

Mingpao Weekly - Article on Gambiered Silk

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Translated into English by Ms Juan Huang

大題：香雲紗——南國紡染發展之路

Xiang Yun Sha - The Path of Textile Dyeing Technique Development in South China

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This used to be daily wear for South China people, everyone of whom was wearing one in the old photos. The fabric is light, transparent, waterproof and enduring, with one side in brightly black and the other in sedately maroon. It is natural-dyed and gets softer and softer as time goes by. Black Gambiered Silk, also called "Chou Zai", "Liang Sha" in south China, or "Bamboo Sha" in Beijing, is now named "Xiang Yun Sha" throughout China. The technique of dyeing Xiang Yun Sha in Shun De was listed to be the Intangible Cultural Heritage in China in 2009.

There have been various approaches to summarize the origin, history, techniques and inheritance of Xiang Yun Sha. This traditional dyeing technique has experienced up and downs along with the changes of the society, times and technology. Now there are only a few factories left in Shun De and Fo Shan. We witnessed the tough production process and strict conditions required by the material, as well as the innovative experiments done by independent designers, trying to find the connections between this nearly lost heritage and modern life, and explore the spiritual relationship among textile, earth, culture and nature. Shall we then, start to track how this fabric has lived such a long way through boom and drop?

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[Right side quote]"Before the 60s, this fabric was indispensable for the Cantonese - it was the most common fabric for summer clothes, only second to Indigo dyed linen and cotton. The right side is browny vermilion, and the wrong side muddy beige. It's a bit stiff and breathless when new, but gets more ventilated and softer after years of washing and wearing. We can achieve similar effect through garment wash and sand-wash nowadays."

---Quoted from the column Chou Zai, Xiang Yun Sha by HK fashion designer William Tang

[Left page] Clothes made of Xiang Yun Sha used to be so often worn by people in south China. The styles vary according to the wearers' social class, profession and living habits. However, the material is no longer seen in any photos after the 80s. Most of the modern Chinese know little about it, let alone see or wear it.

This fabric shines in so many old photos of the 60s and 70s, or in the 19th century's photography collection Illustrations of China and Its People, shot by John Thomson when he travelled from the south to north China. As the fabric cools down quickly in the heat and is waterproof, the Tanka boat women in Hong Kong wore it while wielding the oar or carrying the baby; the local opera actors wore more stage styles with delicate Chinese cutting, adding more oriental touch when the musicians started to play Classical Chinese instruments. In old Guangzhou, loose top and pants could be seen on tea-makers, bankers, silk reelers, and workers in all kinds of professions...

[Right page] Caption: Fieldwork Companion

Being sun-proof, waterproof, light and ventilated, it's worn often by field workers under the sun in New Territories of HK

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[Bottom right image] Caption: Martial Art Master

Ip Man, the master of Wing Chun, was wearing a set of neat and clean Chinese suit made from Black Gambiered Silk with his students travelling from Foshan to Hong Kong, in this 50s photo.

[Left page image] Caption: Shunde Dama

The fabric can be made in to various styles and the gauze base can have special pattern designs, too. The lady

visiting ancestor's tomb was wearing a two-pieces Gambiered Silk garment. The sedate and elegant pattern can be clearly seen.

[Top right corner] Caption: Shopping in the Market

Cantonese spinster house helpers serving the riches liked to wear it. It was also the summer wear for women in the 60s. It is light, ventilated, with natural shine and easy to wash, so really is the women's indispensable outwear. (The picture is from the Collection of Government News)

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[Left page] Caption: The Must-Have for the Boatmen

It's the most common wear for boat women of South China. Usually they wear a set of clothes made from this fabric with woven hat.

[Right page] Caption: Choice for Children's Wear

Children wear it, too? Yes, there are quite a few girls and babies of the Typhoon Shelter boatmen wearing this in the photos of the 60s' Hong Kong Government Annual Report, bringing fun and energy to this dark fabric.

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Craft of the South Under the Sun

Shun De, Guangdong, a known for its tasty food. People usually come here for leisure and cuisine, however, a group of textile experts, students and hobbyists from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China came to join a 5-day Xiang Yun Sha workshop at a temperature of 40C, organised by Jinze Arts Centre.

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[Main text] Mr Liang Zhu, 78 years old, owner of Cheng Yi factory, inherits the "Dyeing Technique of Xiang Yun Sha", one of the National Intangible Cultural Heritages. He smiled when seeing the designers' experimental dyeing, with some trying Shibori and some trying on leather, and said that "The technique is so much more complicated than this, well, there's no harm trying anyway." Days later, everyone in the workshop showed more respect to the dyeing process and realised it is a very labour-intensive work, because there are a lot of steps in the process, the cycle is long and most of them can't be done by machines therefore the quality is difficult to control. That's why Xiang Yun Sha can only be produces in small quantities and by hand.

A Long Process

Cheng Yi factory locates just below the flyover of Shunde, with an area of about two or three football fields, covered by short and strong grass without any ceilings, to ensure the fabric exposure under the sun. There is only one brick house and a simple scruffy metal house next to it, and these have already included the admin office, warehouse, dyeing pool, and beds for the workers to rest and sleep. The mud-applying and washing venue is 10 minutes' walk away, where the future Xiang Yun Sha museum and hotel will also be.

