

Contemporary Textiles for Urban Living –

Patterns Derived from Thailand's Lanna Culture

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Abstract

This research project aimed to establish guidelines to develop traditional woven textiles in the *Tai Yuan* and *Tai Lue* style which is a renowned heritage art form from Thailand's *Lanna* region for incorporation into contemporary living spaces. First, the unique characteristics of *Tai Yuan* and *Tai Lue* weaving were determined by specialists. Their analysis revealed that the uniqueness of *Lanna* textiles were the result of the combination of weaving techniques, materials, colors and patterns. Secondly, a survey of preferences for culture-based textile products was conducted by consumer orientated questionnaires administered to elicit contemporary pattern preferences. This survey revealed that respondents preferred culture-based textile products made in a modern style with contemporary patterns. With these findings of consumer preferences and the study of the characteristics of *Lanna* textiles the author designed new patterns and applied them to a sample collection of decorative products for living rooms.

Keywords: Textile Design, *Lanna Weaving*, *Tai Yuan*, *Tai Lue*, Pattern Development, Contemporary Textiles

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Introduction

Lanna, which literally means “a million rice fields,” refers to the region encompassing the *Golden Triangle* area of present day Thailand, Laos and Myanmar. There, the *Lanna* civilization and the Kingdom of *Lanna* flourished for hundreds of years until the early 20th century when it was annexed by the Kingdom of Siam (Siam is the historical name of Thailand). The *Lanna* region refers the region encompassing Thailand’s provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampoon, Lampang, Payao, Prae, Nan and Mae Hong Song.

Studies of *Lanna* textiles by Prangwatanakun and Cheesman (1987) revealed that *Tai Yuan* and *Tai Lue* refers to the major tribes in the *Lanna* area. Additionally, the research by Silpakorn University (2001) on “Local Woven Textiles: Research of the Maker and Development Project of Local Textiles” of all provinces in Northern Thailand concluded that the problem in enhancing development of local textiles came from the lack of market potential, new patterns and new products.

The author of “Developing the Woven Textiles of Northern Thailand into International products” by Boonthin Indaritt (2005) held that the uniqueness of Northern Thailand’s textiles could be developed into renowned products.

According to “The Incorporation of Thai Textiles Products Into Contemporary Designs” by Sarasarin Pitprapai (2002), The *Chok* pattern of weaving from the *Tai Yuan* community of the Rajburi province were derived using art theory techniques. The original patterns were re-sized and separated into small patterns or filled with different colors in order to achieve a more three-dimensional effect giving the original a more contemporary style based on their traditional patterns.

Figure. 1 illustrates the samples of *Lanna* woven textiles of conventional style and pattern that were fashioned into various products. It is their unique patterns that gives the traditional *Lanna* woven textiles a national heritage status.



Figure 1. Left, a wall painting in Ching Mai’s Viharn Lai Kham of the Phra Singh temple illustrating a *Tai Yuan* woman donning a horizontal-striped tube skirt and a shawl. (Thai Textiles: Threads of a Cultural Heritage, 1996: 52). Right, a wall painting in Nan’s Phu Min temple in the late 19th Century depicting *Lanna* people in their traditional clothing (Thai Textiles: Threads of a Cultural Heritage, 1996:62).



Figure 2. Left, traditional *Lanna* banners (Tung) at Lamphum's Phrat Hariphunchai temple (Exceptional Woven Beauty: Masterpieces from The Bank of Thailand Textiles Museum, 2010:53).

Right, the Sali (futon) - folded, Pha lop (bedsheets) and pillows of *Tai Yuan* and *Tai Lue* woven textiles (*Lanna Textiles Yuan Lue Lao*, 1987:88).

According to a consumer survey on textile product preferences conducted by the author, there is an increase in preferences for cultural products and elements to be reflected in a modern or contemporary style. A study by the Kasikorn Research Center (www.kasikornresearch.com) reported that the changing of lifestyles and the escalating numbers of single-family homes and population growth in South-east Asian countries including Thailand) during the last 3-5 years has resulted in increasing demands for residential furnishings and home decorations.

From the aforementioned research, the author decided to extend the *Lanna* classical forms and unique textile patterns by creating modern and contemporary patterns and products for residential decors.

Research Methodology

Part 1. Characteristics of *Lanna* Textiles

The unique character of *Lanna* textiles was analyzed from samples of woven textiles from the *Tai Yuan* and *Tai Lue* communities during the early 25th Buddhist Era (100 to 150 years ago). As no original ancient woven textiles of *Tai Yuan* and *Tai Lue* remain nowadays, samples of those original textiles which were taken into the analysis were obtained from available photograph images which appeared in reliable publications.

Seventy sample images of ancient woven textiles of *Tai Yuan* and *Tai Lue* origin were selected by the author utilizing the Purpose Quota Sampling technique (Krejcie, Robert V. and Morgan W. 1970). These samples were analyzed by three experts in *Tai Yuan* woven textiles and two expert weavers familiar with *Tai Lue* textiles.

