

Life and Work
Of
Mrs. Pranom Tapang

National Artist in the field of Visual Arts (Fine Arts – Art of Woven Fabric)

Mrs. Pranom Tapang was born on 1 August 1954 at Ban (Village) Na Mon, Tambon (Sub-district) Hua Thung, Amphoe (District) Long, Phrae Province. She is the second of the four children of Mr. Pan Tapang and Mrs. Kaewmool Tapang. She is married and has a son, Mr. Sutthipot Uttha.

Education

Pranom Tapang has had a passion for learning since her childhood. At 12, she learnt from her mother, her first teacher, how to weave cotton yarns and cloth for domestic use. She also learnt how to weave Tin-Chok cloth, an ancient art of Long District, from her aunt, Mrs. Boonyuang Uppatham, the second teacher in her life. She attended a primary school in the village. Unfortunately, her poor health and family's financial difficulties made it impossible for her to go beyond Grade 4. Yet, she never stopped learning. She took advantage of the existing education systems that were available, be it non-formal education, adult education or informal education. Life began to pick up when she was admitted as a student to an Arts and Crafts Centre of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit. She studied weaving at Bhubing Palace in Chiang Mai Province. After completing secondary education, she went on to study at Uttaradit Rajabhat University where she graduated with a bachelor of art degree in community development. She created so many beautiful pieces of Tin-Chok cloth and was so professionally successful that in 2003 she was conferred an honorary bachelor's degree (home economics) by Ramkhamhaeng University.

Work

Her formal education came to an abrupt end after completing Grade 4 at Ban Phai Lom School (now Namonwitthayakhan School) because her family was too poor. She then went to Bangkok with several of her friends and took a job as a domestic help. Being diligent and humble in her nature, she was treated kindly by her employer. However, for her frail health and small physique she found the work too hard and decided to return home. Later, she applied for another domestic job and went to work at an acquaintance's home in Chiang Mai Province for just over a year. She continued to work as a domestic help for a while but found life too hard. Realising that she was not cut out for it, she returned home to help her parents plough the field, grow rice and do other farm chores. She spent her spare time selling wares to local folks and learning weaving from her aunt, Mrs. Boonyuang Uppatham (now deceased). The aunt passed on the ancient art of Tin-Chok weaving of Long District, Phrae Province. She practised her art in an open space area under the raised house next door. When the old lady stopped for lunch, young Pranom would stealthily continue the work. The young woman produced beautiful results. Seeing her dedication and keen interest, the aunt decided to teach her Tin-Chok weaving techniques.

“I have enjoyed weaving ever since I could remember. I always saw my aunt weaving. During her lunch break, I would sneak into the house and continue her work. When she returned, I would ask her if I did alright. She said it was correctly and well done. I have been weaving ever since. It was the beginning of my training with my aunt.”

Pranom Tapang practised her weaving, and her products were in great demand. On 2 January 1979 she presented some samples of her traditional Tin-Chok patterned cloth to Her

Majesty Queen Sirikit on a royal visit to Phrae Province to graciously bestow a group flag on provincial village scouts. Sometime later, Her Majesty's representatives came to Pranom Tapang's home to inform her of Her Majesty's desire to promote Tin-Chok weaving among the villagers. A royally-sponsored fund was made available. The initiative was further taken up by government authorities responsible for community development in Amphoe Long. On 1 May 1989 the village committee set up a "Ban Na Mon Women Weavers Group" consisting of 15 members. The house of the village headman of Ban Na Mon was used as its headquarters with Pranom Tapang as Chairperson. With training regularly provided to interested locals and subsidized by the Department of Community Development and the Aid Fund of Thailand under Royal Patronage, the group attracted more members and generated more income especially during the post-harvest season. Soon the Ban Na Mon Women Weavers Group became known far and wide.

For more than 30 years Pranom Tapang has been involved in the conservation of traditional hand-made cloth. She set up a number of groups, such as Cloth-Weaving Group, Tin-Chok Cloth Restoration and Conservation Group, and Women's Cooperative for Naturally-Dyed Woven Cloth. The cooperative consisted of about 400 members, with mutually supporting networks in 17 provinces in the Lower and Upper Northern Regions. As President of Phrae Network Centre, she has been actively assisting and teaching members of the cooperative networks.