Only circulated in Foshan and Shunde, this traditional craft takes full advantage of the local natural elements: plants, soil, water, sunlight, and men. Every worker wears wide straw hat, long sleeves and pants to avoid sunburn. As hanging the fabric out requires not only skills, but also patience and physical strength, all the workers have steel-like muscles and tanned skin, no matter they are fresh apprentices or the experienced. They start working from 8am to 11am, have a nap until 2pm then continue to work until 4pm. Sometimes they start even earlier from 5 or 6am in order to get fresh mud from streams far away.

The technique is also called "Insolation" (曬蓑) - it uses only one dye intermediate - the juice of Shu Liang (薯莨) - to dye silk and it only exists in South China. The juice of the plant contains gel and tannins which will turn into the unique mahogany and black colour after meeting the iron oxide in the river mud. The whole process includes 14 main steps such as soaking, drying, sealing, cooking and washing - all by hands and can take as long as 15 days.

Completely Handmade

It's the first time for both the journalists and workshop attendants to witness the live process of "Mud Applying" (過烏) - washing the jetty mud off the gauze. Several workers join force to move the 18.5 to 20-meters-long fabric from the shaded drying yard to the riverside, get rid of the mud in the water and then move it to the grass nearby to sun-dry again. The moving process is so rhythmic that it looks like a dance performance, in which the workers feel the interaction between the fabric and the stream with their body and hands. The work is not as easy as it looks, as the fabric gets so heavy with the mud and dye. Therefore the workers take turns and work in a group of two, in order for one to have enough rest to continue washing. The way of washing is slightly different for every worker, and the level of proficiency gets higher when the experience grows.

Ms Liang Zi, a Chinese designer who collaborates with Cheng Yi factory, described the drying process this way, " it's like going back to the dye 500 years ago. " The working procedure, tools and materials are all like the old way, for example the rinsing pool, dyeing pool, palm leaves broom with which the bubbles on the fabric is swept off, copper pots, the bamboo nails and the palm leaves broom...Only juicing the Shu Liang and stirring the mud involve machines, but all the other processes are done by hand.

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[Left page title] Handicraft Wisdom of 100 Years

The insolation of Shu Liang is an unique dyeing art in Guangdong. Every step comes from first-hand experience through a long time, and is passed on between fathers and sons, or teachers and students via practical demonstration. The main elements - plant Shu Liang and the river mud - both local specialties, limit the technique within Foshan, Shunde, and Panyu area in Guangdong. From the environment, climate, material to techniques, every factor of producing Xiang Yun Sha shows its unique traditional wisdom.

[Left page, top box] Caption: 14 Processes 十四道工序

To dye Xiang Yun Sha there are 14 steps, generally summarised to be " 3 Washes, 9 Cooks, 18 Insolations" (三洗九煮十八曬), as follows: prepare the greige, soak in the dye solution once, insolation (曬莨), re-soak for 6 times, sprinkle the dye solution (封莨水) for 6 times, cook the fabric (煮練) once, re-sprinkle for 12 times, cook once, re-sprinkle once again to seal the pigments in, apply the river mud (過烏), wash off, seal the dye, flatten the fabric, absorb the dew from the grass (攤霧), roll the fabric (卷綢), and finally store the fabric in the warehouse.

[Left page, right column] Caption: Run against the Sun (跟陽光賽跑)

The drying process relates so significantly with the sunlight, wind direction and humidity that it can only run from April to October. If it is too sunny or the temperature is too high, the gauze gets too crisp because strong sunlight dries the animal fiber, silk protein, and water, which constitute 90% of the silk fiber. Wind is also key - the gauze hardly gets dry when the wind blows from the north, or when there is continuous wet weather in summer, which is typical in South China. Work has to be seized, too, when the rainy season comes. Therefore, there are only about 100 days in a year suitable for drying, just like competing against the sun.

[Left page, bottom] Caption: Natural Drying Yard 天然曬地

A plain, flat yard is required for an insolation factory. It should be layered with mud and very fine sand, with grass planted above which is about 1 to 2 cm long. For the grass, a local species called "Crawling Mice" is particularly good, as it bears the pressure from the fabric very well.

[Left page, bottom] Caption: Close to the Stream 鄰近河涌

The location of a drying factory also indicates the geographic features of South China. It should locate just next to a river stream hence convenient for both river mud washing and delivery. Streams, spreading all over the Canton Delta, have long been the essential ways for transportation and trade, also where the boatmen live.

[Right page, top] Caption: Dioscorea Citrohossa 薯莨

Shu Liang is the plant dye used in the technique. With the Latin name *Dioscorea Citrohossa*, it is a genus of perennial lianas in the family of Dioscoreaceae. The leaves are spirally arranged, mostly heart-shaped and with vein patterns. Its

vine looks like that of yam, with round shape large tuber, stucco skin and red-brown flesh. It contains large amount of tannins and is mainly used to dye leather, fishnets, ropes and fabric. It's also one of the traditional Chinese medical herbs for pain relief, inflammation, and detoxification. The Shu Liang used in factories are mostly wild and usually takes 7 years to grow. The redder the tuber flesh, the more mature it is. The use of this plant as vegetable dye can be traced to as early as the North Song Dynasty, for example in Meng Xi Bi Tan (夢溪筆談) by Shen Kuo (沈括), that South China people made boots with leather dyed by a plant called Zhekui (赭魁). This plant has jetty skin and rust flesh, looks like Fallopia Multiflora (何首烏), the juice as red as the terra-cotta colour Zhe (赭) - all these descriptions are very similar to the features of Shu Liang.

