

Chapter 1

Introduction

Ms. Panitsa Kanokpornwasin
ID No. 478 57996 29

Introduction

For more than a hundred years, almost everyone in the small village of Bosang has earned a living from the umbrella trade, making paper umbrellas. Watching the umbrellas being made and the choosing one from the variety of beautiful and colourful designs to take home, as a souvenir is one thing that visitors to this village should not pass by when travelling in this part of Thailand.

Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd, the most outstanding store, is on the corner of Bosang road. *Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd* is the center of making umbrellas. The company not only sells umbrellas but it preserve Northern Thai culture and proudly present the culture to the world also.

I. Situation Analysis

a. History of Bosang Umbrella¹

The making of umbrellas in Bosang village is a handicraft occupation of the villagers which has made its name known throughout the country and abroad until the parasol has become one of the symbols of Chiang Mai. How did this come about? Who introduced this art form and how many years ago? The author has based this narration on the words of the village elders as follows:

Approximately one hundred years ago there was a monk named Pra Inthaa (his ranking status was not stated) who had taken holy orders at Wat Bosang. The monk practiced Dhamma regularly (but had never been with the temple due to his pilgrimage travel). It was his nature that he liked to observe and investigate the local customs which he found in the area which others had not seen or encountered at that time. On one occasion, the monk went north, nearby Burma, and stayed for many years. Being close to the Burmese border, the people who came to make merit and give alms to the monks were probably both Thai and Burmese.

One day, while the monk was taking his morning meal, a Burmese, inclined to make merit, brought an umbrella to offer to the monk because he had seen that the monk did not have one, which caused difficulties. After the monk had blessed the Burmese who had brought the umbrella, he asked him if he had made the umbrella himself. The Burmese answered that indeed the umbrella was his own handiwork which he had made to offer to the monk. The monk then asked where the Burmese lived. He said that he lived not far from where the monk was staying. One could get there within one day's walk. After the Burmese had returned home, the monk opened the umbrella in order to see how it was made, whether it was convenient to use, and whether it would protect him from both sunshine and rain. The monk decided immediately that he would travel to Burma, intending to investigate how the umbrella was made.

When he went to the place in Burma where umbrellas were made the monk saw the villagers making umbrellas which could protect the user from both sunshine and rain. Additionally he saw the villagers making large umbrellas, which they called “ceremonial umbrellas”, as they were used in various feasts and ceremonies and for religious ceremonies as well. This umbrella was made entirely of Sa (mulberry bark) paper, attached with rubber and suffused or coated with oil to help repel both sunshine and rain. The monk was able to consider and asked the villagers what equipment was necessary in making the umbrellas. The villagers then explained the method of making umbrellas from beginning to end, including how to make Sa paper. After the monk had made his observations, he wrote down everything concerning the method of making umbrellas, from the method of making Sa paper to the various steps in umbrella making. When he was finished he had it in mind to take the instructions and make umbrellas at home, as he saw

¹ www.chiangmai-chiangrai.com/umbrella_making_history.html

that the various equipment needed for the process from the beginning to the end would not be difficult to obtain. After that, the monk returned home.

When he returned to the Wat (temple), the monk began looking for the various necessary equipments according to what he had written down. He persuaded the villagers to help him in his search and taught them every step of the method, except the way to make Sa paper. He ordered a man to boil mulberry bark until it was soft, wash it, and then choose that which was soft and pound it until it was fine. He then instructed the man to use lengths of cotton cloth as a mold. Water to a certain level was put in a teak basin and then the cloths were placed in the basin. They then took the finely pounded mulberry bark and put it in the water for the solution would adhere to the cloth mold. They stirred it so the fragments of mulberry bark fell evenly over the cloth and then removed the cloth and dried it in the sun. When it was dry it could be made into Sa paper. The monk chose women to be responsible for this part of the process because women are more perseverant than men. The Burmese relegated women to perform this step of the process, also.

