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**THAI TEXTILE SOCIETY SUPPORTING
WEAVING COMMUNITY**

The Thai Textile Society aims to promote the understanding and support the continuation of weaving and other similar crafts in Thailand. In the past, the Society helped to put together a catalog of weaving samples for a handicraft school in Chiang Mai. The aim was to help to preserve traditional designs by using these samples to teach the students.

Currently, the Society is donating magnifying eyeglasses to the ageing community of weavers, who struggle to see their handiwork. A number of these were already given to those who need them, with continuing plans to help any weaver who may require these in the future. The pictures are seen here some of the recipients.



THE QUEEN’S GALLERY: A WEAVING OF BIRTHDAY WISHES

Text and pictures by Catherine Lynch

A group of Textile Society enthusiasts visited The Queen’s Gallery on 27th August to view an eclectic collection of woven items on display in honour of HM Queen Sirikit’s 87th birthday. We were grateful to Khun Chomporn who kindly substituted for Khun Wipawee at short notice to provide us with expert guidance.



Tribal Bags

The exhibition opened with a hanging forest of shoulder bags from the Northern and mountain-regions. Woven from raw cotton, flax and hemp, a gorgeous display of vivid colours surrounded us, enhanced by brocades with tassels, pom-poms and the use of seeds as natural beads, such as Job’s tears. Tribal textile art celebrates indigenous animist cosmology and there were many delightful images of birds, dragons, elephants and plants that would have had a spiritually protective function, often bordered by intricate geometric patterns. Buddhist communities may show *stupa* designs. Sourced from the Karen, White Tai, Akha, Mlabri, Lawa and Mon peoples (amongst others), many of these bags would have been crafted by women using traditional back-strap looms. Seeming more like an exotic emporium than an exhibition, it was difficult not to reach out and touch!



Animist detail



Job’s Tear seeds incorporated into textile design



Bag

The next display showed how traditional textiles can be developed into swashbuckling fashion statements.

Created by Poomchai Bumtiphat and Sirichai Taharanout with a theatrical élan reminiscent of John Galliano, the flair and details were remarkable, although such heavy fabrics are possibly not best suited to a tropical climate! A pot-pourri of draped, ruffled and patchwork textures, the designs incorporated traditional *mudmee*, hill-tribe embroidery, lace and brocades studded with beads, sequins and faux jewels.



Swashbuckling Style



Embroidery details

A group of *pha sin* (traditional Thai tube-skirts) showcased a variety of weaving techniques and fabrics including the familiar *mudmee* (Thai *ikat*), silk damask with supplementary weave, two-toned cotton and examples of decorative embroidery.



Particularly eye-catching (below) was an elegant damson, maroon and gold sarong, a stunning example of *mudmee* traditional technique. Using straw or banana string to tie-in the desired pattern so that the covered threads pass through the dyeing process untouched, the process can be repeated as necessary to add subtlety to the colours and complexity to the design. Dyed threads are then woven to produce the distinctive effect below, the pattern carried by weft, warp or both.



Mudmee sarong

A lovely surprise for many of us was the inclusion of fabrics from Myanmar. The sarong style was reminiscent of its Thai *pha sin* equivalent, however Khun Chomporn explained that the Burmese prefer a 'fish-tail' sweeping train at the back. What was surprising however was the colour palette: soft pinks and greens on a gentle beige-gold background. The

designs are also very distinct, sinuous and flowing, quite different to the more angular Thai style. These are the traditional designs once favoured by the Burmese Royal Court and known as *luntaya acheik*, much softer to the touch and more complex to weave than everyday fabric.



Burmese luntaya tapestry weave

Perhaps my favourite items of clothing however were the formal Thai dresses. Tangible heritage and perennially popular, all will have admired them gracing events such as weddings, dance performances and court ceremony. The most prestigious fabric for such formal wear is known as *yok dork*, an intricately woven silk brocade, extraordinarily sumptuous, often shot through with silver, gold and other iridescent colours. Designs feature intricate floral patterns with slender tapering geometrical shapes, the epitome of graceful Thai aesthetic. The fabric is said to have gained popularity during the reign of King Rama VI and is most often associated with Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Surin. The sophisticated looms used to create *yok dork* employ pedals that are up to 13 meters long and it can take many months to complete a length of fabric with as little as 6cm accomplished in a day. For ceremonial wear, the basic *pha sin* sarong is elaborated upon to produce a garment known as the *Thai Chakri* or *Siwali*, usually worn with a blouse, *sabai* shoulder cloth and metallic belt.