[Right page, bottom]

Caption: Environment-Friendly 環保無害

The tannins from the juice of Shu Liang will get lost if stored for too long, and the juice will become putrid because of the heat. That's why the factories store the plant tubers in the shade and take the juice freshly whenever it's required. Machine is used in this process and now it's much faster than the old times. The residue can be used as fuel after being dried, which is very energy-saving. Any extra juice can be discharged into the river directly as it has no pollution to the water.

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[Left page, top] Caption: River Mud Containing Iron 鐵質河泥

The key element - river mud - comes mainly from Cantonese towns such as Shunde, Nanhai, Sanshui. It must be the unpolluted mud containing large amount of iron salts. The best ones look very smooth and have natural black-grey colour. The requirement for iron is very strict, too: if the level of iron is too low, the finished fabric will not be bright enough; if too much, the coating will fall off easily. Colour fading will occur on elbow, knee and hip position of the garments made from those didn't do proper coating. A specialist worker usually leaves very early in the morning to collect mud. However, there are only very few streams left unpolluted in the area, getting good-quality mud becomes harder and harder.

[Left page, bottom] Caption: Prepare the Greige 準備綢緞

There are many processes in the textile production industry, and Xiang Yun Sha Dyeing Technique refers specially to the "dyeing" process. There can be two main finished products: Liang Sha (苧紗) and Liang Chou (苧綢). Liang Sha is satin ground pattern woven on jacquard looms, with long warp and weft yarns and fewer crossovers, less transparent. Liang Chou is a type of plain-weave silk, the light ones are for dresses while the thick ones are for jackets and pants. The length of the whole roll of greige fabric is about 45 meters, but usually cut into the length of 15 to 20 meters - generally 18.5 meters - for the convenience of insolation. Fabric bindings are sewn on the selvages before processing to prevent the fabric from rolling.

[Right page, top] Caption: The Dyeing House 染坊

Being one of the most important facilities of the factory, the dyeing house is also where the workers sleep and eat. On one side there is a brick tank where the plants are stored and an electric grinder; next to it there is the solution vat which is 3 meters' long, 2 meters wide and 1.2 meters deep, where workers pour the plant juice and residue together, and adjust the solution concentration among the five tanks within the vat. On the other side, there are beds and dining tables for the workers.

[Left page, bottom right corner] Caption: Degumming with Copper Pot 大銅鑊煮練

Some textiles need to be gently cooked to get rid of the gummy substance on the fibre, particularly bast. Factories mostly use copper pots about 1.2 to 1.5 m diameters instead of iron pots, as the latter will generate chemical effect with the Shu Liang plant.

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[Left page] Caption: The Soaking Process 浸苧

The process requires about 30 times of soaking. The dyeing master is the key of the whole craftsmanship crew, as he controls the dye solution and usually has over 10 years' experience. The process of adding water into the solution vat

to adjust the density of the solution is called "Water Dilution" (過水) in Chinese, so every tank has a certain level of concentration and is classified based on different amount of water added in. And then workers will pour some solution liquid into the cement dyeing vat, which is in a half circle shape with 1.2m diameter. There are two recesses in which a piece of bamboo can be mounted to hang the fabric. Below is a 1.2m long, 60cm wide and 10cm deep soaking pool, and two 1 meter wide pits on its both sides for two workers to stand in and work at the same time. They only need to slightly bend over to work on the fabric, which is quite ergonomic. When dyeing, workers keep turning the fabric over or stepping on it, to obtain a uniform concentration throughout the dyebath.

[Right page] Caption: The Insolation Process 曬莧

The dyeing process usually happens in very early mornings, while the drying process follows when the sun fully comes out. The workers firstly suck away the dew on the grass with a big fabric mop, walking from one side to the other side. The insolation field is already designed with the length of the fabric bearing in mind, with a row of 20cm tall wooden nails set in on one side. Two people pull a bamboo stick through the end of the fabric and flatten it, but care must be taken not to stretch the fabric too much. It's a step requiring more attention and experience than it looks, because the fabric might get out of shape if pulled too hard.

The fabric is then stretched in between two rows of wooden snails on the lawn. After all the fabric are laid flat, workers will brush the bubbles left on the surface away carefully, in order not to leave any marks on the fabric, which is called Colour Brushing (掃色). After that and several times of dye solution sprinkles, the fabric will be folded up in accordion pleats, and then the above processes are repeated again for better penetration.

(If there is any deviation from the required shade, small additions of dye may be made to the dyebath to achieve the required shade. Dyeing vessel.all the substrate has uniform contact with the dye liquor. the density...Evenness of packing is crucial in obtaining levelness throughout the substrate. Pre- and post-dyeing treatments.)

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[Left page] Caption: Mud Applying Process 過烏

After over 30 times of continuous soaking, sprinkling, drying, and sealing, every inch of the fiber has absorbed the juice of Shu Liang and the whole fabric now looks brown-red. Mud-applying (過烏), which is the last and most important step, will turn the fabric into Xiang Yun Sha which is inky on one side and brown on the other side. In the old times workers had to get up at around 3 or 4 o'clock to daub the mud, but they can do it in the normal time as the shaded drying racks are now available. Workers separate the tiny wood branches and stones from the fresh mud with electric mixing machine, and then put them into the cement tank.