For making umbrellas the monk taught the men to make frames out of bamboo (in Central Thai this is known as Mhai Bhai but in Northern Thai it is called Mhai Bong). The wood at the top and bottom of the umbrella was pine and the handle was made of a thin bamboo called Mhai Ruak, and resin from the persimmon tree was used as an adhesive. Finally another kind of resin was used on the paper as protection against both sunshine and rain. Concerning umbrella making, there were not many of the villagers who were interested in practicing and in helping the monk. When the final product was eventually available, some of the villagers made use of them when traveling to protect themselves from the sunshine or rain. When people from other villages came and saw the name of umbrellas Bosang became known somewhat more. Finally people began to place orders to buy umbrellas and it became a source of income. From that time until the present more of the villagers became interested in umbrella making. But we humans must agree that there is gradual evolution and so the process was modified over as time passed. Bosang villagers began to make more umbrellas, the work was a profitable hobby as a supplement to rice farming. Once the rice harvest was completed the villagers began making umbrellas throughout the village. When the umbrellas were finished, villagers took just a few, maybe 20 or 30 umbrellas, to the city to sell.

Later some people in Sanpatong District, in a village called Mae Wang, produced umbrellas similar to the people of Bosang. It is not known where they learned the craft of making umbrellas from silk or cotton. When the cloth and Sa paper umbrellas were finished they were brought into town to sell. The Bosang villagers keenly observed the other designs and skillfully thought up a way to make cloth umbrellas as well. They developed this gradually and changed from using tree resin to using Mameu oil which was both softer and stronger. They also used the oil mixed with Haang to good effect. (This Haang is a dust-colored pigment and at present is only sold in Burma at a very expensive cost.)

After the villagers had learned the method of making cloth umbrellas, things developed to the point that in 1941 the villagers got together and formed a

cooperative within the village. The villagers called this cooperative the Bosang Umbrella Making Cooperatives Ltd. At that time, the organizer was Mr. Jamroon Suthiwiwat, the head of cooperatives for the province. The villagers produced umbrellas of many different sizes, such as 14 inch, 16 inch, 18 inch, and 20 inch umbrellas as well as large ones of 35 and 40 inches, both cloth and paper umbrellas. The umbrellas are painted with oil paints mixed with Mameu oil of many different colors, such as red, yellow, blue and green. (At that time these oil paints had begun to be imported.) The venture succeeded progressively to the point that in approximately 1957, the Center for Industrial Promotion for the North assisted the villagers by teaching them to make Sa paper and to print cloth such as we can see up to the present.

Umbrella making developed prosperously to the point that they began to be painted with flowers and landscape view scenes of various kinds. This prosperity is the result of the assistance given and the fact that these umbrellas are products which can be exported and sell well abroad. The villagers have also been invited to give demonstrations of umbrella making so that the citizens of these countries can see this craft at various fairs and shows to the extent that Bosang umbrellas have been transformed into one of the symbols of Chiang Mai.

The villagers of Bosang should remember the monk's benevolence that he brought this art from to become a vital occupation up to the present. It is all a result of the foresight and wisdom of Luang Paw Inthaa which cannot be forgotten.

b. Background of Bosang Village

One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project means nothing for hundreds-year famous products like Bosang umbrellas. Because Bosang umbrellas are famous souvenirs that Thai tourists and foreigners have to pay for when they visit to Chiang Mai for a long time. Almost 100% of tourists must visit Sankamphaeng district to look and shop for Bosang umbrellas to remember that they have ever come to Chiang Mai.

At Bosang village, many stores are decorated by various umbrellas. *Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd*, the most outstanding store, is on the corner of Bosang road. *Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd* is the center of making umbrellas. People can shop for umbrellas and other souvenirs. They can observe the whole umbrella making process also. They can see how to make bamboo umbrella frames, how to cover umbrellas with Sa paper or cotton and the decoration. *Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd* sells umbrellas not only in Thailand. But it exports umbrella to many countries. Then it improves the living conditions of villagers. Moreover, *Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd* can preserve Northern Thai culture and proudly present the culture to the world.