Formal wear with yok dork weaving





Yok dork detail

Moving away from clothing, an historic canopy from the Royal Barge *Suphannahongsa* was also on display. King Rama I revived the tradition of the royal barges at the beginning of the Bangkok era and *Suphannahongsa* was built to serve as the King's personal barge. It's figure-head is the sacred swan or goose, the celestial vehicle of Brahma and a familiar icon in Thailand. This canopy (or curtain) was made about 70 years ago to be hung on the wooden *mandapa* (spired enclosure) located the centre of the barge where the royals sat, it being made specifically for the women's section. The fabric is richly layered applique, including paper painted with gold.



Suphannahongsa Barge Canopy

Said to be from Arabia (or possibly made by Muslim weavers in India), we viewed a length of woven silver-plated wire. Glinting under the lights and impressive in design, it was probably too stiff (and heavy?) to be worn, however it would have had prestigious decorative value. It reminded some of us of the 'Cloth

of Gold' (or silver) reputed to have been prized by Medieval European monarchs.



Silver Cloths

The art of weaving is of course not limited to fabric. The exhibition included a display of woven Thai hats, including a huge basket-like hat with a very long back that Khun Chomporn explained was made from palms and traditionally used to protect the necks of rice-farmers from the beating sun.

Another personal highlight were the shirts printed with *yant* magical designs. Weaving is used throughout Asia as a metaphor for magic and the creation of the manifest world of form and pattern from a fundamentally ‘empty’ Unity. These shirts are therefore not just woven with threads, but soaked with the power of incantations, prayers and spells to bring desired states and objects into manifestation. *Yant* derive from Indian spiritual practices brought to SE Asia by *rishis* (Indian magicians and healers) and were particularly developed in Khmer times, which is why the writing is often old Cambodian. Such shirts (like the *sak yant* tattoo) would have been prized by men in dangerous professions (or criminals) to protect them from harm.



Magical Yant drawn on a shirt



Long-backed hat for farmers

The best was saved for last. Excitement was generated as a television camera crew filmed the unfolding of three large lengths of cloth, reputed to have been saved from Ayutthaya times approximately 250 years ago and put on display for the first time. It was explained that these sumptuous cloths were made on the Coromandel Coast (South India) to a Thai design, finely woven and then hand-painted in extraordinary detail. The preservation of quality and rich colour was remarkable and drew gasps of admiration. A lattice of exquisite *theppanon* (angelic beings) occupy the centre panel and expertly painted, gracefully tapering shapes form the borders. It is unknown exactly which King commissioned these cloths, but their Royal provenance is evidenced by their design and it is thought they would have been used as Royal *pha kao ma* (loincloths). In that era only natural dyes were available and made from items that could be collected from the forest, such as annatto seeds, insects, indigo, jack-fruit wood, almond leaves, cumin root and jungle vine. Dye-stuffs were either boiled with the silk threads before weaving or painted directly onto the cloth.

Fortunately, for posterity, it would appear that these particular examples were not actually worn and were kept in storage to survive the fall of Ayutthaya.



Royal Ayutthaya silk

Many thanks to our guide Khun Chomporn and the organisers Ruth Gerson and Khun Tom. An interesting morning, full of woven skill, historical surprises and a little light shopping conducted at the quality fabric stalls adjacent to the exhibition.



GORYEO DYNASTY KOREAN PAINTINGS ON SILK AND OTHER TEXTILES

Text and photos by John Toomey

The Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) was founded by General Wang Geon, a rebel, who rose against the dominant state of the Korean peninsula - the Shilla Dynasty. General Wang succeeded in uniting the Early Three Kingdoms of the fractured peninsula whose people belonged to the same race and spoke the same language, and named his dynasty Goryeo, from which the modern name Korea is derived. Goryeo created a distinctive open cultural milieu by encouraging dynamic cultural exchanges with far-flung foreign realms as well as neighboring countries during a time of political and economic upheaval when the neighbors were in competition with one another. Although the Goryeo Dynasty could not reclaim lands lost to China, it achieved a sophisticated culture represented by a vibrant tea culture which used *cheongja* or blue-green celadon cups and pots, in both the court and monastery, and a flourishing Buddhist tradition that permeated the lives of the Goryeo people, especially noted for its refined Buddhist paintings on silk adorned with cut gold.