In this process, they work in two groups, with one folding the fabric and one daubing the mud. They stand about 2 or 3 meters away from the cement vat, and the mud applier brush the fabric evenly with a mop which looks like our normal ones. The movement looks like calligraphy or painting, where the strength and pressure should be well controlled to ensure an average coating, or else the mud should be applied again. After the mud is applied, the other group then folds the fabric in half, carry the fabric coordinately and lay it flat on the sand carefully, in order not to rub off the mud. The fabric should lay there for at least half an hour to ensure that the mordant is working between the plant juice and the iron in mud.

[Right page] Caption: The Washing Process 水洗

The workers carry the full roll of fabric to the dock just in front of the drying rack to wash away the mud. This is also the hardest part of the whole process, because half of the workers' bodies have to be in the river. They firstly throw the fabric into the water, then rinse it weft wise with full coordination and power of the whole body, making it look like a rhythmic dance, accompanied by the sound of water. After the mud is washed away, we can see the bright jetty colour of the textile when they are being dried on the lawn. The fabric will then be softened after the last dye solution sealing and dew absorbing, so that the crisp, paper-like fabric becomes smooth.

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[Main text] Liang Zhu: Xiang Yun Sha Shouldn't Be Extinct in My Generation 梁珠：香雲紗，不要在我這一代消失
Xiang Yun Sha is one of the a few traditional crafts reserved in South China under the impact of the modern textile industry. Mr Liang Zhu's name should be remembered among those who have the perseverance. As a native Shunde person, he is not only the owner of Cheng Yi factory, the chairman of Xiang Yun Sha Association, but also the dyeing technique inheritance responsible in the country, with many of the employees in this field trained and apprenticed from his factory.

This elder Cantonese is still very energetic, being particular on food, humorous, without much grey hair, although he is already over 70. Xiang Yun Sha means so much for him, that he can't help asking the aged who wear any dusty jade green top in restaurants, to find out if that's "the fabric" or not. "The most beautiful colour of Xiang Yun Sha, is the kind of faded pea green colour, but rare to see now. Huge amount of patience and high level technique are required to make good-quality Xiang Yun Sha, as any tiny mistakes in the 30 processes will influence the final product. A piece of good Xiang Yun Sha garment can last for a life time, getting softer and more comfortable with washes. There are quite a lot non-qualified ones in the market, easy to be torn, and the colour fastness is bad. In our eyes those cannot be sold at all. That's why we call this fabric 'Soft Gold' as the production is hard to control and can only be produced in small scales. "

Radical Ups and Downs of the Industry 產業大起大落

When looking back, the old man couldn't help sighing that his destiny has all the same ups and downs with Xiang Yun Sha. "I leave home early and go back late every day. Although being chairman of more than 30 associations, involved in all kinds of commercial projects, my mind is with here this fabric, and I won't want to see it extinct in my life. But I can't guarantee after that."

He entered the factory as an apprentice at the age of 14, and learnt every step within 5 years. At that time there were many factories in Shunde and Foshan, workers were asked to meet high standards with fast minds and hands. He joined the army at 18, but encountered the Cultural Revolution when he retired. The movement has cut the the life of Xiang Yun Sha. In 1979 the government re-opened the factories, and he chose to be the responsible instead of being an army official. He invited all the craftsmen back, and attracted clients from Hong Kong and Yangzi River Delta, maintaining the fabric production capacity at the level of 400,000 meters per year.

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Caption: Facing the Impact of Modern Age 面對新時代衝擊

In the 90s, there were many cheap and new styles of textile in the market. The traditional textile business got worse with the emergence of jeans, artificial fibers like polyester, which is more suitable for the fast speed of modern life. In 1996, the annual production of the factory where Mr Liang worked was less than 10,000 meters. Cheng Yi factory was bought by him and other two friends when the industry was at its bottom, and all the facilities we see today were built at that time. "All the dyeing vats, dyeing pools, copper pots and tools were made based on the traditional styles, and every piece was made by old craftsman."

Designers from Japan and Shenzhen came to him afterwards, to make high-end clothes with Xiang Yun Sha, therefore the orders have switched to overseas. However, this brought Mr Zhu some unforgettable experience. "Two terrifying moments in my life both related to Xiang Yun Sha. The clients abroad like to try new stuff. One Japanese asked us to sand-wash the fabric to get innovative patterns. Our workers worried so much because we scraped the fabric too much and it looked terrible, but the client liked it very much! The other time, the fabric got so tough, but the Japanese designer immediately tore it apart and sewed the broken pieces into a trendy bag." Mr. Zhu was still sweating when talking about this memory. Being someone trained in a very traditional way, it does take time for him to get used to new designs and the kind of rough beauty.

Being listed as the national cultural heritage didn't bring much growth for the commercial side of the industry, but it has ensured Mr. Liang to develop it from the perspective of fashion design and tourism. There will be new projects just near Cheng Yi factory, including a Cantonese style workshop, insolation venue, museum and hotels. The

engineering work is going on. "Look, there are 1.3 billion people in China, if we only consider half of them there are already 600 million. I believe there is a future for Xiang Yun Sha."

