



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



Types of Handicrafts

Pa Tor Lao Krang



Pa Tor Lao Krang (The Homespun Weaving of Lao Krang People) is among the masterpieces from master weavers that pass on this cultural inheritance through many generations of the descendants of Lao Krang people. Lao Krang People are proficient weavers, and when they relocated into Thailand, they also brought the tradition and cultures of their appliances into their new home as well, especially the handicraft of weaving. Lao Krang people preserve their tradition, culture, ritual and belief quite well, and homespun weaving is an integral part of Lao Krang people's life. In the past, every household would weave their own clothes for their family's

members. These clothes were also used in many rituals that are related to the ideology of the spirit, birth, death, etc. Their homespun cloths are related to many rituals of Lao Krang people, such as, Pah Pok Hua Nark (a piece of cloth uses as headscarf for a man who is about to ordain), or a special blanket that has auspicious and graceful pattern that the people use to wrap the death relative, in order to comfort them in their afterlife. Therefore, homespun weaving is very important to the lifestyle of Lao Krang people in the past, and such belief is passed on to their descendants in the present day as well.



The unique identity that reflects the craftsman's wisdom and ability

The Lao Krang people were a group of people that was very proficient with weaving Jok cloth. Pa Tor Lao Krang is therefore a unique and prominent product, in comparison to products from other ethnic groups. One of the most prominent and unique products from the Lao Krang people is **Pa Sin Mud Mee Tor Tin Jok**. This workpiece represents the finest and excellence of Lao Krang craftsmen. Prominent characteristics of this product are homespun weaving that uses the technique of Kid, Jok and Mud Mee, and uses both cotton and silk in the workpiece. Sin (a piece of long cloth wear by woman on her lower body, like skirt) is normally wove with silk; whereas the Seng Poong (horizontal threads in weaving with loom) will be processed by Mud Mee technique (bind – dye technique) with single color. Other colors will be added by Jae, or painting, where the craftsman will use a stick to paint color on the thread directly. This technique is also a unique characteristic of Mud Mee Lao Krang. The threads will be then wove, using Lai Kid pattern for the vertical threads; and then the finished workpiece will be extend at the bottom edge, using Tin Jok technique (embroidery)

The edge of Sin made by Lao Krang people is usually extended with cotton and silk. The upper extension is decorated with embroiled patterns, and the lower edge of the extension will be left out to show the

base cloth under the embroidery. This is also another prominent – unique characteristic of Pa Tor Lao Krang. The colors used in their production are natural colors, such as, yellow from Mapood fruit or the leaf of Indian Almond; brown from betel nut or Pradoo Tree (*Pterocarpus macrocarpus*), grey from Pradoo and mud dye, indigo blue from Krarm Plant mixed with red lime, red from lac, etc. Patterns on the clothes made by Lao Krang people come from their surroundings, lifestyle, tradition, culture, and belief, such as, Lai Nak (Naga), Lai Mah (Horse), Lai Kor, Lai Dork Kaew, Lai Ear, etc. The most popular patterns are Lai Borarn, Lai Mee Luad, and Lai Mee Tah.

The followings are examples of Pa Sin Tin Jok that represent the unique identity of Lao Krang people:

- Sin Karn; this is made by applying Jok or Kid technique on the whole cloth.
- Sin Mee Luad; this is made by Mud Mee technique and wove plainly and continuously. The result is a piece of cloth with smooth and continuous pattern. Unique patterns of this homespun cloth are Lai Mee Sumpao, Lai Mee Kor Yai, etc.
- Sin Mee Ta; this is made by alternatively applying Mud Mee technique and Jok or Kid technique. The result is a piece of cloth that has patterns that run along the length of the cloth. Unique patterns of this homespun cloth are Lai Hong (Sworn), Lai Nak (Naga), etc.
- Sin Mee Noi; this is made using Mud Mee technique with small stripe of threads that are mixed alternatively with silk and cotton.





Another prominent characteristic of homespun cloth made by Lao Krang, or Thai Krang, people, is their preference of hot colors in their work, such as, red, yellow, green, black, etc. Combination of their patterns gives the feeling of independency, straightforward, and excitement. Lao Krang people combine different materials in their homespun weaving, such as, using silk, which is naturally shiny and soft, for the cloth's body; and using cotton, which is heavier and rougher, for the bottom edge of the cloth with Jok and Chid technique. Such combination provides balance between lighter body and heavier bottom of a piece of Sin; and provides additional benefit to the wearer, as the Sin will not flip while the wearer is walking.

Structure of a piece of Sin can be categorized into 3 parts, namely, head, body, and foot.