Silk Case for Sutra of Great Enlightenment 1375, at the Sutra Repositories at Heansa Temple, the world's fullest collection of Buddhist scriptures, The Tripiaka Koreana.



Silk with Treasure and Peony Design in gold thread

From a technical perspective, an important feature unique to the Buddhist paintings of the Goryeo Dynasty was the technique of painting on the reverse of the silk as well as on the front. The Water Moon Kuanum (Avalokitesvara, the compassionate Bodhisattva) is an example of this. The colors were thus filtered through the silk before they reached the viewer, and presented a more subtle and subdued effect, contrasting with the striking primary colors painted on the front. In the case of this painting, the majority of the paint is on the back of the silk, and the front is mainly used for outlines and the finer details. Colors that required mixing, such as the color of skin, were achieved by painting different colors on the front and back – e.g. gold and flake white – to produce the mixed effect.

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Water Moon Avalokitesvara, 14th century color on silk, Musee Guimet, Paris (Source: Wikipedia.)



Water Moon Avalokitesvara, Horim Museum, Seoul

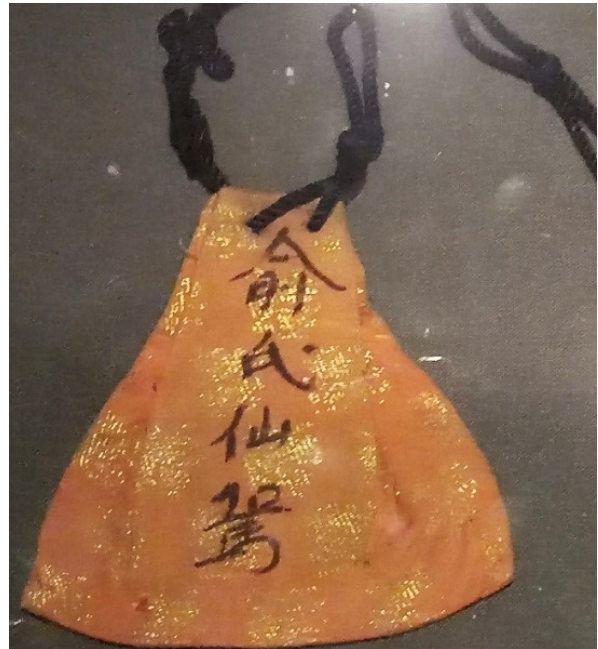
The Water Moon Avalokitesvara has a long history of portrayal in Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan, but its most delicate and dynamic depiction comes from the Goryeo Dynasty, the same early Mahayana

Buddhist Korean culture that produced the world's most beautiful blue-green celadon and many of the finest mother-of-pearl inlaid lacquer ware, much in demand in China and Japan at the time. This culture also produced the world's first books printed using moveable metal type settings, long before Gutenberg. The superior quality of goods produced by the Goryeo is a symbolic indicator of its cultural position in Medieval East Asia

Goryeo Buddhist paintings on silk are widely seen as among the most beautiful religious art in the world. Their delicate and graceful forms are indicative of the high aesthetic standards of the Goryeo people; their brilliant primary colors, resplendent gold pigments and beautiful, yet powerful, flowing lines combined to create an unparalleled world of beauty in the East Asia of the day. There are two special points about the technique of these paintings that intrigue those who view them: 1) to intensify the watery aspect, certain areas of these paintings were painted from behind the silk and others from the front. 2) In some areas of the paintings, the gold lines were not painted. These paintings were all decorated with very thin cut gold called in Japan (which now owns most of these paintings) *kirikane* (the term most writers now use), applied to the garments of Avalokitesvara and other celestials in the paintings.

The most comprehensive exhibition of the extant paintings of the Water Moon Avalokitesvara to date was included in *Masterpieces of Goryeo Buddhist Painting, A Long Lost Look after 700 Years*, held at the Seoul National Museum from October 12 to November 21, 2010. The curators had gathered works of Korea's Goryeo Dynasty from museums in Korea, Japan, Paris, Berlin, Cologne, New York, Washington DC, and Cleveland, as well as China, Russia and Central Asia. The highlight of the exhibition was Master Hyeheo's solemn and graceful Water Moon Avalokitesvara. Many of these works had been out of Korea for 700 years.

Daily life in the world of Goryeo textiles involved more than just Buddhist paintings of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas on silk. The following illustrations show other Goryeo Dynasty textiles that were part of *The Glory of Goryeo* (the title of the exhibition, which displayed these textiles March 2019 at the Seoul National Museum).