In 2000, thanks to the support given by Technical and Technological Centre for Local Textile under University of Chiang Mai Institute for Science and Technology Research and Development, she learnt how to better grow cotton, produce yarns and make cloth with natural dyes. She was able to revive and develop the natural indigo-dyeing technique. As a result, her cooperative groups expanded very fast. In 2008 Learning Centre for Mueang Long Chok Cloth and Natural Indigo Dyeing was set up.

Pranom Tapang was also responsible for the creation of several other groups, including Ban Na Mon Women's Group (1979-1996), Ban Pranom Tin-Chok Cloth Weaving Group (1995-present), Agricultural Women's Group (1996-1997), and Weaving Group Network of Amphoe Long, Phrae Province (1998-present). Other establishments came into being under her leadership, e.g. Educational Museum (1999-present), Agricultural Technology Transfer and Service Centre (1999-present), Women's Natural Dyeing Cooperative (2001-present), Homeworker's Group Network (2003-present), and Learning Centre for Mueang Long Chok Cloth and Natural Indigo Dyeing (2008-present).

Creative Career

Pranom Tapang taught Tin-Chok pattern weaving to members of women weavers of Ban Na Mon and to those from other villages and districts (Amphoe) of Denchai, Wangchin and Mueang. At that time the membership was more than 2,000 strong. The Ban Na Mon women weavers were able to generate considerable incomes during the post-harvest season and became well known to the rest of the country.

Pranom Tapang was chosen to receive further training on three separate occasions as a trainee in the royally-sponsored SUPPORT project at Bhubing Palace in 1984, 1986, and 1988. She became an ever more accomplished weaver.

One day, she came across a small piece of ancient cloth with half-completed patterns. Driven by her creative curiosity, she decided to complete the other half. She closely studied the patterns until she was able to work out the complex structure in its entirety.

With a natural thirst for knowledge, she developed and experimented new teaching methods designed to facilitate understanding and practice of the technique. Such a technique involves the use of equipment known as "Khao Fuem" in the design of the Tin-Chok pattern. Each Khao Fuem is complete in itself, thus making it possible to combine several Khao Fuem in an intricate continuity of patterns. Some of the ancient patterns are: Phak Waen pattern,

Kho Lai pattern, Nguang Nam Khu pattern, Nok Kin Nam Ruam Ton pattern, Samphao Loi Nam pattern, Bo Khanat pattern, Kha Kampung pattern, Kong Keng Son Nok pattern, and Tom Khruea pattern.

“In clothing weaving in the olden days you would have to use a porcupine quill or a sharpened stick to pull out and stitch one thread at a time. It would take one or two months to finish a piece of cloth. So, I was wondering how I could shorten the time and the villagers would make more money so that they would not abandon the craft. Eventually, I devised a technique called “Yok Khao” that is simple to execute and saves time.”

At the same time she began to consider how best to preserve all the ancient cloth patterns which might be lost with the passage of time, especially because people seemed to lose interest in or pay less attention to the subject. She devoted much of her time to studying cloth patterns, colours, and old weaving techniques. Her efforts finally bore fruit. She produced a large collection of ancient folk patterns, a testimony of ancient Thai heritage.

“Tin-Chok patterns of Amphoe Long are numerous, possibly in hundreds, notably Lai Lak patterns (major patterns). When people in the olden days saw doves, they would weave a picture of doves drinking together on a tree. When they saw red or orange ants, they would weave an ant-leg pattern. If they saw flowers, the pattern would be floral, vegetative, or jasmine. Newer patterns that were more recently designed include a heart-shaped pattern. We call them according to what they look like.”

Production was often based on ancient patterns. The patterns were closely studied, copied and reproduced. Thus, the cloth of Long District reflects an authentic ancient tradition. Sometimes, the weavers might include patterns taken from other places such as Hat Siao, Hat Sung, Phrae province, Nan province, and Uttaradit province. The cloth that bore such combinations was an amazing blend of colours and intricate patterns.

