

The Modernization of Paj Ntaub in China

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Background Information

- ❖ Eight students and two faculty members traveled to 16 Hmong villages to conduct qualitative research in Yunnan Province during July 2012.
- ❖ The project was funded by The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire International Fellows Program and AsiaNetwork.
- ❖ My focus was to learn about the history and practices of Paj Ntaub. Paj Ntaub is a general term used for stitch work that includes textile art for clothing, accessories, and artwork in general.
- ❖ This was qualitative research through dialogue and group interpretation that took place in Hmong and English.
- ❖ We visited 16 villages as a group but I spoke with villagers from only 13 villages.

Importance of Paj Ntaub

- ❖ Commonly done by women as a way to maintain tradition and for recreation.
- ❖ In recent decades Paj Ntaub- Story Cloths have been produced from refugee camps telling the story of the Hmong peoples' migration from Laos to Thailand after the Secret War (Ma, 2005).
- ❖ Traditionally Paj Ntaub shows the status of the person wearing it.
- ❖ The quality of the stitch work showed the ability of the woman; being able to sew durable stitches meant she would be a promising wife/daughter-in-law (Craig, 2010).
- ❖ While there has been research done on the Paj Ntaub and its history, in depth visual processes of batik has not been done. Batik is the process of making textile designs with bees' wax then dyeing the entire piece with blue dye. As the piece dries the bees' wax will peel, leaving the designs the same color as the fabric against the blue dye.

Findings

- ❖ With the help of technology, making Paj Ntaub is a lot more convenient however the uniqueness of each outfit and stitch is becoming more rare
- ❖ Industrial machines are able to mass produce Paj Ntaub in a short amount of time and able to pleat a skirt in a few seconds when a skirt being pleated traditionally took hours.
- ❖ Though seamstresses are able to create a unique outfit with their own personal sewing machines, it is still not as unique as one made by hand because the Paj Ntaub textiles used by the seamstresses are manufactured by only a hand full of companies, ultimately resulting in similar Paj Ntaub with slightly different styles of the outfits.
- ❖ More recently, summer dresses and evening gowns with signature textiles have become very popular. The modern dress is a cross between a westernized summer dress, but because they are printed with Hmong Paj Ntaub textiles, they remain identifiably Hmong.
- ❖ Mechanization has potential to make Paj Ntaub a lost tradition.



Left: Due to illegalization of hemp, common fabrics used now for traditional outfits are cotton, polyester, and silk. Photo: Crystal Vang.

Right: A machine is used to pleat modern Hmong skirts. Photo: Crystal Vang.



Modern Production



Left: Paj Ntaub textiles and designs made into modern prom dresses and evening gowns. Photo: Crystal Vang.



Left: With technology and machines, Paj Ntaub and traditional skirts are being mass produced in a matter of hours. Photo: Crystal Vang.

Traditional Production



Above: A woman from Zos Hmoob Sua sews Paj Ntaub for a traditional outfit. Paj Ntaub for a skirt could take up to six months to sew. Photo: Crystal Vang.



Above: Bee's wax designs made onto Ntaub Maj. This process is known as batik, a form of Paj Ntaub. Instead of thread and needle, a utensil with bee's wax is used to draw designs onto the fabric. Then it is completely washed in blue dye. As the fabric dries the bee's wax peels off, leaving behind white designs against the blue fabric. Photo: Crystal Vang.



Above: On the left is a traditional Hmong Sua outfit stitched with thread and Paj Ntaub. On the right is a Traditional Hmong Sua outfit made through batik with bee's wax designs and blue dye. Photo: Crystal Vang.



Above: The rind on the hemp plants was used to make thread for Ntaub Maj. A hallucinogen, it is now illegal to grow in China. Photo: Crystal Vang.



Above: Looms were used to make Ntaub Maj. Ntaub Maj, also referred to Hmong's cloth was the fabric Paj Ntaub was traditionally stitched onto. Photo: Crystal Vang.



Right: Traditionally a skirt was pleated by hand with needle and thread to create folds in the dress. Photo: Crystal Vang.

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References

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