Silk pouch for amulet embroidered with owner's name Yu and wishing him a safe journey



Two Embroidered Silk Pouches

Among the other textiles in the exhibit, there is an interesting small drawstring silk pouch, embroidered with ancient Chinese characters that indicate that it belonged to a high-ranking man or nobleman named "Yu". It was most probably a container for an amulet to protect him during his "Celestial Journey" and was kept in Mr. Yu's vehicle, which was a litter, palanquin or a cart to protect him and ensure his safety while he was in his journey. This high-ranking noble would most likely have had a heavenly cart, as he was the person who may have helped General Wang Geon rebel and overthrow the old Shilla kingdom and establish him as Emperor of the new Goryeo Dynasty.



8th King of Hell, color on silk, Goryeo or Southern Song, Metropolitan Museum, N.Y.



Amitabha color on silk with Kirikane cut gold, 14th Century, Museo Delle Civita

UNIVERSE OF SIRIVANNAVARI

By Bangkok Blogger Little Wandering Wren -
Jenny Littlewood



Come with me and wander through the fabulous exhibition "Universe of Sirivannavari - from Paris to Bangkok," displaying H.R.H. Princess Sirivannavari's fashion creations. I adore all the exhibitions that I have stumbled across in Central Embassy shopping mall, and this audio and this audio-visual extravaganza was a particular delight.



I only popped in for a pint of milk and was feeling somewhat underdressed as I suddenly found myself transported into the High Society Haute Couture fashion world.

I pull aside the heavy velvet curtain to find a deliberately dim interior. This forms a perfect entrance to the bright, modern, and oh so stylish, life of the multi-talented Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya, the daughter of King Vajiralongkorn of Thailand.

It is a real sensation! Along each wall are ten mannequins. Their quiet statuesque presence is in stark contrast to the busy video backdrop. On the exhibition's ceiling and walls are projected ever-changing images of flowers and Thai motifs. The Princess takes her inspirations from various sources, and her designs are colourful, creative and as intriguing as the display.



The fast-paced multimedia kaleidoscope of colours shows Princess Sirivannavari at work sketching her designs. She had developed her passion for textiles and clothing design while she was a student at Chulalongkorn University and at L'Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne in Paris.

Each of the ten collections deserves special attention: Presence of the Past (2008), Ethnic Rock (2009), Human DNA (2014), Napoleonic (2015), Mystical Garden (2016), Serenity (2017), Horse, Helen, Henri (2018), Naravanna (2019), and S'Homme (2019), and a special collection called “The Way of Silk, The Way of Thai” (2015). The names of the collections are intriguing and tell a story. For example, the title ‘Horse, Helen, Henri’ is calling for attention. It originates from a poem the Princess had written, a love story between a young military officer and a farm girl at the end of World War II. It drew on inspiration from the countryside, with poppy flowers, a horse, buzzing bees and a typewriter in their midst.



I walk along admiring each fancy frock. Beside each is a pair of carefully matched shoes. Would it not be wonderful to be walking in the shoes of the lucky owners of these outfits? Not being one who customarily wears designer clothes, I found these outfits appealing and approachable, unlike some creations that make you wonder who would have the courage to wear them.





I love the ultra-feminine designs of the Sirivannavari Collection and its signature graphic prints. For the embroidery lovers among us, have a close look at the fine and intricate embroidery on the fabrics. The Sirivannavari Embroidery Academy produces the beautiful embroidery used for these and all other fashion creations. Fabrics include Thai silk with traditional patterns, produced in Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Centre that Her Majesty Queen Sirikit had set up for preserving Thai crafts

Maison Sirivannavari Bangkok may be well known in Bangkok and in the fashion industry, but for me it was the first introduction to the Princess's signature designs of unique graphic prints and avant garde silhouettes. It has developed into a broad ranging collection that includes active wear, accessories, jewelry and footwear.

I might be known as “Five frocks Wren” in Bangkok due to my limited wardrobe, but I can appreciate exquisite clothing when I see it. I hope you have enjoyed this little wander with me!

Photo Credits: All photographs courtesy of the Public Relations Office at Central Embassy, Bangkok.