On scrutiny one would find Pranom Tapang’s work consisting of a series of fine and uniform cotton yarns with colours evenly distributed, reflecting a strong commitment and individuality of the artist.

Creative work

Pranom Tapang wove a piece of cloth made of pure gold with Chok lotus-flower patterns. The gold weighed seven kilograms. The work was commissioned by the Wat Tha Sung Committee of Uthai Thani Province to serve as a shroud for the body of the most venerable monk Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam of Wat Tha Sung, Uthai Thani province. The work is still on public display.

She participated in numerous national cloth-weaving contests, winning first-place or second-place awards. She became well-known, and her works have made the province of Phrae famous for cloth weaving. She created several new patterns that are beautiful and dazzling to look at. Several pieces of the work are on display at the museum and learning centres.

Dissemination to the Public in Thailand and Abroad

Because of her success and fame, Pranom Tapang and her weaving groups were invited to display their products to the public in Thailand and abroad on such occasions as trade fairs, demonstration events and exhibitions. Some important events were Royal Folk Arts and Crafts Centre Fair at Bang Sai, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya province, Royal Peacock Logo Design Event to uphold the Thai Silk Tradition, Exhibition on the Inventors' Day organised by the National Research Council, National Trade Fairs including One-Tambon One-Product (OTOP) fairs, Bangkok International Gift Fair and Bangkok International Houseware Fair (BIG&BIH), academic and technical conferences organised by universities, ministries and departments, as well as cultural and tourist promotion events organised by public and private sectors such as Cotton-Silk Cloth Exhibition at Chiang Mai University.

She exhibited her woven work in Holland, United States of America, and China. She was invited to study visit several countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, United States of American, Holland, and Japan.

Social Contributions

Besides marketing Tin-Chok products, Pranom Tapang has made important social contributions based on the lessons she learnt from her long years of struggle to overcome poverty and stand on her own feet. She dreams to see poverty eradicated and people have a decent work, earn enough money to support themselves, and live a happy and independent life. She started several post-harvest initiatives, teaching Tin-Chok weaving techniques to housewives and hill-tribe people in several areas in the Upper Northern Region. She also taught natural dyeing to network groups in 17 Northern provinces.

Forms of her social contributions:

1. Teaching natural dyeing techniques to networks of handicraft producers in the One-Tambon One Product (OTOP) project in 17 provinces in the Upper and Lower Northern Regions.
2. Teaching cloth weaving techniques and natural dyeing to various agencies and northern textile groups at Ban Phai Lom Cloth-Weaving Centre and upcountry.
3. Starting and developing projects on Tin-Chok cloth weaving of Amphoe Long and application of local materials for dyeing purposes; serving as a role model of Ban Na Mon Village; and making its products (Tin-Chok cloth) better known to other communities.
4. Acting as trainer and resource person on Tin-Chok weaving to various communities; invited by Phrae Provincial Community Office to speak on her life and career and how she overcame poverty and became a successful and well-off person.
5. Serving as chairperson of Ban Na Mon Weaving Group, advisor to various support groups at village and Tambon (sub-district) levels, groups that received budgetary support for Tin-Chok women weavers from the Department of Community Development.
6. Serving as a point of reference, providing information and support for students conducting studies on the subject at various research institutes and universities.

In view of her devotion to the public and social causes, her personality, and her passion for traditional arts and crafts, she has become one of the most distinguished personalities in the Northern Region. Recognised as a true conservationist of Thai culture and social values, she has been approached to serve on several committees, such as Committee of the Agricultural Technology Transfer and Service Centre of Amphoe Long, Phrae Province; Cultural

Committee of Amphoe Long, Phrae Province; Committee of the Learning Centre for Religion, Art and Culture, of Tambon Huathung, Amphoe Long, Phrae Province; Knowledge-Based OTOP Promotion Committee of Phrae Province, as well as assisting researchers from the Office of the National Research Council and acting as chairperson of Northern Region Textile Network and Ban Phai Lom Weaving Group of Tambon Huathung, Amphoe Long, Phrae Province since 19889. She was among the first group of teachers of Thai wisdom, for the Industry, Arts and Crafts (weaving) category, organised by the Office of the National Education Commission.