The opinions and comments from the specialists were obtained by in-depth interviews and questionnaires. The images were analyzed by means of Index of Congruence (IOC) in order to obtain a conclusion on the uniqueness in these *Lanna* textiles.

The questions for the specialists were: (a) Which textile products has uniqueness?, (b) What was the unique technique used?, (c) What were the materials used?, (d) Which pattern(s) indicates the uniqueness of *Lanna* weaving?, (e) What location is the origin of those patterns?, (f) What are most frequently used colors?

Part 2. Consumers' Preferences in Textile Products

Research was conducted through questionnaires given to 100 residents in the *Lanna* region and 100 residents in Bangkok. The questionnaires were structured as multiple choice questions. The responses were analyzed by means of the Descriptive Statistic method and the average percentage statistic in order to obtain the preferences of consumers in regard to *Lanna* textile residential products.

Background Research

The unique characteristics of *Lanna* woven textiles are the result of the choices made in their weaving techniques, materials, colors and patterns as shown in Figure.2 and 3.



Figure 2. Top left, the various patterns of *Tai Yuan*'s tube skirts (*Pha Sin Tin Chok*) are from the Kom pattern resulting from the *Chok* technique. (Thai Textiles: Threads of a Cultural Heritage, 1996:53).

Top right, *Tai Lue*'s *Tungs* (temple banners) with imaginary patterns using the *Chok* and *Khit* techniques. (Cultural Heritage of *Tai Lue* Textiles, 2008:114).

Bottom left, a pattern from a *Tai Lue* tube skirt by created by the *Ko*, *Chok* techniques. (Cultural Heritage of *Tai Lue* Textiles, 2008:57). Bottom right, patterns on a traditional *Tai Yuan* tube skirt made by *Chok* techniques. (Exceptional Woven Beauty: Masterpieces from The Bank of Thailand Textiles Museum, 2010:174).



Figure 3. Left, tube skirts and right pillows from *Tai Yuan* woven textiles from Mae Chaem district, Chiang Mai province.

The characteristics of *Lanna* textiles are as follows:

1. *Chok*, *Khit*, and *Ko* are names of some of the weaving methods. The *Chok* weaving method appears in fabric of traditional tube skirts known as *Pha Sin Tin Chok* in the *Tai Yuan* community. *Khit* and *Chok* weaving methods appears in the temple banners (*Tungs*) while the *Ko* and *Chok* weaving technique appears in tube skirts of the *Tai Lue* tribe.
2. In regard to materials, most *Lanna* textiles are primarily made of cotton and threads of silk silver, and gold are added during weaving for fabrics used during special occasions.
3. The standard colors of *Lanna* textiles are yellow, red and black, while in the *Tai Yuan* fabrics they are yellow, red and blue. Most *Tai Lue* patterns are comprised of red and black.
4. Colors and patterns of textiles in the *Lanna* region are typically connected to religious beliefs. Patterns of *Tai Yuan* textiles were derived from a combination of the *Kom* pattern with the *Kum*, *Hong Nok*, *Nam Ton* and *Hang Sa Pao* patterns. *Tai Yuan* patterns appeared on the *Pha Sin Tin Chok* (a traditional tube skirt). *Tai Lue* textiles include the appearance in geometrical motifs, mythical animals floral depictions.

Consumer Research

The research findings on the preference of consumers aged between 28 and 44 whom expressed interest in textile products for living room decor revealed the following:

1. 73% of the respondents in Chiang Mai and 81% of those in Bangkok preferred textile products made with easy-care materials with a natural feel.
2. 71% of the respondents in Chiang Mai and 67% of those in Bangkok preferred textile products which have an affordable price.
3. 62% of the respondents in Chiang Mai and 70% of those in Bangkok preferred textile products containing vivid colors.

4. 69% of the respondents in Chiang Mai and 75% of those in Bangkok preferred modern styled patterns for textile products.
5. 76% of the respondents in Chiang Mai and 81% of those in Bangkok preferred contemporary *Lanna* textile products more than the original *Lanna* products.
6. 74% of the respondents in Chiang Mai and 79% of those in Bangkok preferred either the Mix & Match style, Contemporary Style or Retro Style in living room decor.

Patterns Created for Living Room Products

From the research it was found that consumers in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, preferred contemporary styled products made from easy-to-care-for materials with a natural feel and sold at an affordable price.

Following the research on the uniqueness of *Lanna* textile patterns they were altered to be used in conjunction with contemporary styled items for modern interiors. The color pallets used in these designs followed those from the Thai Creativity & Design Center – TCDC's (www.tcdc.or.th) publication titled “Trends of Design Spring – Summer 2012” which was based on their own survey of consumer preferences.

The resulting patterns were applied to textile products intended for living rooms of families consisting of two to five members. These new textile patterns were utilized in living room wall decorations and furnishings such as sofas, arm chairs, cushions, lamps, and coffee tables. They were grouped into sample collections named following the TCDC publication mentioned above as follows:

- *Local Culture* – whose emphasis is on local handicrafts, simplicity and traditionalism.
- *Positive Thinking* – whose focus is on nature, simplicity, delicacy and fluidity.
- *New Definition of Normal* – whose focus is on simplification, naturalism and technology. (Thailand Creative & Design Center: TCDC. “Trends of Design Spring – Summer 2012”).