Sin's head is normally woven with black, red, or other desired colors, and with ancient patterns, such as, Lai Num Sarm Chiaw, Lai Tor Khun Krueang, etc.

Sin's body is normally woven with black, orange, green, red, or yellow thread. Main patterns used for Sin's body are, for example, Lai Makua Papoang and Lai Aor-Air. Supplementary patterns used for Sin's body are Lai Kan Fai or Lai Ear Kan Fai. Also, Lai Mah Pa is used for dressing the Sin' edge, where the craftsman will weave this part with stripes of smaller pattern.

Besides the aforementioned patterns, other patterns can be used as supplementary on the cloth, such as, Lai Kan Mark Hoi, Lai Peek Bang, Lai Tor Kradai Ling, Lai Kor Bong, Lai Nak, Lai Kor Kuea, Lai Kor Noi, Lai Kor Luang, etc. Once supplementary patterns are set onto the workpiece, the craftsman may also at Lai Soi Sa, Lai Kiaw Ma Pen, Lai Kiaw Ma Tai, etc, under the stripes of other patterns, in order to boost the workpiece' beauty.

The importance of Sin Lao Krang lies on the 'Tin Sin' (the foot or bottom edge of the cloth.) In the past, Tin Sin can only be made in red, as ancient craftsmen used this color to represent the origin of their ancestor. Red represents the sun, as ancestors of Lao Krang people were immigrated from the east.



Red would be only used at Tin Sin. Sin Lao Krang is mainly made with 5 colors, which have different meanings, namely, ‘Red’ means immigration from the East; ‘Black’ means a city with abundant natural resource – ‘Black soil with plenty water’; ‘White’ means ‘nation’, or the ethnic group or race of their ancestors, which was ‘Buddhist Lao’; ‘Yellow’ represents Champak flower, a symbol of their community, the people of Lao; lastly, ‘Green’ represents ‘living’ and nature.

In the ancient time, craftsmen invented the patterns by imitating what they saw from their surrounding and daily life, in combination with their imagination. For example, Lai Aor-Air represents a tired person who is walking on a mazy road; Lai Soi Sa represents flowers that bloom all around us; Lai Peek Bang represents a large bat, which is known as Bang in their community; Lai Kor Sua represents monkey’s ladder or vine; Lai Kor Noir represents small mushroom or Hed Crang (*Schizophyllum commune*); Lai Kor Bong represents vines that are twisted together; Lai Kor Luang represents large vine; Lai Makuea Pa Pong represents a small eggplant that has been sliced into 3 or 4 pieces, etc.

Besides providing aesthetic value, patterns on Lao Krang homespun cloth also represent habits and imagination of the weaver as well. In the past, it was

believed that a weaver who could produce cloth with meticulous pattern would also be a good housewife that took a great care of the household.

In the past, colors used for dyeing silk or cotton thread came from the nature, where the craftsman would seek available raw materials in her community, until she found the desired colors. Originally, there were only few colors available. Nowadays, the variety of available colors is far more greater, such as, orange, pink, and reddish violet from lac, brown from betel nut, green for Takian Noo tree or Maphood fruit, grey from Pradoo tree and mud dye, yellow from Maphood fruit or Indian Almond’s leaf, etc. The concentration and tone of the colors depend on amount of raw material used for processing the silk or cotton thread. These natural raw materials can be used to create hundred tones of colors, pertaining to the craftsman’s ability and skill.

Most popular species of silk work used for production of silk thread are Thai silk worms, including, Nang Noi and Nang Lai; as well as half-breed species of Thai silk worms, such as, Lueang Pai Roaj. This is because these silk worms are easy to breed and grow, and quite enduring against illness. Unique characteristics of thread made from Thai silk worms are shine and volume of the thread.



History of Lao Krang homespun cloth

Thai Krang People, or Lao Krang People, in Thailand, are sometimes referenced to as 'Lao Wiang' or 'Lao Ka.' From historical evidences, it is saved to assume that these people are Lao people from the city of Phu Krang or Khu Kang, Luang Phra Bang and Vientiane. These Lao people from Lao's provinces on the left side of Mae Kong River were forced to relocate to Thailand, during the war between Siam and Larn Charng Kingdom, back in the time of Thonburi Kingdom, and early days of Rattanakosin Kingdom. Nowadays, though some Thai Krang or Lao Krang people assert that their ancestors were relocated from Phu Krang, Vientiane or Luang Phrabang, the most interesting

and important aspect that leads to the conclusion of their root and existence, clearly represents the unique identity of Thai Krang or Lao Krang people, and proves that they share the same ancestor and come from the same root, is collective representation of their original culture, whether in the abstract form or concrete form. And one of the most prominent representations of their culture to the public is their dressing culture.