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GENDER BENDING FASHION
An exhibition
Text and photos by Ruth Gerson



Fashion has been defined for centuries by the gender wearing it prescribed by culture, religion, education and numerous other factors giving rigid definition to male and female cloths. However, there were always those who tried to “break the mold” by creating their own fashion, ignoring societal rules imposed on them. There have been women attired in tailored men’s clothing while men who donned colorful flowing feminine apparel. These trends have been evident in haute couture, ready-to-wear and in plain street cloths. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston has recently highlighted transgender fashion calling it “Gender Bending Fashion,” tracing the history of such trends and bringing to the foreground well-known personalities who defied fashion norms, making their own personal fashion statement.



The exhibition’s brochure defines the displays as, “Boundary-pushing contemporary designs that appear in dialogue with historical garments, exploring moments when people have disrupted, blurred and sought to transcend concepts gendered clothing over

the last century.” And indeed, the exhibition has followed that format, featuring historical and contemporary pieces, emphasizing that transgender fashion is not something new, but has been part of Western society for a long time.

In the 20th century, there have been women who wore men’s tuxedos and day suits, as was part of Marlene Dietrich's stage persona during the 1930s and 1940s, and later by Katherine Hepburn, whose strong personality carried comfortably her masculine tailored suits, defying what women of her time were expected to wear. Women began wearing masculine styled riding habits as early as in the 17th century with tailored jackets and shirts, and by the 20th century, the many female office workers wore tailored suits. The two World Wars were also contributors towards the gender blurring dressing, as many women participated in the war efforts, working in factories dressed like men. In 1966, French designer Yves Saint Laurent created a tuxedo-like jacket for women in tune with the female emancipation movement. His style became somewhat controversial, as the models with their short- cropped hair appeared androgynous. The term unisex came into being, moving away from specific gender defined clothing.



As for male fashion, actor David Bowie owned a wardrobe of gender blurring outfits, which he wore in the 1960s and 1970s. He accessorized high-heeled platform shoes and heavy makeup to complement these outfits and seemed truly comfortable with his image. Some well-known designers capitalized on the

gender bending such as Jacques Esterel who proposed skirts for men in the 1960s, and his trainee Jean Paul Gaultier who shot to fame had offered gender blurred fashions, as had other famous designers.



Gender bending new fashions were generally driven by young people, making their own statements at various historical times, occasionally politically motivated at other times just expressing the rebellious nature of youth. Three such periods were identified, times when a significant change in fashion appeared, perhaps a reaction to what was happening in society in those years. We are looking at the 1920s, the 1960s and the 1970s. In 1920, women got the right to vote, a monumental achievement that was reflected in women wearing men’s clothing, emphasizing their newly acquired equal status. The Hippie era of the 1960s truly blurred borders, including the way people dressed. The movement began as a protest against the Vietnam War and became in time a sub-culture in American history. The ensuing 1970s marked the beginning of the fun loving Disco Era that went on into the 1980s. These eras represented radical change in fashion, introducing similarly outrageous clothing.

Colorful prints and designs entered male fashion over the years but as the new millennium entered, all stops seem to have been pulled out and daring designs for men appeared. Gender blurring fashion is gaining popularity right now, in a society that is youth driven such as the Millennials and Generation Z, young people who are less inhibited by expressing themselves through social media and seem to be comfortable the way they are, including gender bender dressing.



IKATS IN THE LESSER SUNDA ISLANDS

By Jenny L. Spancake

Photographs By Steven C. Spancake

(Part 1)

In May 2019 my husband Steve and I visited the Lesser Sunda Islands of Indonesia. We have lived for a number of years in Malaysia and Thailand and during that time we have become very interested in the technique of ikat. We have collected textiles over the last thirty years, predominantly the weft ikats of mainland Southeast Asia, mostly done in silk but with some in cotton. But we wanted to learn about the warp ikat of Southeast Asia, predominately woven in insular Southeast Asia, done in cotton. When we began to look for a trip that would focus on textiles, particularly in the island villages not easily reached, we saw a cruise led by David and Sue Richardson. As a member of the Oxford Asian Textile Group, I was familiar with the Richardsons; although I had never met them, I had read their articles and blogs because of that membership. The Richardsons have been traveling to Indonesia and studying the textiles there since the late 1980s. Here was the opportunity we had been looking for and after some years missed due to schedules, last May we finally traveled to the Lesser Sunda Islands in Indonesia with David and Sue on the Ombak Putih. (Photo1)



1. The Ombak Putih

My approach in this article will be to give some very general information on culture and dyeing, then to look at some of the places we visited. I am giving so little of the available information that I very much hope that this article will inspire you to go to some of

the sources I will mention and read all about these fascinating cultures. David and Sue Richardson are a good source of information through their website asiantextilestudies.com. Everything in this article stems from the information provided by the Richardson both on their website and through their trip handouts as well as a number of books that I will cite. None of what follows is original work and is completely based on the work of those authors cited. Any errors are of course my own.

