheath is round.

A Kris in Pongsta School is more delicate and dainty. A sheath is small and round. A head in a form of Pangka Bird has a longer neck.

Each Kris head indicates social status and class of its owner. A Kris head of Pattani School can be divided into 3 classes as follows:

Ta Mue Ngong Kris head is for a king, a ruler. It features exquisite patterns.

Bor Tor Ga Lor Kris head is commonly used by a warrior, an army leader or a ruffian because of its dignified and stern look.

Der Ror Kris head is used by common people. It looks charming and pitying. Its pattern is rough. Some even does not have any patterns.

To make each Kris head, formulas are associated with belief and culture of Malay or Muslim people.



Bor Tor Ga Lor Kris head



Der Ror Kris head





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## Raman Kris

**Raman Kris** has a distinctive shaft, its nose is long and sharp like a kingfisher’s beak. Actually, it is a giant in Wayang or Java puppet that used to have influence over former Pattani art work. This Kris is found in the lower part of Songkhla. Its feature is a Kris head that is carved in local characteristic of the South. The wood that could be found in nature is used. Beautiful patterns are all featured in a head, a body and a shaft.

Important component is at a Kris head or a shaft, which is commonly carved as a man’s head or an animal’s head. Later on, it is changed to be made in a geometric shape. Stories are intervened in production of Raman Kris head, such as a pattern which is locally called “Sila Flower” which refers to Sila Dancing (a folk performance art of Thai Muslim in the South).

A carver must understand all dancing postures. The initial pattern comprised of 4 leaves, which feature basic dancing postures. Then, it ended up at “Dok Taeng” which is a posture of “Piercing a Kris”. Outstanding characteristic of Dok Taeng is a single direct blossom before restarting with curling the end which is comparable to dancing in a posture of “wai to apologize”. A pattern is called a final step.



Raman Kris



As for steps for making a blade, make a wide bottom and sharp and tapering end. Both sides of a blade are sharp. A body of a Kris is wavy and narrow down to its end, similar to flame. A wavy blade is to cause a wider wound and it can even stab through a bone.

In the old days, making a blade of Kris was done by mixing many kinds of iron or metal, including steel or soft steel, into an iron tube. Then, gradually hit the iron tube until it gets properly flat before melting it on a furnace to get homogeneous texture. If the texture is still not completely homogeneous, immerse those iron pieces into clay water and melt it again. Repeat a process until it is well mixed. Then, place it on a base and hit until it is flat with a proper weight of a hammer.



Nowadays, Raman Kris is forged from iron ore from a rare source in Malaysia or Indonesia. It is mostly mixed with Nickel. A Kris maker or Aimpoo forges a blade into laminations of different metal. Some Kris takes short time to be finished, whilst some takes longer time or even for a life-long period. For a high quality Kris, its blade is a compilation of dozens or hundreds of laminations of iron before forging repeatedly. A blade might have some traces of a Kris maker, such as a forefinger fingerprints or lips. Using different metal in forging a single blade will create different watermarks. This is called Pamor or Pampir.

A sheath for a part next to a Kris head is commonly made of brass, silver or gold. It can also be exquisitely carved. Normally, a shaft of a Kris is made of single kind of metal.





## Background of Kris

A Kris used to be a national weapon of Java and Malaysia. It is commonly used in neighboring countries, including Brunei, Philippines, Cambodia altogether to Thai Buddhist and Thai Muslim in the South, or so called throughout a whole region of Malay Peninsula. This corresponds to a picture of Kris firstly discovered at the wall of Suku monastery of Java in the middle of the 14th century. It features an engraved statue of Bhima God, a Java warrior, barehanded holding hot iron and forging a Kris on his own knee in lieu of an anvil.

According to a legend of a Hindu King, Sakutrum during Majapahit period, Kris was widely used until the 19th century. In the belief of Kris usage according to Islamic idea, it has been mentioned that making each Kris is associated with natural phenomenon, power, life, flesh and blood of a Kris's owner.

In Thailand, according to a legend of Raman Kris of Yala over 300 years ago, a ruler of Raman city wished to use a Kris in a ceremony to establish himself as a governor and to regard a Kris as a respectable object of the city.

