

Marion Wettstein

NAGA TEXTILES

Design, Technique, Meaning and Effect
of a Local Craft Tradition in Northeast India

368 pages, 21.4 x 27 cm, 287 colour illustrations and graphics.
With enclosed poster showing 156 colour illustrations.
Half-linen cover.
English.

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NAGA TEXTILES

With their geometric and often minimalistic patterns, the traditional textiles of the Naga provide an unparalleled exception within India's world of textiles. The group of local tribal cultures in the eastern foothills of the Himalayas – in the borderland between India and Burma – fascinated explorers as far back as colonial times, thanks to their spectacular material culture and their head-hunting practices. With this current work, the endeavour to decipher the aesthetic and language of their textiles has been undertaken for the first time.

For more than ten years the ethnologist Marion Wettstein systematically researched their design, production technique, meaning and contemporary transposition into fashion. Over 60 colour sketches and 180 watercolours on the morphology of the patterns serve – for the purpose of visual argumentation – as a basis for her research. Hence her work also reads as a plea for the ethnographic drawing as a scientific mode of practice.

The examination of craft techniques and position within north-east India's history, through colonialism and the armed struggle for independence, is followed by an analysis of the textiles' patterns as objects laden with meaning of a complex system of status and social structure. The question of how far constructs – the result of colonial and scientific intervention – also play a role is never far away. An examination of the local fashion scene, in which the fascinating effect of the fabric today comes once again into its own, rounds off the study.

The first comprehensive monograph on the textiles of the Naga dedicates itself to their historical setting as well as the decryption of the cultural significance of their patterns. Also impressive on an aesthetic level, the large-format reproduced drawings and watercolours serve the author as a fundamental tool for her ethnological research.

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Design Chart of Naga Textiles (Beigelegtes Poster)

About the Author

Marion Wettstein studied anthropology, musical anthropology and media studies at the University of Zürich. From 2002 to 2008 she was assistant and scientific staff of Prof. Dr. Michael Oppitz at the Ethnographic Museum of Zürich University (Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich) where she contributed to several exhibitions. From 2007 to 2010 She was member of a four year research project "Material Culture, Oral Traditions and Identity among the Naga of Northeast India" funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF/FSN). In 2011 she completed her PhD thesis and in her current ongoing PostDoc research project "Ritual and Mimesis: Identity based on Dance" she is working about the Sakela, a ritual lay dance of the Rai in Eastern Nepal. Since October 2011 the research is part of the project "Ritual, Space, Mimesis: Performative Traditions and Ethnic Identity among the Rai of eastern Nepal" at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan, and Buddhist Studies (ISTB) of the University of Vienna, headed by Univ. Prof. Dr. Martin Gaenszle. The project is funded by FWF (Fonds für Wissenschaftliche Forschung), Austria.

With a general interest in Asia, her regional specialization is the extended Himalayas, particularly Northeast India and Eastern Nepal. Her teachings include lectures and seminars on visual and embodied ethnography, visual anthropology, material culture, fashion theory, mythology, anthropology of religion, and anthropology of dance.

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Fig. 31

Examining pattern differences of two Ao women's skirts and getting explained their meanings, Chuchu Imlang 2005.

Foto: Alban von Stockhausen



Fig. 39

Rongsüsü men's shawl: With side fringes on both sides it indicates three successive generations with completed cycles of feasts of merit, without side fringes only two generations (PRM Acc. No. 1928.69.715, Akhoya village 1920s).

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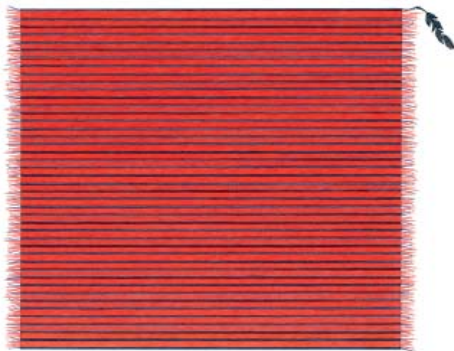


Fig. 44

Men's shawl of the kizesü type being the design base for the süvangsü (PRM Acc. No. 1928.69.158, Yimchenkimong village 1920s).

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Fig. 55

Rich women's shawls or full body cloth (Longsa village 2005).

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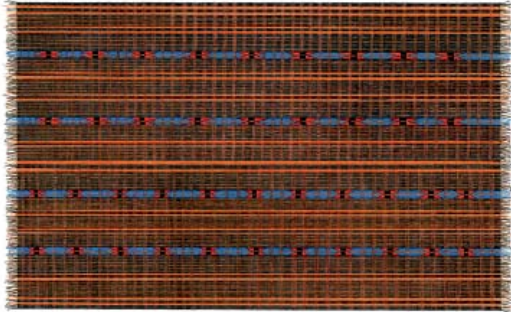


Fig. 59

Women's skirt from Longkumer clan of Chantongya village which could be worn by a woman whose father and forefathers had sacrificed mithun (PRM Acc. No. 1928.69. 170, 1920s).

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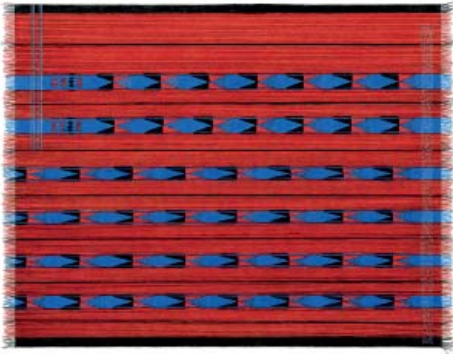


Fig. 75

A variation of an Ao women's clan skirt of design type 2 worn by the Longchar, Pongener and Ozukam clans of Sangratsü village (2004).

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Fig. 77 a-i

Some pattern variations found in the stripes of historical and contemporary Ao Naga women's clan skirts of type 2.

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Fig. 112

Sangtam inspired design.

Foto: Alban von Stockhausen

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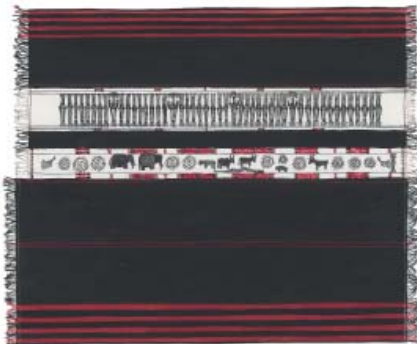
Fig. 113

Sema / Konyak inspired design.
Foto: Alban von Stockhausen



Fig. 117

Modelspresenting Sema fusion fashion at a fashion show on the occasion of the Ahuna festival of the Sema Naga in Zunheboto town (2008).
Foto: Alban von Stockhausen



Design Chart no. 60

Historical Rengma men's shawl: PRM Acc. No. 1928.69.1553 (Jacobs 1990:276). Variations without central band: Jacobs 1990:277; PRM Acc. No. 1928.69; MKB Acc. No. Ilb 1494. Produced again today for tourist market but seldom worn.
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Design Chart no. 97

Historical Chang men's loincloth: Jacobs 1990:273. Remade today for festivals.
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