The Lesser Sundas

The Lesser Sunda Islands are a part of the country of Indonesia. Perhaps the best introduction to all of the textiles of Indonesia is Mattiebelle Gittinger’s *Splendid Symbols: Textiles and Traditions in Indonesia*. Indonesia stretches over 3,500 miles and is made up of somewhere between 13,466 islands and 18,307 depending on the source. There are more than 350 ethnic groups, many of those with subdivisions. Learning about all Indonesian textiles is a task beyond one human’s capability. We visited just one small part of Indonesia – The Lesser Sunda Islands – located in an arc east of Java. The main islands running from west to east are Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa, Flores, Sumba, Timor, Alor archipelago, Barat Daya Islands, and Tanimbar Islands. So out of this one smaller part of the larger country, we visited just a small portion – Flores, Sumba, Timor and the Alor archipelago.

Textiles in the Culture of the Lesser Sundas

Textiles play an important role in the culture of the Lesser Sunda Islands. They have a role in each part of the life cycle ceremonies. A great deal of study has been done on this area and I will only present a few aspects of this available information. Many of the ethnographic museums of Europe, particularly the Dutch, sent scholars to study the islands beginning in the nineteenth centuries so the history of studying these relationships is a long one. Mattiebelle Gittinger states: “The most important use of textiles is as gifts. This importance comes both from their real value and from their symbolic value as the product of women. For many Indonesian groups, textiles have sacred origins in myth and legend, and this aura is never completely lost. Their role as gifts, however, is rigidly controlled by customary rules and practices” (*Splendid Symbols*, p. 19). Dr. Gittinger has written the best summary of textiles and culture for this part of the world.

Most but not all textiles that we saw on this trip are created using the technique of ikat. Ikat should be familiar to those living or studying Southeast Asia. Ikat is a technique of textile patterning. Before weaving, the design is created by a form of resist dyeing (Photo 2).



2. Tied threads before dyeing

Areas of the threads are tied, dyed, and then retied depending on the pattern as often as is needed to create the pattern desired. The design can be tied into the warp, the weft, or both the warp and the weft, known as double ikat. Generally speaking, weft ikat is done using silk in mainland Southeast Asia with the addition of Sumatra and Bali, while warp ikat is done in insular Southeast Asia. I am only speaking about Southeast Asia. When warp ikat is done and the threads are placed on the loom before weaving, the pattern is readily apparent in the warp (Photo 3). Cotton is used for this ikat and is produced locally and we often saw the entire process demonstrated (Photo 4).





3. Ikat on the loom



4. Cotton production

However, this is a time-consuming process, so today a good deal of commercially produced cotton is used. The textiles are woven on a backstrap loom throughout the area. Dyeing traditionally was done using natural dyes, although also today synthetic dyes are often used. The most common dyes were indigo for blue and morinda for red (Photo 5).



5. Threads dyed with indigo and morinda

I will discuss these two dyes with some detail before discussing different locations as they are a common thread with almost all of the weavers visited.

One particularly important aspect of ritual use is textiles as part of bridewealth. When a marriage is negotiated between families, male and female goods are exchanged as part of the ritual of marriage. Textiles are the female side of the exchange, while jewellery, elephant tusks (Photo 6)



6. Elephant tusks in clan house

and ivory bracelets are the male side. Ruth Barnes titled one of her articles on the textiles of Lembata, “Without Cloth, We Cannot Marry.” Detailed discussions of these exchanges can be found in a number of publications as the specifics vary according to the island and ethnic group. The general principle is a basic one.

Textiles also play an important role in death rituals. On Sumba as just one example on death a Sumbanese of high rank may be wrapped and buried in over a hundred *hinggi* which will protect the soul from malevolent forces and identify the deceased to the ancestors in the next world. We saw coffins draped in textiles waiting for the community to gather enough resources to bury the dead (Photo 7).