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[Main text] The Cultural Value of the Intangibles 非物質的文化價值

The annual textile production capacity can reach as high as 1.6 billion square meters in China. Such a big volume, plus the slowing down for the needs of the delicate silk industry, directly impacted the development of Xiang Yun Sha. The demand for this fabric has not been very steady since the 60s, therefore less and less young men are willing to join the labour-intensive industry due to the long working hours. On the other hand, the raw materials and dyeing venues are facing severe challenges, for example, environment pollution. Xiang Yun Sha is in danger of extinction in the 20's century.

Save it Quickly 趁早保存

The book *The Dyeing Technique of Xiang Yun Sha*, written by Ms Liao Xuelin the associate dean of Foshan Art Academy, Mr Wu Haoliang, and Mr Ren Guanghui, gives detail research about the fabric's intangible value, and explains the relationship between that and the natural environment and daily life of South China. This time, Ms Liao came to Cheng Yi factory together with the other researchers to collect more information for their second book about Xiang Yun Sha. "The biggest character of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is its liveness, we must pass on this impression. When we applied to be listed in the first batch of the ICH, Xiang Yun Sha couldn't fight against the Dragon Boat, Wooden Paintings, and Canton Opera. When we applied for the second time I was working in the ICH office, the technique only got kept in the list thanks to the high recommendation of professor Wu Bingan, the chief officer and an expert of national ICH protection."

Ms Liao graduated from the Chinese National Academy of Arts, major in textile dyeing engineering. She spent huge amount of time on the production fields, recording the processes, methods and historical data research about Xiang Yun Sha. Her valuable studies reveal the relationship between the textile and local environment.

The Origin 追溯起源

South China people in Song Dynasty had used Shu Liang to "dye the leather and make boots". In Qing Dynasty this plant was more widely used to dye textiles such as fishing nets and folk cloth. There were sayings like "Canton gauze has good density and evenness", "Canton gauze ranks best in the world". The Canton Gauze (廣紗) is a famous local specialty of Foshan. The textile industry was ever the key economic generator in Foshan, and has 18 sub-categories. It was recorded in the Shunde County Report that "the silk reeling commercialization started from Ming Dynasty". The whole silk industry in Canton pushed the development of printing, dyeing, machinery and garment manufacturing, and this was also the society background within which Xiang Yun Sha was born.

At the beginning of the Republic of China era, a woodman from west Nanhai called Yue Chengjia invented "jacquard loom with a leno device". This gauze texture fabric becomes Xiang Yun Sha after the dyeing process, and was called "the influential breakthrough in Canton silk industry". It was produced around Nanhai county, and got popular among all classes from late 19th to early 20th century because of its soft, smooth texture, durability and washability. It was particularly favoured by the riches in Shanghai in early 20th, and exported a lot overseas. The Canton silk industry reached its peak from 1918 to 1926, with thousands of silk factories and over 500 dyeing factories.

There has been very little research done for Xiang Yun Sha, and none of the archeological items can be found for study. In Ms Liao's book, different origins of the historical data and doubts are pointed out. The valuable study done by Mr Chen Yongzhuo, researcher of Guangdong Academy of Sciences, provides an overview of factories of Foshan in the 30s and 40s, including the industrial development history, investment in the factories, qualities of goods, profits, relationship between the employers and workers, industry organizations, and the living status of workers. It reveals the close relationship between the industry and local life, as well as the value of this folk craft. "This is always a technique generated from the natives. We realized that we couldn't fully understand the details if we don't try it ourselves. So we are going to record all the tones, shades, and density every time throughout the 30 times of dyeing."

[Right page, box] Caption: All About Shunde 順德人 順德事

There are various sayings about how the technique has started locally. However, it does relate to Mulberry Plot-Fishpond which is unique in the Pearl River Delta, and the silk industry development in Canton. The Mulberry Plot-Fishpond is an ecosystem in which mulberry trees are planted in the field around the pond where fishes were raised, and the mulberry leaves are fed to the silkworm. The mulberry trees, silkworms and fishes naturally form a circulation with mutual dependencies. The silk production of Shunde occupied 97% of the PRD, and 80% of the silk exportation of China in 1922, but the sales dropped dramatically due to the recession of Europe and America. After 1995, the government decided to develop the silk industry in the west of China, which resulted in the end of Mulberry Plot-Fishpond in the PRD. Nowadays we can only imagine how the ecosystem looked like in the old time in the Shunde Nanguo Silk Museum and Shunde Museum.

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[Main text] Let the Relics Tell 讓文物說往事

Preface

Foshan used to be a key town in the textile industry. Garments made from Xiang Yun Sha were very popular in all classes from the rich, merchants to fishermen. The collector Li Haiyuan has a nickname "Foshan Know-It-All", and his collection ranges from textiles, furniture, newspapers to books and old photos. He brought us 6 or 7 big luggage cases full of items about Xiang Yun Sha, which mean all city memories about Foshan to him.