Pranom Tapang's accomplishments in traditional arts and crafts include a whole range of creative processes, from cotton growing, indigo growing, yarn making, weaving, and natural dyeing to designing and marketing. Her efforts have, thus, enriched and strengthened the community in such a way that good quality of life is enjoyed by all in line with His Majesty the King's principles of sufficiency economy and sustainable development.

“Continue the cloth-weaving tradition as a lasting treasure of the nation and intellectual property”

A lifetime of work, experience and natural curiosity has made Pranom Tapang an invaluable asset, a source of inspiration for other women villagers, and a role model for other artists who make their livings from cultural arts and crafts. A small humble woman from Amphoe Long, Phrae Province, still works as hard today as ever, teaching at the **“Learning Centre for Mueang Long Chok Cloth and Natural Indigo Dyeing”**. The learning centre consists of three parts: **Tin-Chok Cloth Museum, Indigo Dyeing Plant, and “Gao Muen” Garden of Dye Plants**. The museum houses a large collection of traditional Tin-Chok cloth of Amphoe Long, produced by Pranom Tapang, works that have won prizes and awards, as well as displaying woven cloths from other cultures and other regions, Thai and international. The indigo-dyeing plant is a source of learning for natural dyeing, especially natural indigo dyeing, while in the “Gao Muen” garden one will see a great variety of dye plants, a wealth of information for interested students, young people and women groups.

Pranom Tapang is a model teacher who passes on knowledge and information without expecting anything in return. Her passion and social contributions have attracted people far and wide to the Learning Centre for Mueang Long Chok Cloth and Natural Indigo Dyeing. The centre was formally opened on 28 May 2008 by Phrae Provincial Governor Mr.Pongsak Plaivej, 2nd Lieutenant Designate, and Chiang Mai University Rector Professor Dr. Pongsak Angkhasith. The objectives of the learning centre are to facilitate an exchange of learning, to enhance the quality of natural indigo dyeing, to disseminate knowledge and information on local traditional cloth-weaving production of Tin-Chok of Long District as well as on natural dyeing in all its aspects, to enhance income-generating capacity of the community in line with the principle of sufficiency economy, and to conserve and propagate local wisdom of Tin-Chok cloth weaving of Long District and natural indigo dyeing.

In this spirit Pranom Tapang has worked tirelessly to link cloth-weaving activities with community development. In 2008 under her leadership local people organised a weaving activity to make robes for monks in a ceremony called “Chunla Kathin”. The event is now held annually, allowing young people, weavers and the community to learn and participate in the local cloth production and at the same time appreciate the treasure of Long District and Thailand.

Pranom Tapang's Tin-Chok Patterned Cloth that Won Awards and Prizes during 1987-2007

The grace and uniqueness Pranom Tapang's works captivate the heart and imagination of those who have come in contact with them. It does not, therefore, come as a surprise that she has won so many awards and prizes.