Actually Bosang village and other 8 villages nearby of Sankamphaeng district and Doi Saket district in Chiang Mai are areas for making umbrellas. But now making umbrellas become more household industry. Making umbrella's components is responsible for each village. They send those components to

Umbrella making center at Bosang village to assemble them. Then the center continues to decorate umbrellas, famous symbol of Bosang umbrellas.

II. Economic Environment

In the present time, *Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd* makes umbrellas majoring for export. Comparing exporting to foreign countries is 70% and the rest is 30%² for selling in domestic (at *Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd*). Clearly seen that the objective of buying umbrellas is not to protect the weather (from sunshine and rain). The company and other Bosang umbrellas producers cannot compete with other competitors, who use more durable materials to make umbrellas such as iron, plastic, etc. And the company does not compete with them actually. Then the strong point of Bosang umbrellas are firstly for souvenirs. Bosang umbrella is a symbol of Chiang Mai. Secondly Bosang umbrella is for decoration. The decoration of Bosang umbrella is artful and unique. The uniqueness of Bosang umbrella is "hand made product". It cannot be made by machines. Most Foreigners admire this uniqueness and prefer to buy Bosang umbrellas to decorate their home. So the major customers are foreigners that shop Bosang umbrellas for souvenirs and when they return to their countries, they still order from abroad.

Moreover, the company publicizes to make people recognize more Bosang umbrella both to Thais and foreigners. Umbrella making center joins The Tourism Authority of Thailand to exhibit and sell Bosang umbrellas and other products in foreign countries. And travel magazines invite Umbrella Making Center to promote Bosang umbrellas also.

III. Technological Environment

Making Bosang umbrella does not change much from the past. From making bamboo umbrella frames process to decorating umbrella process, *Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd* still maintain the local wisdom of making umbrella without applying modern technology to the production process. Making paper umbrella is not difficult and it does not require high investment. Villagers can assemble the components by hand to produce umbrellas. Umbrella making is a labor intensive household industry. However, making bamboo umbrella frames process may need machines for convenient purpose, for example bamboo lathing process. Bosang umbrellas are hand made products, each umbrella is unique. The customers like this uniqueness of hand made product. So making umbrella process does not need to develop application of modern technology to its production process.

The gaily painted parasol, a French word meaning "against the sun", that is for sale to visitors are built over a bamboo frame, and the cover is made of organza, cotton or Sa paper. This last material is a northern speciality and is made from the inner bark of the mulberry tree. The umbrella frame is made of seven separated parts. These are the upper head, the upper head sleeve, the lower head,

² From interview with Mr. Kiattipong Pipatjariya (Personnel Manager) on 5th August 2005

the rib struts, the stem and the spring latch. These are still made in the same way as in days-gone-by despite several modern innovations such as impregnating the bamboo with modern insecticides.

IV. Socio-Cultural Environment

The village of Bosang has earned renown for the art of umbrella making for more than 100 years. As stated before, a Buddhist monk on pilgrimage to Burma learned about the art which he brought back with him on his return to Bosang village.

It was not famous for a long time, but villagers still maintain Bosang umbrella culture until now. Villagers still maintain making umbrella process and decoration in the same way from the past. In the old days villagers make umbrella for use then they turn to make it for sell in the current time. So Bosang umbrellas still exist as a symbol of Chiang Mai until now.

V. Conclusions

From history, Sa paper umbrellas was influenced by Burmese Style. It was taken to Bosang village for more than a hundred years. Until now making Sa paper umbrella is a major occupation in Bosang village. Moreover, Sa paper umbrella is a major export product of Chiang Mai.

Umbrella Making Center 1978 Co., Ltd is the center of making umbrellas. The company is a place for making and selling umbrellas. Visitors can also observe the whole umbrella making process. Bosang villagers maintain making Bosang umbrella culture for a long time and do not apply modern technology to production process.