[Right page] *The Interpretation of the Vintage Clothes* 舊衣的演繹

Tall and big, Mr Li is a pure Foshan native. He puts so much effort into collecting everything about Foshan, far beyond his working hours. He can talk forever about Foshan stuff from Kong Fu, food, street life to architectures, "I belong to the old times. I like the old streets, traditional food and old objects. Seeing the new development of the city changes the look of Foshan makes me sad. Those old buildings are dead if you turn them into commercial streets or museums and drive the inhabitants away."

He collects garments of all sizes and varieties made from Xiang Yun Sha, from the Qing dynasty peasant pants, cheongsam, tops, suits, aprons, children's wear, to even military uniforms in the Cultural Revolution period, all from residents in the old town. "We go to see if there's anything to be collected whenever there are old houses being put down. These clothes are passed on from the previous generation, for example father to son. Because the cutting of cheongsam is loose, it suits different sizes. You can see different fabric used from these patches on the pants. They are kind of decorations and also reveal the trace of time. "

We opened the transparent package of the clothes, no molds, and the unique smell of Shu Liang came out. There are various styles such as rugged worker pants, fair lady's suit, and military jackets. The styles reflect the social and living habits and people's different demands through times.

"Quite a few people say that this fabric is for the rich only. But you know this can be for ordinary people, too, when you see these old clothes of various interpretations." Mr Li also collects old fabric store packages, leaflets, newspaper and books to understand the story behind. "All these well-made packages show the consumption behavior of Xiang Yun Sha at those times. We can only keep records from objects like this so I will not sell them, but donate to the museums."

Relics from the historical collections of Li Haiyuan

[Left page image] The price tag can still be seen from this old Xiang Yun Sha fabric of Foshan.

[Right page, first image] The Chinese knot button and western button both exist on this garment, reflecting the fact that the east meets the west in the Republic of China period

[Right page, middle image] If woven differently, the fabric can be very unique, e.g. the traditional cloud pattern on this piece

[Right page, third image] The most beautiful colour of Xiang Yun Sha is said to be ecru. This shade can only be reached after over 20 years' wearing.

[Right page, top image] Collector Li Haiyuan of Foshan. He owns antiques of Foshan involving many categories, and thinks these are important to record the city.

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[Left page, top garment] 歲月洗練 The black colour has faded into ecru particularly on the positions where a lot of movements happen.

[Left page] Caption: Working Shorts 勞動短褲

There are a lot of men's shorts in Mr Li's collections. Many of them have been worn for many years and have all kinds of repair patches. From the old photos about the fishing and agricultural industry in Shunde Museum, we can see that fisher men and peasants wear similar styles to work.

[Right page] Caption: One Pant for Two Generations 父傳子兩代褲

Mr Li says that most of the old pants he sees are passed on to the sons from the fathers. We can usually see patches of all sizes, different shades and even different fabrics.

[Right page, bottom] Caption: The age of the fabric can be told by analysing the patterns of the patches on these old pants

[Right page, top] Caption: Apron 圍裙款

Everyone can tailor-make garments according to his or her own needs. This apron might be a working suit for craftsmen in a certain industry of Guangdong?

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[Left page, left side] Caption: The Riches 富貴人家

Xiang Yun Sha is favoured by the riches, too. This well-made lady's suit has two pieces with an interesting inner pocket design.

[Left page, bottom] Caption: Army Style 解放裝

There was clothes made from Xiang Yun Sha even in the Cultural Revolution period. The cutting is quite western, with two chest pockets and badge of chairman Mao attached

[Right page, right column] Caption: Individuality 獨一無二

The Chinese garment styles might look simple, but people's various demands and interpretations can be seen from the details of the clothes. They can be unique on size, material and cutting.

[Right page, left side] Caption: The East and the West 中西特色

There are exquisite jacquard pattern on this piece, as well as buttons from the west.

[Right page] Caption: Pants for a Lifetime 一生唐裝褲

The cutting of Chinese style pants is very flexible and can be adjusted according to the wearer's size. If cared properly, they can be worn throughout someone's life and even passed on to the next generation.

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[Left page, bottom] Caption: There is one brand-new Xiang Yun Sha top in one of the boxes, and the colour is still lustrous.

[Left page, top] Caption: Art of the Packages 美工包裝盒

The design of fabric store packages in the Republic of China period was a combination of both eastern and western arts, ranging from Art Deco, engraving techniques, to the Chinese style paintings on calendar posters.

[Right page, left column] Caption: Publishes of the Industry

Literatures and books are essential for people to understand the social and economic environment of the time. The title of this small catalogue published by Foshan Lian Sheng Silk Co., Ltd is "Xiang Yun Sha". There are details about the history, production and sales status of the silk industry, as well as fabric stores' ads.

[Right page, top] Caption: Cantonese Style Sales Campaign 粵式減價招紙

This sales ad of Yi Chang Sheng fabric store has used Chinese poem format to introduce the address and selling points of silk.

[Right page, box] Caption: Renaissance of Foshan Gauze 復興佛山葛紗

Su Liang Ji is a fabric store specialized in Xiang Yun Sha, locating in Ling Nan Tian Di (嶺南天地) in Foshan. The founder Mr Xian Da Feng has spent 4 years researching and experimenting, and recovered the traditional gauze base Xiang Yun Sha to differentiate from most of the plain-weave ones in the market. He also added modern design and more choices of colour such as dark green and vermilion. His shop is set in traditional style, displaying sample fabric and records from his mother's old Xiang Yun Sha factory, aiming to introduce this textile to younger generation in Foshan.

