



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



Art and craft work  
**Squirrel Tail Silk**



**Squirrel Tail Silk** is the name to call one of silk fabric types. It is derived from its characteristics of texture pattern which possesses a ripple effect of colors seen as various little silk threads inside. It is similar to fur of squirrel tail. It looks beautiful and strange. It is made with the weft of multiple plies which are called squirrel tail threads. A squirrel tail thread is produced by plying two different colored

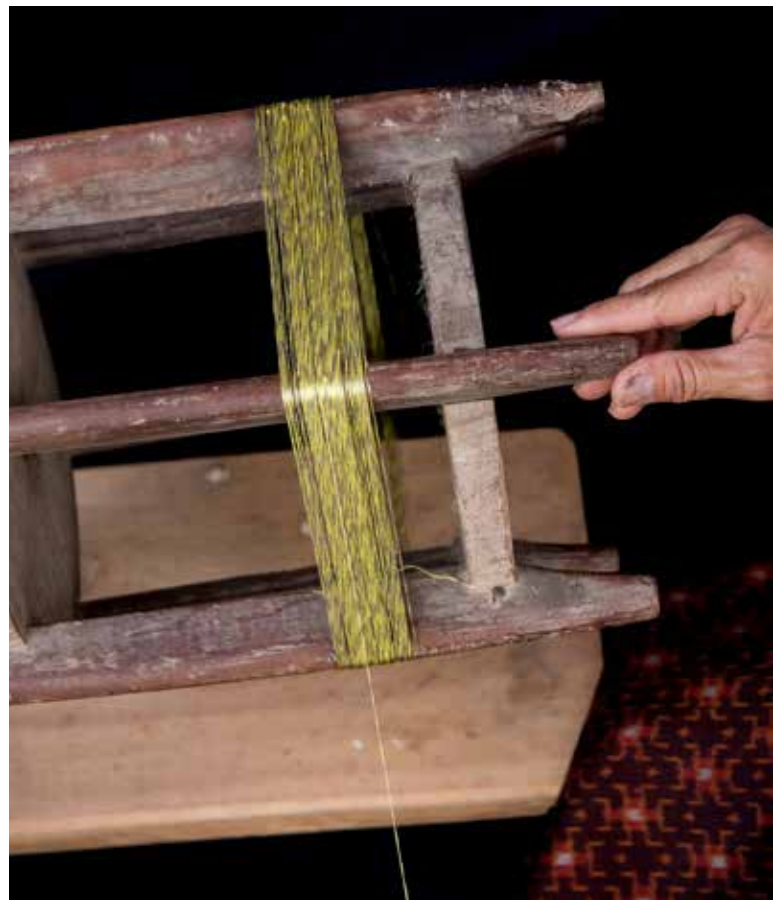
silk threads or cotton threads into a single thread. This process is called thread combination. When used in weaving a single silk fabric, it makes the single silk fabric to possess little patterns inside which cause a ripple effect of shiny colors, similar to fur of squirrel tail. For this reason, the name of Squirrel Tail Silk is referred to its characteristics of ripple effect.





## Identity which reflects folk wisdom and artisan skills

An important characteristic of Squirrel Tail Silk is that it is a textile fabric normally weaved, or a double-heddle textile fabric, similar to other general folk textile fabrics which are weaved with two heddles. But for weaving Squirrel Tail Silk, a single thread as the weft is produced by plying two different colored silk threads or cotton threads, such as, green and black, white and green, red and yellow, etc. The plied single thread is called a multiple-ply thread or a multiple-ply silk thread, or a squirrel tail thread. Main tools, such as, Nai and Bok are used to produce the plied warp. A weaved textile fabric will be beautiful and possesses a pattern of the light-dark colored warp with the light colored weft. A textile fabric with the plied warp is more expensive than general textile fabrics. A process of weaving this textile fabric is called “squirrel tail patterned fabric” because its pattern is like a squirrel tail.