The created patterns were digitally printed on commercially produced canvas and satin fabrics which provided a natural feel for the former and a soft feel for the latter. The digital outlines were extracted from the original *Lanna* patterns and were arranged into free form compositions by using various perspective and visual techniques such as overlap, warping, extension, dimensional shifts and optical illusion. Some utilized the original *Lanna* colors and others the ones from the 2012 TCDC publication as shown in figures 4 – 8.

The living room decor product collections were publicly exhibited in the Museum Hall of Chulalongkorn University from March 20th through and April 10th 2013 where visitor's opinions were collected. In general, visitors viewed these modern derivative designs based on the *Lanna* weaving traditions in a positive light.



Figure 4. Wall decoration made from textiles from Mae Chaem district, Chiang Mai province.



Figure 5. *Tai Lue* woven tube skirts from Ban Sri Don Chai district, Chiang Rai province.



Figure 6. The original pattern was rearranged resulting in a flowing free form according to local cultural trends by overlapping and rotation, but still retains the traditional red, black and yellow colors.

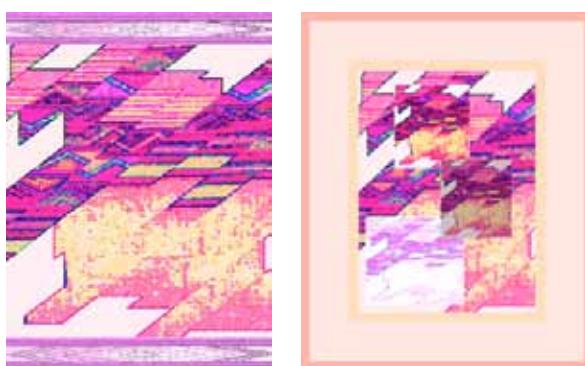


Figure 7. Original colors were replaced with a vivid pallet following the positive thinking trend resulting in framed artwork decorations.

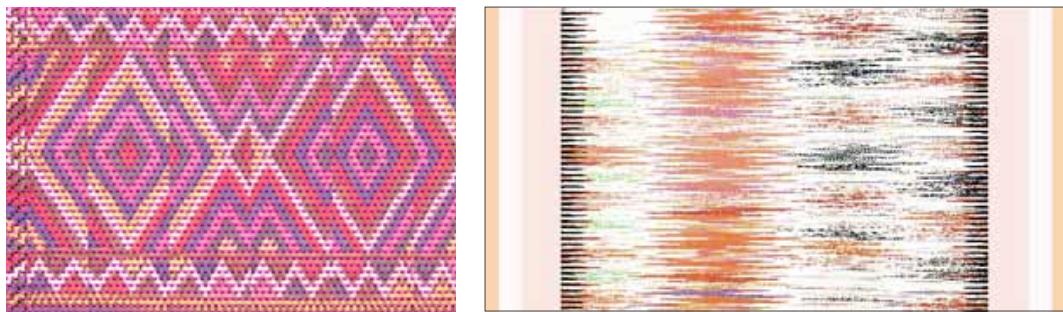


Figure 8. Left, details of the pattern were reduced and rearranged to make better visual sense of the textile with vivid colors following the *Positive Thinking* trend. Right, the original pattern was rearranged according to new definition following the *New Normal* trend.

Design Collection

Following the textile patterns developed from the research as shown above, the below are sample living room collections following the trends from 2012 TCDC publication integrated with the respondent's preferences from the author's consumer survey questionnaire.



Figure 9. Collection Retro - *Lanna* Style, Concept of design: To bring graphic illusion patterns from Op Art into a Retro style while maintaining the traditional *Lanna* pallet.



Figure 10. Collection Contemporary - *Lanna* style, Concept of design: To create a contemporary style according to the *New Definition of Normal* whose focus is on simplification.



Figure 11. Collection Mix & Match – *Lanna* Style, Concept of design: Take the style of local decoration in combination with the *New Definition of Normal* to derive beauty handicraft origins with materials produced by modern technology for affordability.



Figure 12. Collection Mix & Match - *Lanna* Style, Concept of design: To combine gentle and simple from the *Positive Thinking* trend to create a warm and relaxing atmosphere by using light, transparent fabric (lamp shades) and a vivid color pallet.

Conclusion

The research findings revealed that original woven patterns from *Lanna* traditional textiles could be successfully applied to contemporary furnishings and stylized for modern residential living by following 2012 product design trends. The unique patterns of the original weavings were extracted, digitized, rearranged and applied to a variety shapes while costs were contained through digital reproduction and printing on commercially available fabrics. Together these elements allowed the proposed furnishings to meet the preferences and budget of present-day consumers as the publicly displayed sample collections were met with a general level of approval in its migration of traditional *Lanna* pattern into contemporary homes.

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