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# Heritage of Northern Thai Textiles

Thai textiles have become quite sought after, worldwide, Museum, collectors, tourists, exporters and importers and representatives of the fashion industry have discovered the unique beauty of Thai textiles. Whether they are sought for a new line of fashion or to decorate a home or as cultural material rich in the history and traditions of a people, Thai textiles appear ever more frequently on people's "must have" list.

Any attempt to catalogue the many types of textiles found in Thailand and to trace their origins, would require a book of some length; what follows is just a glimpse of five type of textiles found in Chiangmai and the "North". (Though these textiles are part of the "Northern" culture, it should be noted that for various reasons - cultural diffusion, centuries of immigration, etc. - similar textiles can be found throughout Thailand and neighboring countries.)

## Pha Zin Dteen Jok

The Pha Zin Dteen Jok is a more stylized version of the Pha Zin (sarong) traditionally the everyday outfit worn by Thai women. The Pha Zin Dteen Jok was, and in some places still is worn by women on special occasions. In the "North" most Pha Zin Dteen Jok were made of cotton, as only royalty was allowed to wear silk. Pha Zin Dteen Jok differ from the ordinary Pha Zin in that they have a special hem done in the Jok style (weaving technique). In the "North", the Pha Zin Dteen Jok, above the hem are characterized by horizontal stripes; and the bottom border of the Jok hem will be red. Pha Zin Dteen Jok worn by royalty were made of silk, often with gold or silver woven into the textile. (Laotian versions of the Pha Zin Dteen Jok have vertical stripes above the hem and the Jok border is not finished in red.)



## Pha Haw Khampee

This particular textile was primarily made by elderly women and given to the temple as an act of merit making. Though Pha Haw Khampee are still being made and can be seen during the annual merit-making ceremony at village temples (Guay Salaak), the art has been slowly dying out. Pha Haw Khampee were made to be used as covers for



palm-leaf religious texts, before paper and book-binding found their way into culture.

Pha Haw Khampee, usually made of cotton, were done in a combination of Khit, Wrapping and Twining techniques; the latter used to incorporate bamboo slats into the weavings. This textiles can further be recognized by a telltale string on one side - this was used to tie the manuscript cover securely.

### **Pha Ched Noi**



Traditionally, young women would weave a textiles for their sweethearts. This textile was known as Pha Ched Noi; the young men would wear this gift over their shoulders when they went courting. (It was not uncommon for some young men to receive more than one of these Pha Ched Noi.) Pha Ched Noi were made of cotton (using the Khit weaving technique), and the most common patterns were horse, elephant and geometric motifs. Each village had its own distinct style, varying in the amount of decorations and the colors used.

### **Pha Lop**

Pha Lop were made to be used as bedsheets. These were made from large pieces (usually two) of white cotton; occasionally they were made from silk. At each end of the Pha Lop, decorations were woven, usually using the Khit technique. The most common colors used for the end borders were black, red and yellow, Pha Lop varied according to the village and ethnic group, and the variation was characterized by the amount of decoration. Most patterns were geometric designs.



### **Yaam**

Yaam, or Thoong Yaam, are shoulder bags and they are made and used by Northern Thais, ethnic Tai, and all of the hilltribes. They are made in different sizes, ranging from purse size to bags large enough to carry the contents of a fair-sized briefcase. The traditional Yaam used by Northern Thai is a white cotton bag with black vertical stripes. With the exception of the bags made by the Karen Hilltribe, which are quite similar to the traditional Thai Yaam in color and design, the Yaam made by the major Hilltribe groups are far



more elaborate, more colorful with geometric patterns. The Yaam , as a traditional Thai textiles is in no apparent danger of disappearing, as they are still used by many Thais and tribal people, and they are popular with visitors to the North.

In Thailand and elsewhere in Asia, traditional textiles and the people who possess the knowledge to produce them have been slowly disappearing; an increasing availability of cheap, mass-produced alternatives has been a major cause of this unfortunate phenomenon. Fortunately however, the growing awareness, among nations, of the importance of preserving one's traditional heritage has reversed this trend.

This awareness, coupled with an international appreciation for their beauty and uniqueness, should insure the continued existence of Thailand's traditional textiles.