For weaving Squirrel Tail Silk to have a ripple effect and a beautiful squirrel tail pattern, it depends upon expert skills of an artisan of plying who can produce a single thread as either loose or tight as desired. For selecting multiple silk threads to ply into single silk threads for the warp and the weft, they must be levelly thin silk threads and specially selected for weaving a whole silk fabric. They must be dyed levelly. For dyes, they are considered by how outstanding a ripple effect on a single thread will be after two or three different colored threads are plied in to the single thread. And, for plying, it is considered how many circle to ply for a loosely-plied single thread and a tightly-plied single thread to be level. Importantly, when plied squirrel tail silk threads, or “multiple-ply threads,” is used as the weft threads to be weaved through the warp threads, what is to considered includes how to arrange the threads and plies to make a pattern of waves, such as, sharp-peak waves and obtuse-peak waves, and how many shuttles, two shuttles or three shuttles to insert the different colored weft threads to make a single textile fabric beautiful. In addition, it should be considered which technique and which colors to make each edge’s strips of a single textile fabric more outstanding, and a purpose of making the strips.

General characteristics of squirrel tail silks includes that they are one of smooth fabric types with one yard in width and four yards in length. Their colors are often dark, such as, a tamarind seed color, a mangosteen peel color, red lac color, etc. They possess a pattern of a ripple effect of colors. They look like three dimensional images. In each edge of a single ancient squirrel tail silk, there are strips weaved with silk threads whose colors are different from the color of the single ancient squirrel tail silk. The number of strips is eight or nine. And there are three to four conventional frame lines depending upon a weaver. Some squirrel tail silks are weaved in a strangely beautiful pattern of little glass balls. The each edge’s strips are called a separate, a divider, a limitation, a foot of limitation, and a fabric foot of edge separation.

“**Squirrel tail silk**” is an ancient textile fabric which characteristic of pattern is simple. “Thread combination,” a technique of weaving a textile fabric which is an identity of Tai group is used. It is call “squirrel tail silk” by Thai people. Squirrel tail silk is regarded as an ancient textile fabric commonly found in southern Isan, such as, Nakhon Ratchasima, Buri Ram, Surin, Si Sa Ket, Ubon Ratchathani, and in the south of Thailand, such as, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Trang.





Nakhon Ratchasima is one of famous provinces of weaving the most beautiful squirrel tail silks. Once, squirrel tail silks used to be a province's textile fabric of Nakhon Si Thammarat, according to its old slogan: "Karom doves, Kanrom sugar canes, Keema oranges, Squirrel tail silks, Saitong flowers, Korat Cats." It is because in Nakhon Ratchasima there has been weaving squirrel tail silks for hundreds of years.

In Surin, and Buri Ram, a Gui group is in flavor of wearing and weaving thread-combination silks. Its women are expert at plying silk threads, called, Lawee or Rawee, according to their belief of unity in family and lineage which believes in Animism. Plying two different colored silk threads is called "Kanew" or "squirrel tail silk." When used as the warp threads and the weft threads in weaving, a base color of weaved fabric shows a ripple effect of yellow colors like a color of squirrel tail. For a characteristic of Kanew fabric, its texture is shiny. When under a sunshine, its colors are clearly distinguished. Thai men of Gui group are in flavor of wearing thread-combination silks (HachikGanob) as loin cloths.

Squirrel tail silk is called as the name because of, probably, a pattern of fabric texture possessing a ripple effect of colors with little patterns of threads inside which looks like a squirrel tail. Therefore, it is an origin of the name. Besides, this type of textile fabric is called into different names depending upon each local region by its intended appearance. For example, in some local regions it is called as a Wa fabric or a long fabric which are called by a length of the fabric that is two time longer than a length of sarong. In some, a combined fabric because of its weaving by using plies. But most people called it squirrel tail silk more.