However, at that time, there was no good enough Kris maker in the city. A ruler then asked for help from Java. Then, Java dispatched 4 skilled

royal craftsmen with strong mystical knowledge, including Bundai Sarah, Bundai Yana, Bundai Sana and Bundai Niranam.

Later on, Bundai Sarah was appointed as a craftsman of the city. He was named as "Panae Sarah" (Panae means a craftsman, Sarah is named by the city governor). He became a teacher who shared knowledge on how to make a Kris. He also drafted ethics for Kris maker which has been practiced by Kris makers up to the present time.

A Kris in Bundai Sarah family has been widely accepted among Kris collectors worldwide thanks to the art at its head, which is commonly made into a head of kingfisher, a local mythical bird, symbolizing as a guardian.

Moreover, it is strong as it is the only one Kris having a ridge at the middle of a blade. A formula for steel mixture specifically focuses on strength. This is considered a distinctive characteristic of Raman Kris from Bundai Sarah family. According to a story, in a competition on strength of a Kris, only a Kris from Bundai Sarah family can stab through a jar.



## Belief and Stories Associated with Way of Life

In the ancient time, it was believed that once a blade of a Kris was drawn out, it must be immediately stabbed into an opponent. Or once there was a dispute and a manly fight was desired, a disputant must notify his desire at an office of a governor's secretary. Then, an official would bring both opponents to a fighting arena which was a hole at 2 wah wide and 1.5 meters deep. Before fighting using a Kris, both opponents must declare in front of people that there will be no revenge from both families.

As mentioned in the archives of Simon de La Loubère, a French man who travelled to Thailand during the reign of King Narai around 1693, he mentioned about weapons of Thailand, including a Kris. A Kris was bestowed upon court officials by the King to tuck around the left side of the waist so they can use it conveniently.

What is shown on a Kris's shaft and blade represents good luck and power to kill an opponent. It is also believed that each Kris has its own miracle. For example, some Kris can hide itself in the air so it is invisible to people. Some Kris can launch itself to kill a person on behalf of its owner.

A Kris is also used in important ceremonies, such as a festival, a celebration in a court. It is one of Malaysia's regulations that on those important days, all must tuck a Kris by placing a Kris facing toward a body. Facing a Kris outwards implies that an owner was thinking to cause violence to a nation. His Kris must be confiscated.





## How to Make a Raman Kris

A Kris is a weapon with specific features. It has been mentioned that each Kris has its own spirit. Therefore in a Kris production process, the one who orders a Kris to be made must concentrate on his mental power which must be started and finished by specific auspicious timing according to the belief of each person.

### Materials

Steel, Carbon steel

A furnace

A hammer

Pliers

Mamuang Pa or Kalon Mango wood and Diospyros coriacea Hiern wood (to make a head and a sheath of Kris).

A carving knife





Prepare wood by a size of a Kris



Draw a picture on the wood



Saw the wood according to the scratch



Decorate with an axe and polish with a rasp file into a shape



Carving a Kris head

### Making a Kris Head and Carving Process

- Prepare wood by a size of a Kris
- Draw a picture on the wood
- Saw the wood according to the scratch
- Decorate with an axe and polish with a rasp file into a shape
- Carve with a chisel or carving tools on a Kris head

### Making a Blade Process

- Burn the steel to make a blade
- Forge the iron to make a Kris
- Make patterns on a Kris



### Making a Sheath Process

Prepare wood at 2\*5 inches, 7 inches long.

Draw a pattern on the wood.

Saw the wood according to the drafted pattern.

Shave off and decorate with a rasp file or carving tools.

Ta Yong Shaft is unique, unlike other styles.

Form a side of a shaft and a shaft itself together by not making a joint visible by bulging in a mold of a shaft and slantingly gouging at a bottom of a dowel of a shaft.

In Thailand, a Kris is considered a weapon used in the rites and belief in the southern border of Thailand. As for Malaysia and Brunei, a Kris is also an important weapon of the kings. It is also employed in important royal rites.



A Kris is also precious collectibles. Nowadays, it is also produced for trading, as decorations and souvenirs reflecting local spirit and art which also helps preserve handicraft of ancestors to sustain forever.





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