7. Coffins draped with *hinggi*

Indian textiles had a large influence on the textiles of all of Southeast Asia, the Lesser Sundas included. If one looks at the layout of many textiles, it is possible to see the same general layout as that of the *patola* with a central field surrounded by borders. If the layout is not present, there are often motifs that are derived from *patola* patterns. But despite being able to see this influence, today’s weavers rather interpret the patterns as deriving from their own ancestors. Of course, these ancestors did see the *patola* patterns and used them as a source to create their own traditional patterns. Illustrated here is a textile made in Nggela by Mama Ango (discussed below) where the echoes of the *patola* design can be clearly seen (Photo 8).



8. Mama Ango and sarong with *patola* pattern

Indigo

Indigo is popular throughout all of Southeast Asia. It is used to create a wide range of the color blue as well as being used in combination with other natural dyes to create other colors, including green. One of the most time-consuming parts of textile production is the number of times cotton must be dipped to create the desired shade of blue, especially if a deep blue or blue black is the desired result.

The origins of dyeing with indigo stretch far into the past. Indigo grows wild in most of the tropics including the Lesser Sundas. Today it is both collected from the wild and also cultivated. Indigo works well on cotton. It is a direct dye and does not require a mordant, which is needed to bind most natural dyes to the material being dyed. But indigo is insoluble, and the work here is to transform the plant into a form that will directly dye cotton. On our trip we saw a number of demonstrations of indigo dyeing. The plant used most often in the Lesser Sundas is *indigofera tinctorial*. As mentioned above, an excellent resource for a much more detailed description of the indigo dyeing process

including the chemistry involved, please go to the Richardsons’ website asiantextilestudies.com. My description below is based on this website.

Indigo is cut, allowed to wilt, and then steeped in a clay pot for a day or two. After removing the hard bits of the plant, the liquid must be fermented for a few days. Fermentation depends on the presence of alkali-loving bacterium in the plant itself which must be encouraged by the addition of nutrients such as burnt coral or shell, lime or plant ash for alkali and molasses, sugar, cooked rice, tapioca, pineapple, banana and other items for sugar are added to feed the bacteria. When the mixture turns a clear greenish-yellow, the reduction is complete and can now be used for dyeing (Photo 9).



9. Indigo in green liquid stage

Indigo can be processed to a dried state where it can be kept for later use (Photo10). I imagine most every reader has seen the amazing process of the tied cotton threads being dipped into an indigo vat, agitated, sometimes left steeping for a time, then removed. On hitting the air, the miracle of those green threads meeting the oxygen in the air and turning blue never fails to amaze me (Photos 11, 12, 13).



10. Dried prepared indigo



11. Bubbling pot of indigo

TTS website
www.thaitextilesociety.org





12. Dyeing with indigo



13. Dyeing with indigo - color change

The amount of time steeping and the number of times the cotton is dipped in a fresh solution of indigo creates the blue color desired. It can take years to create the color blue desired by the weaver for the creation of her textile. Each village has its own formula for the mixture as well as the sequence of dipping, soaking, and drying between dips (Photo 14), not to mention any pretreatment before dyeing that might be used.



14. Tied threads dyed with indigo hanging to dry

One thing to remember is that although indigo dyes cotton relatively easily, it is a surface dye. Because it is a direct dye, it does not chemically bind with the dyed threads. If you look at well-worn work jeans, you can see the parts of the jeans where the indigo has rubbed off through daily use, or in those expensive jeans where the indigo is artistically rubbed to create the desired look.

So much could be written about indigo and it has been. I have just highlighted a few aspects of the process that I find particularly interesting. There is a great deal more scientific information to be found and I have not discussed the wide range of beliefs associated with dyeing with indigo. Generally indigo dyeing has been a female occupation, although we did meet with a male dyer in Sumba. Often the details of the process of indigo dyeing, and this is true of all other natural dye processes, are often held as a secret to be passed from mother to daughter. If you are interested in reading more about indigo, please see the website above as well as Jenny Balfour Paul's book on indigo. An excellent film about indigo around the world is *Blue Alchemy*. A weaver's hands can show her use of indigo (Photo 15).



15. Indigo hands

Morinda

In Asia a number of plants are used to produce red. In Thailand we are most familiar with lac, an insect dye that creates a beautiful red on silk. Madder is another dye, familiar to all who study oriental carpets. But in the Lesser Sundas, morinda (*morinda citrifolia*) is the primary dye used to produce a wide range of the color red. The dye is produced from the roots of the morinda tree (Photo 16),



16. Cleaning outer bark of morinda root

although in some cases it looks more like a bush. At a demonstration in the Helong area of Timor presented by a small cooperative we saw the process as it was done in that village and the photos used as illustrations were taken there. The roots of the tree are the dye source; this presents a possible ecological problem. If you take too much of the roots too often, the tree will die. It is generally believed that no more than one-third of the roots should be taken. However,

this has not always been practiced and some areas have suffered a short fall of the dyestuff. After washing, the roots are stripped down to an area where you can quite easily see the color change (Photo 17).