The city of Pku Krang, Luang Phra Bang, and Vientiane should have quite large population, which in turn represented some advantages to the adversary. Therefore, during the times of conflict, these people were force to relocate to build new home in Siam Kingdom on many occasions, for example.



Around 1815, the government official record stated that the city of Vientiane, which was responsible for controlling provinces of Lao under Siam's control, gathered and delivered levy, including Lao people from the city of Khu Krang to Bangkok. It was during the reign of Phrabat Somdet Phra Phutthaloetla Naphalai, King Rama II of Siam. His Majesty kindly allowed these people to build their new home at Nakhon Chaisi Province, and gave them construction equipments and materials, such as, wood, nina palm leaves for root, as well as some labor to help with the construction.

Another occasion where the people of Phu Krang were forced to relocate was mention in the government official record stated that some people fled from the caravan and headed back to Vientiane. And though the governor of Vientiane

had brought some of them back on their way to Bangkok, approximately 700 people remained. Phrabat Somdet Phra Phutthaloetla Naphalai hence instructed the officials to gathered people from the city of Phu Kiaw, Kon Kaen, and surrounding towns of Vientiane, to go up and fetch the remaining Lao Phu Krang people down to Bangkok, in 1817, and delivered them to the other group that has previously settled down in Nakhon Chaisi.

Another official record stated that, after the coup lead by Chao Anuwong was subjugated, in the year 1830, Phrabat Somdet Phra Nangklao Chao Yu Hua, King Rama III, instructed the grand councilor to go up and welcome the people of Lao that the City of Luang Phra Bang gathered from various provinces of Lao to rest at the city of Pichai. The grand councilor carried out His Majesty order, whereas he delivered his



progress with 7 notices sent to the capital. These Lao people were gathered from the city of Loei, Lom, Kanta, Pak Lai, Vientiane, Phu Wiang, and Phu Krang. They were comprised of strong men, Krua (collective pronoun of women and children), monks and Nen (Buddhist novice), for the total amount of approximately sixteen thousand people. Some of them escaped or died, the remaining people were instructed by His Majesty the King to move to the settlement of Lao people that previously settled down in Siam.

From the history of forced relocation of Lao people from the city of Phu Krang, Vientiane, and Luang Phra Bang, to Siam Kingdom, as depicted above. It can be seen that all the people of Lao Krang were sent to live at Nakhon Chaisi. Relocation from such area to other was mostly impossible, due to the control system of peasant at that time. Afterward, after the administrative reform and cancelation of peasant system, during the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Chunla Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua, King Rama V of Siam, the control of people has changed somewhat, and Lao people from the city of Phu Krang, as well as other provinces of Lao, such as, Luang Phra Bang and Vientiane, were able to relocate to other provinces.

Therefore, nowadays, we can see communities of Thai Krang or Lao Krang, Lao Wiang, and Lao Ka people in other provinces outside of Nakhon Chaisi, such as, Chainat, Suphanburi, Uthai Thani, Nakhon Sawhan, Phichit, Kamphaeng Phet, etc.

In the past, after finishing their works in the paddy field or daily routines for their households, housewives of Thai Krang people spent free time to produce homespun cloth for their family's members, including appliances used in their households, such as, mattress, pillow, mosquito net, etc. They also produced appliances used for religious rituals, such as, Toong (Flag), treatise's cover, etc; using raw materials that were available from their surrounding, such as, cotton and silk, and colors from the tree, root, and leaf, as well as lac or Karb Krung, which is the nest of a small insect.





Belief and related tales to the people's lifestyle

Pa Tor Lao Krang is a very important object, since the past to the present, it is a homespun cloth made in the household for dressing, or using in rituals, such as, for worshiping the spirits of their ancestors. Pa Tor Lao Krang is also used for the purposed of religious related activities, such as, use as flag, monk's seat, headscarf for Nak (a person who is about to ordain as a Buddhist monk). According to their tradition, Sin is made and used for normal daily living and working, while Tin Jok is made and used for special occasion, including merit making ceremony, wedding, etc.

The base of the local wisdom for creation of the homespun cloth of Thai Krang or Lao Krang people lies on their belief in Buddhism, and in supernatural beings, such as, ghost, spirit, divine, and spirit of their ancestors, etc. These believes were combined and became the underlying inspiration that makes them create such meaningful patterns.





The meaning of Pa Tor Lao Krang's patterns

Patterns of the homespun cloth can be categorized per their belief, and the underlying stories about their past.

