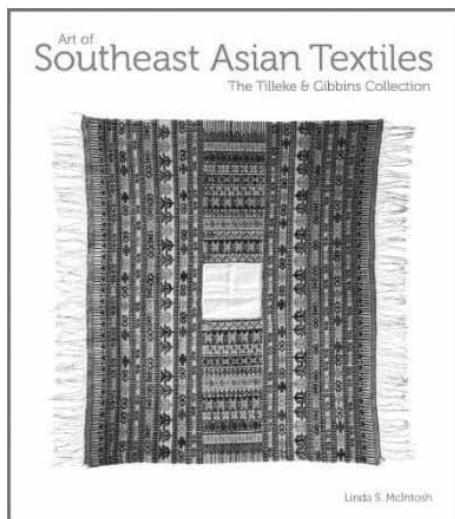


*Art of Southeast Asian Textiles: The Tilleke & Gibbins Collection* by Linda S. McIntosh (Bangkok: Tilleke & Gibbins International Ltd. in association with Serindia Publications, Inc., 2012). ISBN: 978-1-932476-59-0



This superbly illustrated, but heavy 312-page publication, provides an excellent introduction to the diversity of Southeast Asian textiles through an examination of the well-known collection of Mainland Southeast Asian textiles from various cultures of the region, accumulated by the Bangkok-based law firm, Tilleke & Gibbins, over a period of nearly thirty years.

Originally planned to adorn a new office premises, David Lyman, Chairman and Chief Values Officer of Tilleke & Gibbins, explains in his *Foreword* that the law firm actually had two key objectives behind its Collection:

‘preservation and appreciation’. Over time, the role and nature of the Collection evolved from providing decoration in a law firm to establishing a museum-quality textile collection (currently of some 1,900 examples) that would be located in an on-site state-of-the-art storage facility and be widely accessible. It is hard not to concur with Lyman when he notes that the original aims have been achieved, indeed surpassed, with the publication of this book, and that “textile aficionados and novices alike will surely come to appreciate textiles as true works of art created by masterful weavers” (p. 7).

Author Linda McIntosh, a Lao American textile expert who spends her time between Bangkok and Laos, has written the concise, yet highly informative, text outlining the background to, and rationale of, the Collection, as well as the descriptive captions for each of the approximately 200 illustrated textiles chosen for publication. After the *Foreword* and a chapter on *Collecting Southeast Asian Textiles*, the book is divided into seven chapters describing the textiles in the Collection: *Tai; Khmer and Charm; Malay; Burmese; Kachin, Chin, and Naga; Highland Minority Groups of Laos and Vietnam; and Mien and Hmong*. The author explains the rationale for these headings, noting that “handwoven textiles of the various ethnic groups living in Thailand, especially cloth from Tai cultures, dominate the Tilleke & Gibbins Textile Collection” (p. 14). However, close social, political and economic ties linking the cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia to ones in other areas, such as the island cultures of the region, have resulted in the exchange of cloth. In addition, some textiles produced outside Southeast Asia, in particular in India, have had a major impact on local textile production. Hence, textiles from further afield are also

included in the Collection, which McIntosh thus describes as “a multifaceted and comprehensive collection”.

Beyond the discrete geographical division of the textiles, McIntosh also delineates the materials, types and ages of textiles chosen for the Collection, while also examining briefly the creativity and technical ability of regional weavers, who are primarily women. Materials in the Collection range from ‘high-status court textiles to household items’, with most being produced twenty to 120 years ago. The oldest textiles in the Collection are approximately 200 years old. Although the textiles of Southeast Asia are often viewed as ethnographic objects, McIntosh makes clear in this book that hand-woven textiles function not only as clothing, household accessories (such as blankets or sleeping mats) and religious objects (such as temple banners or manuscript wrappers), but play a crucial role in important social occasions. A key theme running throughout the book is that many of these textiles, now appreciated by a wider audience as “sophisticated works of art”, would not exist without the imagination and skill of their manufacturers. In the author’s words, “The producer’s mathematical and technical skills in applying various techniques to form motifs, her creativity in arranging the designs and her ability to blend colors and textures are important factors in a cloth’s assessment as a high quality or fine artwork” (p. 23).

At the end of the book are several helpful Appendices, including a *Map of Ethno-linguistic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* that illustrates the distribution of the main ethnic groups mentioned in the text, *Technical Details* about each textile illustrated in the Collection section, a *Glossary* that will be a welcome reference aid for those unfamiliar with textile jargon, a well-researched *Bibliography* and a detailed *Index* that one would expect of this type of publication.

Of course, the textiles are the real stars of this publication and photographer Pattana Decha has done a superb job. The publishers are also to be congratulated for not stinting in providing high-resolution colour photographs, including many close-up or detailed shots, that supply the requisite level of detail to allow the reader to appreciate fully the diverse techniques, materials, colours and designs utilised in the production of these hand-woven textile gems. Thus, Linda McIntosh can feel proud that she has manifestly achieved her stated goal in providing ‘a beautiful reflection of the great textile wealth’ of this outstanding collection.

Paul Bromberg