1. Gold-threaded Tin-Chok cloth in Bhubing style: Second Place in the category of Best Thai Silk Cloth, Bhubing Palace, 1987
2. Tin-Chok cloth with a double-swan motif: Second Place in Tin-Chok Category in the annual contest of Thai art and craft hand-woven products, Department of Industrial Promotion, 1988
3. Yellow Ta-Mu with Black-Red Tin-Chok cloth with a Samphao Loi Nam motif: First Place in Tin-Chok Contest, Winter Red-Cross Fair, Phrae Province, 1989
4. Full Tin-Chok cotton cloth, hand-woven with natural dyes: Outstanding handicraft product, a Thai Industrial Product Fair, Federation of Thai Industries, Ministry of Industry, 1990
5. Full Tin-Chok silk cloth with Kho Phak Kud and Ngu Hoi Sao motifs: First Runner-up Prize, Silpachip Art and Craft Contest, in the category of Local Silk Patterns, the 8th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 31 January-9 February 1992
6. Yellow Ta-Mu with Red-Black Tin-Chok cloth: Outstanding Royal Award, Cloth Contest, Category 2 (Tin-Chok), Office of National Culture Commission, Ministry of Education, 12 August 1992
7. Tin-Chok cloth with a Na Mon motif: First Runner-up Prize, Category of Tin-Chok cotton, size 50 cm., the 10th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 5-13 February 1994
8. Full Tin-Chok cloth with a Nok Kin Nam Ruam Ton motif: Second Runner-up Prize, Category of Tin-Chok Cotton Cloth, size 50 cm., Thai Handicraft Cotton Cloth Contest, the 10th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 5-13 February 1994
9. Tin-Chok cloth with a Khachin motif: First Prize, Contest of Local Cloth with Patterns Graciously Instructed by Her Majesty the Queen, the 12th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 5 February 1995
10. Full Tin-Chok cloth with a Kho Hak Yai motif: First Prize, Category of Local Patterned Woven Cloth, Thai Handicraft Cotton Cloth Contest, the 12th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 31 January-9 February 1997
11. Flower-Patterned Chok Cloth of Long District with a Nok Yaeng Ngao (Nok Song Krachok) motif: First Prize, Thai Handicraft Cotton Cloth Contest, Category of Local Patterned Woven Cloth, the 12th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 31 January-9 February 1997
12. Full Tin-Chok cloth with a Kho Hak Yai motif: First Runner-up Prize, Category of Local Woven Cotton Cloth, the 13th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 28 January-1 February 1998
13. Yellow Ta-Mu with Black-Red Tin-Chok cloth with a Nok Yaeng Ngao (Nok Song Krachok) motif: Second Runner-up Prize, Category of Tin-Chok Cloth, Thai Handicraft Cotton Cloth Contest, the 15th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 6-16 April 2000
14. Pa-koe-yo (hill-tribe) Cloth: First Prize, Ancient Woven Cloth Contest, on the occasion of the royal visit of Her Majesty the Queen to Huay Duea Arts and Crafts Centre, Mae Hong Son Province, 2000
15. Tin-Chok Cotton Cloth: Second prize, Thai Craft Product Contest, Category of Hand-woven cotton cloth with natural dyeing, Department of Industrial Promotion, Ministry of Industry, 2001

16. Full Tin-Chok cloth with a Maeng Pong Len motif: First Prize, Woven Cloth Category, One Tambon One Product (OTOP) Contest from 17 provinces in the Upper Northern Region, 12 April 2002
17. Full Tin-Chok cloth with an ancient Kho Khrueng motif: First Prize, Art and Craft Contest, Cloth Category, the 19th Bang Sai Arts and Crafts Fair, 12-15 January 2004
18. Tin-Chok cotton cloth: Outstanding Cultural Product Award, Category of Local Cloth and Local Cloth Products, Culture Office, Phrae Province, 2007

Honours received by Pranom Tapang

In 1994 she was acclaimed an outstanding person in culture, in the visual art category (arts and crafts, weaving machine).

In 1995 she was named “Virtuous Person of Long District” and was commissioned by Wat Tha Sung Committee to weave a golden shroud with a lotus-flower pattern to cover the body of the most venerable monk Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam of Wat Tha Sung, Uthai Thani province.

In 1997 she was named “Person with Outstanding Cultural Accomplishments” by Office of the National Culture Commission.

In 1997 she was selected Vice President of the Culture Council of Amphoe Long.

In 1999 she was among the first group of teachers of Thai wisdom in the category of Industry, Arts and Crafts (weaving) organised by the Office of National Education Commission.

In 1999 she received an award for progressive leadership from the Ministry of Interior.

In 2003 she was conferred an honorary bachelor’s degree (home economics) by Ramkhamhaeng University and received an award for progressive leadership in culture as well as an outstanding woman award at provincial level.

In 2004 she was awarded Red Cross Reward Medal (Third Class).

In 2008 she was awarded a royal order of Silver Model (Seventh Class) of the Direkgunabhorn.

In 2010 she has been glorified as National Artist in the field of Visual Arts (Fine Arts – Art of Woven Fabric) in the year 2010.