Group of patterns that are based on the belief from local folk tales or legend, such as

- **Lai Nak (Naga) or Lai Great Snake;** the people that live in Mekong River believe that their ancestors were The Great Naga. Therefore, Naha is a symbolic for bloodline from their mother's side. They also believe Naga is a symbol of stream and rain, and representing fertility of the land, which is extremely necessary for agricultural community.

- **Lai Hong (Sworn);** this pattern represent prestige and serves as a symbol for bloodline from their father's side.

- **Lai Hong Koo (Double Sworns);** in their culture, Sworn is a higher animal, and representing angels that take care of their well being.

- **Lai Sing (Lion);** depict the respectability, gracefulness, and protection. depict swiftness, agility and gracefulness.

- **Lai Charng (Elephant);** depict greatness and prestige, and also relates to Buddhism, or representation of the king, who takes care of his citizens.

- **Lai Tua Mom or Kodchasee;** Kodshacee is a half-breed of lion and elephant. It represents the greatness and prestige, and serves as a symbol of parents that take care of their children.



Group of patterns that are inspired by the nature and surrounding environment, such as, various flowery patterns; patterns with image of appliances, such as Lai Rom (umbrella), Lai Takor (hook), and Lai Ka Pia; Lai Kah Mangmoom (spider's legs), Lai Narm (dog's fangs), Lai Dork Ban Kum, Lai Mah Nai, Lai Kor Kuea, Lai Dork Jahn, Lai Harn Mang Ngord, etc.



The process of making Pa Tor Lao Krang

Fiber preparation

- Remove the seed from cotton pot, this process is called Eew, using ancient tool for this purpose.
- After Eew is complete, the cotton in the pot will be flicked with bow, in order to make it swell and fluffy.
- Fluffy cotton will be processed into Harnng Fai, using specialized tool called Lah Pun Sen.
- After cotton thread is produced from the above step, the thread will be put into skein.
- Skein of cotton thread will be cleaned to remove any grease, and then dyed with natural colors.
- After the dyeing process is complete, the thread will be transferred to quill, for using as horizontal and vertical thread for looming. The thread will be connected to the loom's equipment (Fueam)
- The thread will be woven into a full cloth, using loom.

The process for dyeing the thread (Kram or Indigo blue)

The cotton thread or silk thread will be placed in the *Kram* pot (Kram is a material that provides the color of indigo blue). The thread will be message, in order to



dye them evenly. Once the dyeing solution is turning to green, the thread will be removed. This process will be repeated for 5 times. Once the desired color is acquired, the thread will be soaked in the *Kram* pot for 12 hours, and washed with dish washing soap, in order to remove the remaining dye particle that the thread hasn't absorbed. The thread will be dried, and the silk thread or cotton thread that has been dyed will be transferred to the quill, for later weaving.

Weaving

During the weaving process of Pa Tor Lao Krang, the most important components are silk thread, cotton thread, and *Mai Larb* (special tool for coloring the thread.) The thread will be attached to the loom, then the shuttle will be inserted back and forth between the threads. The shuttle holds thread in its core, and it is used for inserting thread horizontally. Each insertion must be done regularly, or pertaining to the desired patterns that the weaver wants. Between each insertion, the weaver will step down on the loom's foot beam once, in order to press the *Fueam* (pattern setting tool) against the cloth and create a firm texture. The process will be repeated until the cloth is finished.

An important technique for Pa Tor Lao Krang is addition of special silk thread that provides unique characteristics to the cloth. Single color silk thread will be inserted into the shuttle, which is then push into the cloth with *Mai Sord Mai* that pushes the horizontal threads up. This process gives attractive – singular pattern to the cloth.