P100-101

[Main text] Experiment New Creations 實驗新思維

Let's look back to the workshop held by Jinze Arts Centre. What kind of inspiration can the students get in 5 days, if dyeing Xiang Yun Sha is such a complicated craft?

These experts, artists and hobbyists from everywhere tried various methods for dyeing, getting up early every morning to come to the factory, and had group discussions every night. But they can only dye for about 12 or 13 times within 5 days, far from the 30 times the workers usually do. Under such heat, their bodies are sweating all over only half day, not to mention the energy needed for physical dyeing and drying. Most of them think the 150-yuan-per-meter price is really not high, considering such intensive labour involved.

However, the other valuable side of the workshop is the new findings via students' experiments. Edith Cheung, director of Textile Division, Jinze Arts Centre, has also experimented dyeing leather and resist paste dyeing with students in these 5 days. "To dye with Shu Liang is the kind of vegetable dye with only one ingredient, which is fairly simple but not easy to grasp. But the limitation of this raw material makes us think more. The discussion at night helps us to review the success and failure so that we can do adjustments every day, and the result is surprisingly nice."

Professor Yang Jianjun from the Academy of Arts and Design of Tsing Hua University specializes in natural dyes and its techniques. Before coming to Shunde, he just finished his field research about bast textiles in Chongqing. As an expert, he has very rich theoretical and practical experience about textiles. In the workshop he involved himself a lot in all the processes: either studying the leaves of Shu Liang, or observing the settings of the dyeing house and worker's processes. Students asked him questions immediately when they had difficulties or doubts, e.g. how to get rid of the wax. He shared his research about Japanese natural dye techniques after dinner, and the clamp-resist dyeing method he taught was used right away by the students the following day. After 4 days, he felt that the key point about dyeing Xiang Yun Sha was its relationship with local conditions. "We stay on the stage of only reserving the techniques in China, however, Japanese tend to use the techniques to create some practical products which modern people can use. In fact, I think the meaning of a craft is more on the process side instead of the finished outcome, therefore a craft doesn't necessarily need to be used for production. "

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Our Best Works

1) Cui Yan, House of Grass and Wood 崔岩 草木山房

"I firstly tried paste-resist dyeing, but the paste was washed off after several immersions of the cloth into the dyebath. This one has used clamp-resist dyeing, taking fully advantage of the sun, and is my best work. "

2) Huang Wenying, Textile Designer and Artist from Taiwan 黃文英 台灣紡織設計師、藝術家

"I have two successful works. The one in my hand has used shibori technique, the dye solution gets into the weave where the knots are loosely tied; the silk scarf on my body has patterns I drew with the river mud, the effect is quite obvious."

3) Luo Bingying, Book Publisher 羅冰英 書籍出版

"I had never learnt dyeing before and this is my first time. This cotton bag used stitched resist shibori, the size is just right for books, the finished look is quite a nice surprise for me."

4) Tong Tong, Researcher of Jinze Arts Centre 童彤 金澤工藝館駐場研究員

"I repeated the dyeing and drying processes for this piece from the very beginning, and made sure that the dyeing was evenly done. After mud application it looks like this. Simple and nice."

5) Wu Di 吳迪

"I drew wisteria with wax, and drew the stripes with the mud. Both effects are quite satisfactory."

6) Leung Yihu, Artist 梁以瑚 藝術工作者

"I like to think as a creative painter instead of a textile worker. I tried to stick masking tape on the fabric, the result is unexpectedly good. "

7) Edith Cheung, Director of the Textile Division at Jinze Arts Center 張西美 金澤工藝館紡織部總監

"There was not too much time for me to dye, and I spent a lot of time thinking before doing anything. I put bamboo on this piece for resist dyeing, and finally the simplest is the best - the sun does the job. "

8) Bai Lue, Collector of Hand-woven Fabric 白略 江南手織布收藏者

"Xiang Yun Sha doesn't need to be black, reddish-brown is nice, too. I used wax to draw the pattern on this piece, and the effect is clear. "

9) Huang Juan, Independent Designer 黃娟 自由設計師

"On this piece, I repeated the dyeing and drying process for three times, then drew this cat-paw shape pattern with the river mud, finally sun-dried it and washed away the mud. One side is persimmon and the other side camel colour."

10) Zhang Xulin, Workshop Assistant of Jinze Art Centre 張煦林 金澤工藝館工作坊助理

"I have been trying all kinds of experiments on silk and other materials. I used the mud to write on this piece in a calligraphic way."

[Right page, box] Caption: Notes Taken from the Workshop 工作坊手記

During the 5 days, participants have been busy taking pictures of the work progress, dyeing, and typing on smartphones. They were actually recording what they learnt on social networks and the Internet. The Douban diary of Jinze has reproduced the stories of these students, which can be reached via this link:
www.douban.com/note/404434007

P104-105

[Left page] Caption: The Innovation Responsibility of Designers 設計師的創新責任

Black Gambiered Silk used to be very popular among Chinese overseas. The Taiwan fashion designer Sophie Hong (洪麗芬) encountered the fabric from the 80s, and used it on her own brand's R&D and fashion designs. She has used natural fiber and traditional natural dye techniques, taking advantage of silk's skin-friendly, moisture absorbing, and breathability, developed the style called "Silk of Hong", with richer texture and more choices of colour than traditional one-colour Xiang Yun Sha.