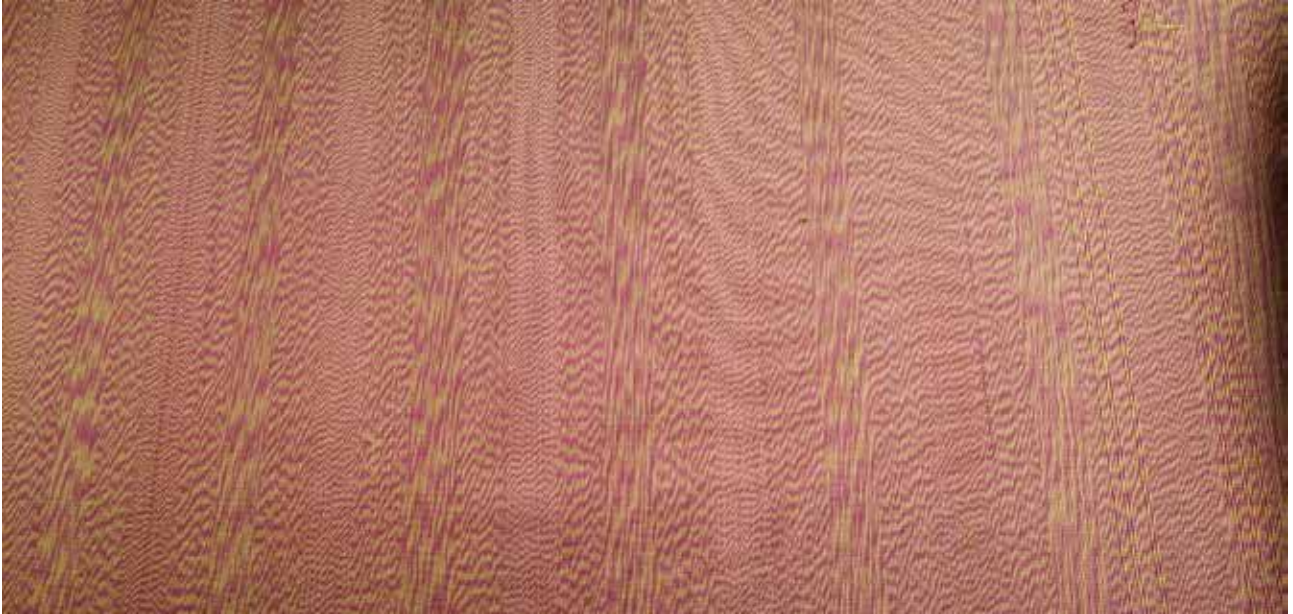


## Pattern and technique of weaving

Technique of weaving a textile fabric with the weft threads made from plying two silk threads needs using โฉง and โฉก as tools of plying. In general, for squirrel tail silks, a yellow dye is in flavor of plying into a single thread. When used as the weft in weaving a single textile fabric, the single textile fabric will be beautiful due to a yellow color of threads. Two different threads are plied into a single thread which is called “a combined thread” or “a multiple ply thread” or “a squirrel tail thread.” Then, it is used to be weaved through the different colored warp threads which may be darker or lighter. A single textile fabric with a ripple effect of colors which looks like fur of squirrel tail is produced. So, it is called a squirrel tail silk.

Technique of weaving this type of textile fabric is an original one of Tai groups because there is weaving this type of textile fabric in original Tai groups, namely, a Phu Tai group and a Tai lao group. The name of this technique is “wheeling”. A Tai Yuan group calls it as “a trigger spinning”. A Tai Puan calls it as “Ma Lung Mai” or “Mub Mai”. A central Tai group, a southern Tai group, and a Tai Isan group call it as “squirrel tail silk”. But Thai people of partial Cambodian ancestry and a Suay group (Gui) call it in Cambodian as “Kranaw” or “Kranew”. In an ancient time, a Tai Isan group wears squirrel tail silk, called by some as Pa Muang, as Sarong.