The value of the Arts and Handicrafts of Pa Tor Lak Krang

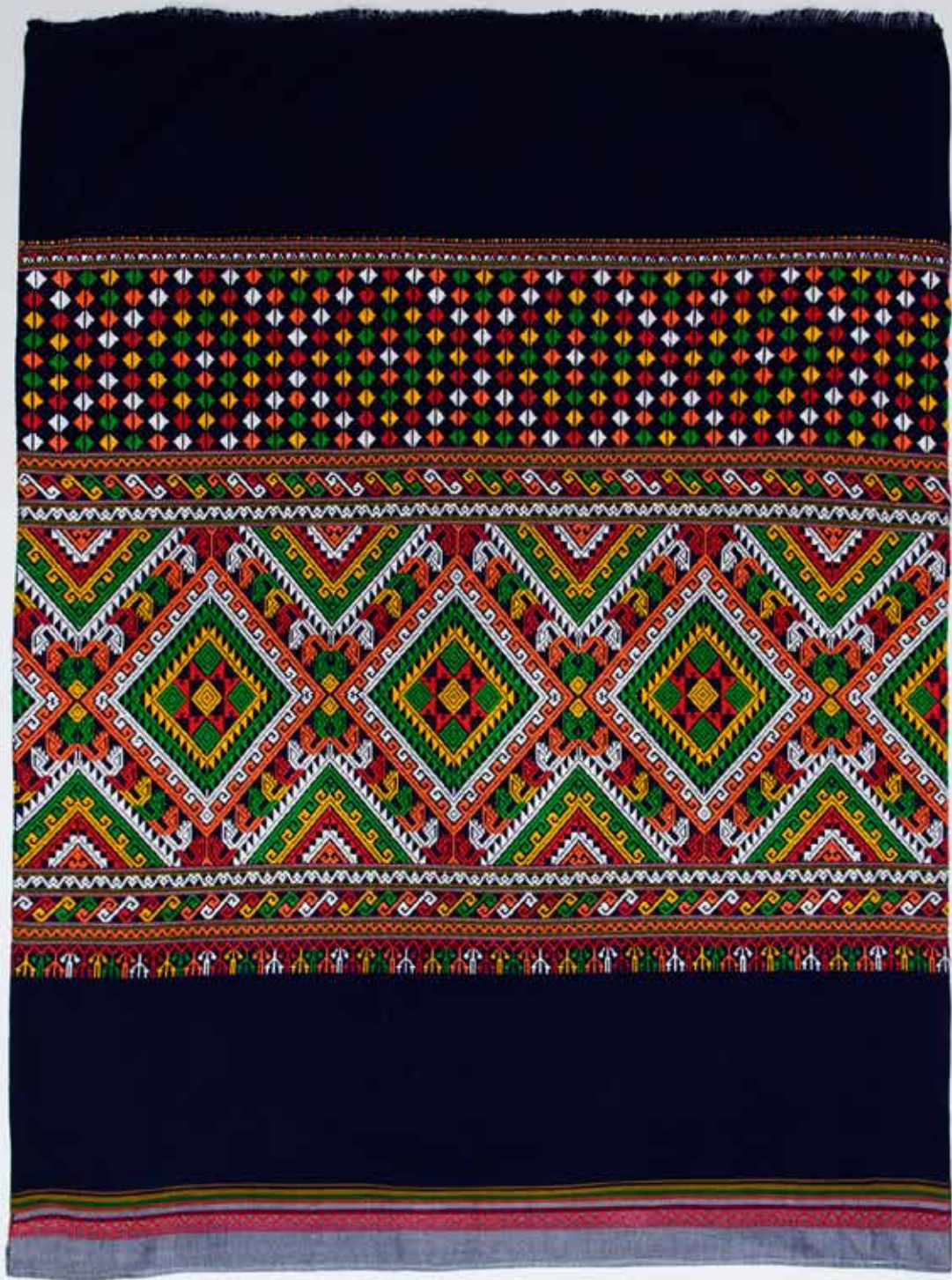
Pa Tor Lao Krang was highly important, and related, to the lifestyle of Lao Krang people in the past. But after foreign cultures gained more influence in their society, their original culture has changed and gradually disappeared from the context of the daily life and local culture of the people in the community. There was also the influence of economy. As a result, the people had to work with other occupations, in order to provide sufficient income to sustain their life. The people's preference in homespun weaving was thus fading.

Things that provide prominent characteristics to Pa Tor Lao Krang are the patterns, in which Lao Krang people inherited from their ancestors. Lao Krang craftsmen also invented new patterns, and applied original patterns with modern design which created novel patterns. Other component is the craftsmen's meticulousness in weaving, as they take great care to every piece of homespun cloth they are weaving. The result is Pa Tor Lao Krang that is truly beautiful, with high quality. Though these products require quite sometimes to complete, the result makes Pa Tor Lao Krang a worthy product that has tremendous value to its owner.

Therefore, Pa Tor Lao Krang is the product from creation of the weavers, who inherit the culture and wisdom from their ancestors of Lao Krang people, for many generations. This product represents the unique identity of this ethnic group, as well as historical value, and the pride of their community. Nowadays, Pa Tor Lao Krang has been developed and improved to serve further more applications, with wider variety of patterns and colors, as well as specialized custom cloth per customer's order.







Information sources and referenced documents for preparation of this article

Interviewing. Mr. Nitat Jahntorn; Information from Master Teeraphan Jahnjaroen, www.oknation.nationtv.tv, www.thaifolkart.blogspot.com, the book 'Sen Thang Sai Pa Lao Krang.'