

Basic Detail Report



Shaman's Cloth or Healing Cloth (Phaa Phii Mon or Pha Sabai)

Date

early 20th Century

Primary Maker

Lao

Medium

Cotton and silk

Description

This is a phaa phi mon or pha sabai from Houaphanh Province in Laos. Houaphanh is well-known for its textiles, and all women in the province have at least some knowledge of weaving. This healing cloth is woven with a cotton warp/silk weft and worn by a supplicant seeking aid in shamanic rituals. The complex motifs at either end of the textile are examples of the pii nyak design, which is common in Lao-Tai textiles. Weavers of Houaphanh describe the pii nyak as an evil spirit who lives in the mountain forest and eats the bodies or souls of all who pass by at night. Although the pii nyak is widely feared, the depiction of a pii nyak in textiles acts as a symbol of protection to ward off other evil spirits. Weavers interviewed by Ellison Banks Findly were quoted as saying that nothing evil can be depicted in a textile, explaining the transformation of the pii nyak from a real and evil creature to a signifier of protection through the process of weaving. The pii nyak appears in textiles as a semi-abstract design of a serpent with a diamond-shaped head and two coiled tails.

Dimensions

18 × 104 in. (45.7 × 264.2 cm)