"Techniques must be developed. Designers can only create products meeting the demands of time, market and end consumers when they know about the details and processes of a technique. I was lucky to be in contact with the fabric when no much attention was put on it, and brought it to the international market, letting foreigners know about this traditional craft from China."

P106-107

[Main text] Re-Discovery of the Craft 手工藝再發現

Ms Hong will not only attend the International Natural Dye Symposium held from Oct 14 to 16 in Taiwan, but also publish her two essays on the practical application and international merchandising about Xiang Yun Sha, a study since her brand was established in 1984. "I have been very low-profiled with what I've done about Xiang Yun Sha. But what differentiates me from the academics is that I am very down to the earth." Many elderly people in Taiwan wear this fabric from the 80s. The Shu Liang grown in Taiwan is bigger and redder in flesh than that in Guangdong, once cut open it can be as red as fresh beef steak. The Taiwanese use it in similar ways with Guangdong and Fujian - to strengthen the fishnet, to dye the fabric, and to take as herbal medicine.

Shunde, Lunjiao town was also the place where Sophie got in contact with the technique for the first time. She called back and said, "I firstly saw the fabric in the Chinese Arts & Crafts Co. Ltd of Hong Kong, that product was a collaboration between the media guy Choi Woping and Guangdong Silk Corporation. I then came here to look for the factory alone and met Mr Liang Zhu. I slept in the dyeing house, got up early with the workers to see all the processes in order to understand the technique closely. Sometimes it's not like you will get a clear answer simply by asking, as the masters won't be able to tell you everything about the details. It all comes from experiences - for example - why the dye solution must be gradually applied and repeated for many times to get the best result."

[Right page] *Innovation and Tradition* 一面創新，一面保留傳統

Understanding the tradition is the base of doing innovation. The experimenting spirit can be seen from the garments of Sophie Hong.

She has used the dyeing technique on natural fiber such as silk, cotton and linen, exposed the hand-sewn seams to create a more 3-D cutting effect. A lot of Shibori techniques are also used to create irregular patterns such as nets, cracks or leaf veins. Every inch of the fabric can be different due to the unevenness of silk itself. She also fully uses the process of spraying Shu Liang juice and insolation to create reddish brown or caramel colour of different shades. The silk then has the touch of leather, whilst linen becomes smoother. On the other hand, she does mix and match using both the techniques of dyeing Xiang Yun Sha and indigo, to create sculpture-like effect on the fabric. In terms of cutting, her garments are mostly simple, some of which can be worn double sided, and can be put in washing bag then machine washed, which is more convenient for the busy modern life.

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[Left page] Caption: The Industry Protection and Education 保護產業 教育用家

We followed Sophie to come to the other factory. This one locates next to a sugarcane field, and just getting of the car we already smell Shu Liang in the air, even the driving path is separated by broken pieces of the plant. One dyeing house is surrounded by three or four insolation fields, where about 20 workers are drying the fabric while singing. Red or brown fabric all over the lawns, making it look like a sea of fabric. The owner Chen Weiming has been co-operating with Sophie for many years and is willing to test whatever creative ideas on the fabric. "I grow up in the factory and the dyeing process has been part of my life. Shu Liang is a kind of sensitive plant, particularly to the wind direction. The experienced worker says that they sink to the bottom of the dyeing vessel every time before the wind comes."

The workers here are all very proficient, and the eldest has got over 30 years' experience. The factory has quite a few modified facilities to lower the pressure of the workers, improve the working environment so that they can focus on the process itself. "I set up my own factory several years ago, and also encountered recession and poor demand of the products but I kept on. Now I have stable clients and more machines to improve the quality and stability of my products. My future plan is to plant Shu Liang just next to my insolation fields, because the wild ones can vary a lot on quality. There were people doing that in the past in Shunde."

Although hard to compare to modern mass production in terms of volume, handicrafts cannot be replaced from the prospective of its culture value. The production of Xiang Yun Sha has to be maintained in a small scale to ensure the quality of products. There was a short period of everyone producing Xiang Yun Sha when it was just named the National Intangible Culture Heritage. More than 20 factories were opened and soon closed, because the products they made were in bad quality; some of them used synthetic fabric and lost the environment-friendly meaning of this fabric. But to most consumers, this fabric might only mean some sort of trendy garments, while few people really understand the technique or the most valuable side behind the fabric. Sophie points out that this is also a possible subject for further education, "Not everyone in our society knows what makes a good fabric, some even don't know how to care a garment. I have been introducing this fabric to Europe in the past 20 years, the purpose is to make people understand its true value."

[Left page] Postscript: Introspection 後記: 惜物離不開自省

Consumption has been in every aspect of modern people's life. The globalization of economic encourages people to keep on consuming, without considering the limited resource of the earth. The future of Xiang Yun Sha not only lies in reservation and innovation, but also for people to understand how Canton Delta's special geological and cultural characteristics have nurtured a type of textile, as well as the wisdom and attitude behind this traditional craft. Some might take this unique Chinese natural dyeing craft simply as one type of technique, but it reveals more about how modern people should cherish what nature has given them, and do more self-examination when confronting the mainstream culture.