**Squirrel tail silks possess a ripple effect of beautiful colors. There are three ways of weaving to make patterns as follows:**

A pattern of squirrel tail advancing to the right, weaving with clockwise-plying threads.

A pattern of squirrel tail advancing to the left, weaving with contraclockwise-plying threads.

A pattern of Squirrel tail advancing as sharp waves, using two shuttles, one shuttle with the contraclockwise-plying weft threads and another with the clockwise-plying weft threads, then weaving each by each.

Besides, there is a pattern of gingham or Sarong. Mostly Sarong is woven with multiple-ply threads or squirrel tail silk threads. A texture of gingham fabric possesses a ripple effect of colors like fur of squirrel tail. So, it is called weaving Sarong with squirrel tail silk threads. A texture of Sarong has a huge gingham pattern in multiple colored squares, such as, red, green, yellow, navy blue in alternation for a whole textile fabric. Then, the huge colorful gingham pattern is separated by a little red or white or yellow divider for a table line. Gingham or Sarong has one meter in width and two meter in length. It is sewed to make a skirt like a female Sarong. There are two color tones of fabric, such as, red Sarong that is colorful is suitable to a male whose age is not above forty years old. But, for a man whose age is above forty years old, a dark tone Sarong, called as black Sarong, is suitable.



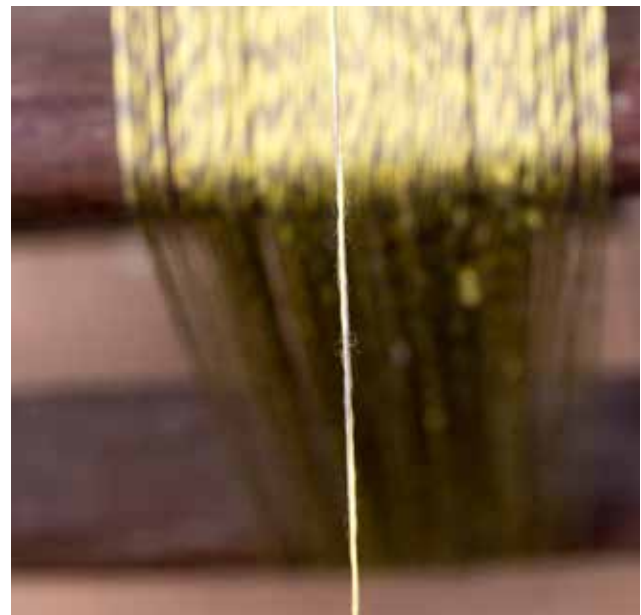


## Thread dyeing methodology

In the ancient time, the natural materials such as Kanke or Kalae were used to dye the threads for weaving the Squirrel Thai Silk. Krang dyed red and

pink, Kram dyed indigo blue Kra and Krang gave violet, Jackfruit core or Kanke gave orange thread, Kamsad flower gave dark orange, etc. In this present day, only chemical product are used for dyeing silk and cotton thread used for Squirrel Thai Fabric.





### Twisted threads methodologies.

Prepare the dyed silk as needed and insert each color in thread rolls. One, roll to the left, another one, roll to the right. If prefer 3 color twisted thread, use 3 rolls which one color in each.

Grip the tips of the thread and insert in the silk hoop hanging above the roll which higher than the one who twist them. Pull the two lines of silk down, then it will start to be twisted.

Bring the end of that two silk threads and roll in on the thread core by using right hand to roll the Nai/Lar and left hand to organize the twisted thread

from no. 2, slowly arrange the thread around the thread core nicely.

Take the twisted thread that rolled on the nail/Lar to wrap around the Bok which placed on the wood pole for rolling the thread core. Then, rolling it to transfer the silk thread from the left steel. If you want the twisted thread to be small, use 2 inches Bok but if you want the twisted thread to be wide, use 3 inches Bok. In the case that you prefer the high frequency of the thread, you have to twisted 3 rounds but it might be too tight and make the fabric hard.