Large amounts of the roots are needed to produce a rich red color. One estimate suggests that 300 tons are annually consumed by all of Indonesia. “When dyers need a deep morinda shade they had to repeat the dyeing process up to twenty times, which consumed around 120 kg of root per textile. Almost thirty years ago Fraser-Lu estimated that in Flores it could take up to 27 kg of morinda root to produce enough dye for the sarong (Richardsons, asiantextilestudies.com, Morinda).



17. Shaving off root for dye

Yet morinda root alone is not sufficient to dye; it is a dye that needs a mordant which is a chemical that will fix the color to the thread, in this case cotton. In the Lesser Sundas, the leaves from the *Symplocos* tree are most commonly used for this purpose. These leaves are rich in aluminum which the tree draws from the soil; dried leaves produce an effective mordant. But still more natural products are needed. The cotton must be prepared for dyeing by soaking in a vegetable oil. The most common oil used in the Lesser Sundas is that from the nuts from the candlenut tree (Photo18).

First the cotton is washed in alkaline water, removing the dirt and other adhesions from the thread. Then the cotton is soaked in a mixture of candlenut oil, an alkali from wood ash or lime and leaves rich in aluminum, usually the *Simplocos* tree.



18. Nuts from the candlenut tree

The morinda roots are prepared by removing the outer bark as noted above and then dried. As one might expect, the process varies from village to village with all of the secrets kept within dyers' families. The dried morinda root is mixed with water and pounded into a pulp (Photo 19), which is then soaked in water, pressed to remove the excess water (Photo 20), then pounded again, and the cycle with added water begins again. This continues until the dyer is satisfied with the mixture, generally four to five times. At some point dried leaves from the *Symplocos* tree are added. Threads of Life, a group based in Ubud, are now selling packages of leaves in powdered form which has been quite helpful to villages that do not have access to the trees.



19. Pounding morinda root



20. Pounded morinda returned to water

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Now the cotton is dipped into the mixture, which has used at one point in the process all of the materials illustrated in Photo 21. One dip produces a pale pink; so as noted above and as with indigo, the threads must be repeatedly dipped.



21. Ingredients for dyeing with morinda

This repeated process requires fresh dye. After the color desired is achieved, the threads will be rinsed with water. Here is the final chemical mystery of the dye process. Each water source has its own unique mineral content. This is possibly why certain villages can produce a much more brilliant red; the water combined with that village’s knowledge.

The above explanations of indigo and morinda dyeing are very simplified here but I wanted to just indicate the complexity of the processes. A large amount of labor goes into the process of using natural dyes, including the collection of all the materials needed for the process. It is easy to understand the seductive promise of synthetic dyes, especially when a weaver producing a cloth that requires a great deal of labor other than the dyeing, including the time to tie the ikat repeatedly, and weave the cloth must sell that cloth at a price that will cover the time spent on it. If she can produce three textiles with synthetic dyes and simplified patterns in the time it takes to produce one with natural dyes and complex patterns, can she justify the time consumed? Consumers must be willing to acknowledge this effort in the price we will pay for the finished product.

(End of Part 1 – Part 2 of this article will be printed in the Thai Textile Newsletter Spring 2020)

ABOUT US

The Thai Textile Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and appreciation of textiles, with particular emphasis on the textiles of Thailand and Southeast Asia. Based in Bangkok, the Thai Textile Society was founded in 2004, when Kathleen Florence Johnson, wife of U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Darryl Johnson, invited scholars, collectors, and other textile enthusiasts to establish a society dedicated to the study, appreciation, and preservation of the textile arts in the kingdom and the region.

Under the leadership of President

Dr. Sathirakorn Pongpanich, the Society continues to host regular educational programs designed to promote appreciation of Asia’s rich textile heritage. The Steering Committee organizes regular lectures, trips, and other programs such as its popular Collector’s Corner series. Membership in the Thai Textile Society has grown steadily, and our emailing list now reaches more than 600 people worldwide.

The TTS enjoys and appreciates support from the Siam Society and the James H.W. Thompson Foundation.