### Process of weaving squirrel tail silk

Preparing the warp thread, the same process as other ordinary fabric weaving.

Preparing the weft thread by using the multiple-ply thread, then twisted it as one thread by using Nai and Bok. The ordinary Swuirrel Tail Silk is usually weaved 2 twisted lines but applied silk will be weaved 3 twisted lines. The fabric is popularly used yellow threads with other threads therefore when weaving the treads, the fabric will provide the beautiful yellowish tone silk.

Weaving technique is regular the contrary pattern by using the Tago to tie 2 set of the warp thread or using the lighter color warp than the weft will provide the small reflection of the color in the fabric similar to soft fur of squirrel.

From the methodology of the squirrel Tail Silk weaving can be concluded as the highlight of this fabric that this fabric weaving has been popular in the northeastern Thailand especially the southern part of it. The process of weaving using the multiple-ply thread to get beautiful combined color such as yellow and green, red and yellow. The silk threads used in this weaving process are thin to provide the beautiful ripple effect fabric after finishing weaving process.





## Background of soft silk fabrics

Squirrel Thai Silk weaving or using the multiple-ply weft in some part of the fabric have been used in all region in Thailand for a long period of time. They have been called differently based on the dialect of the region. For example, The central and southern parts call “Squirrel Tail”, the north-eastern Thai call Kuab or Khen, the Khmer Thai in lower Nort East call “Kanew” and Lanna call “Pankai” or “Mubmai” , etc.

In the past, soft silk fabric is popular used as Sarong, Loincloth and Siin skirt. It was used as loin-cloths for men. Then, it was used for wearing in important ceremonies. It is also the fabric used in rituals such as the Naga wearing in monk ordination, alm bowl wrapping cloth, coffin covering cloth. According to that Squirrel Thai Silk is important fabric of the families which mothers, grandmothers weave it with their hearts to leave their children good intentions therefore when they pass away they can use this fabric to cover their coffin. As the saying “Death without long fabric cover the face, feel a shame to all friends” .Nowadays, the Squirrel Tail Silk is being applied to soft variety designs and colorful fabrics to be made as cloths as well as shawls, scarves, and blan kets, etc.







## The customs of weaving Wa , Khen, Squirrel Tail fabric in the past

In the past, weaving this fabric in the traditional way of northeastern Thai needed to follow Kalum ( Kalum means taboo). The way to start weaving, always start with the warp but when someone ask what you are doing, the one who weave has to say silk skirt but realize that this warp is for weaving the last Wa fabric of the weaver (Hoog). The reason of saying that is, normally, this fabric used for covering coffin while making it. Answering the fact of weaving the Wa fabric can lead to this idea. The weaving start with the two colors of threads in the shuttle for 15-20 centimeters. Then, use the Kid thread or white thread or plain thread to show the contrary of the color. This design called “Tokcherng” which is weaved on both top and bottom of the fabric. The length of the fabric is approximately 3-3.5 meters.





## values to conserve the Squirrel Tail Silk

“The Squirrel Tail Silk” is the beautiful traditional fabric that represent the skillful technique of finely line-by-line weaving. In these days, there are not many regions keeping this fabric weaving. This is one of Thailand’s pride to have passing on the methodologies from generations. There are learning groups of how to weave the Squirrel Tail Silk to gain some family income but this attended people are usually in middle age group or up. These can be considered that in some day, this fabric will be faded away from Thai society, left alone the history noted in the literatures.

If the new generations start to love and interested in weaving and its process, we can conserve our ancient weaving way. The Squirrel Tail Silk will be part of Thai culture heritage that pass on and last in Thai society forever.









*Data source and documentary reference for data provision*

*interview Mr.Thongloet Sornchan,*

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สัมภาษณ์กลุ่มทอผ้าไหมสีธรรมชาติ กลุ่มหูล่งประจักษ์