

Narratives of Mizo Puan and Mizo Indigenous Patterns

DR. LALRINDIKI T. FANAI,
Department of English, Mizoram University

The term *puan* in Mizo means cloth in general and denotes, in particular, the traditional costume of Mizo women and men. The traditional way of wearing a *puan* is to wrap it around oneself from the waist to the ankle. The length of the *puan* is normally sixty to sixty-five inches. Loin-loom is used to weave the *puan* and it takes a week or more to finish a plain *puan*, and a month or more for one with patterns.

Some of the most important traditional Mizo *puans* are :

1. *Puanchei* or *Puan Laisen*

In literal terms, *puan* means cloth, *chei* means to decorate, *lai* means middle and *sen* means red. Both terms above mean 'decorated cloth' or 'cloth with a red middle'. In *Puan Laisen*, the red colour runs through the middle horizontally. It was and is still used for wedding costumes and for very special festivals and dances.

2. *Ngotekherh* or *Puan Hruih*

This is also an important Mizo traditional *puan*. The older term used for this *puan* is *Puan Hruih*. *Hruih* is a technique of weaving. The background of *Ngotekherh* or *Puan Hruih* is white with horizontal shadowy black stripes which is produced by using white and black weft alternately in the white vertical warp. Both men and women wear this *puan*.

3. *Puandum*

When literally translated, this is 'black cloth', and assumes different names according to its different functions. The background is black and both the horizontal edges are red. The multicoloured bands are arranged horizontally between these edges. Traditionally though, it consists of black and red colours only. *Puandum* is very significant in Mizo culture.

4. *Tawlhlopuan*

The attribute of courage or bravery is associated with this *puan*. The design of this *puan* consists of a black background with vertical stripes of red, yellow and white.

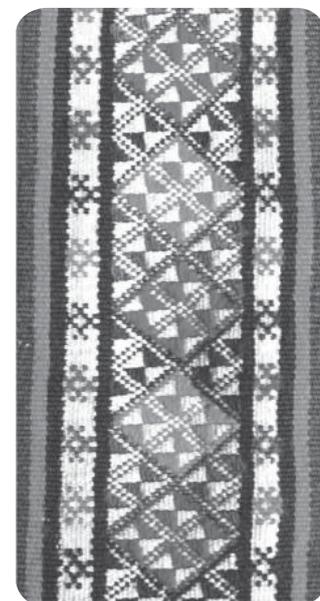
Some of the Mizo traditional patterns integrated in the *puan* are good examples to illustrate man's skill in translating artistic expressions. They are as follows:-

5. *Lenbuang thuam*

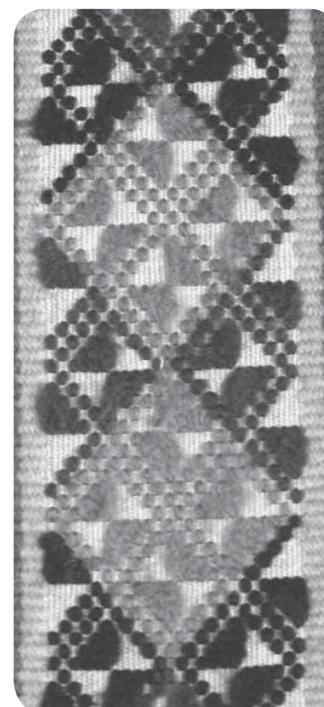
Lenbuang is the name of a tree and *thuam* means 'the junction of two or more boughs or branches'. This is a very common pattern in a Mizo *puan* and is woven into different shapes.

6. *Disul*

Di means 'sungrass' and *sul* mean, "the long grass or weeds on or by the side of a path which brush against passers-by and thus point in the direction in which they have gone." This pattern is considered to emulate a design in the compounded word. It is also combined with other patterns.



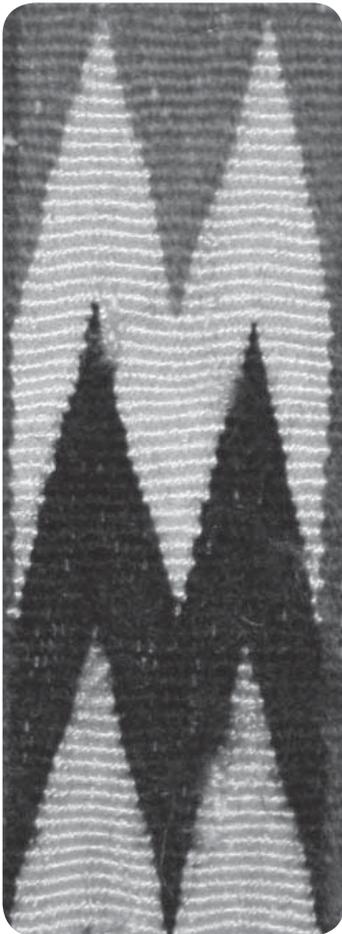
Disul konghnhnih



Lenbuangthuam



Ngotekherh



Sakeizangzia II



Senior I

7. *Sakei zang zia or Keipui zia*

The word *sakei* or *keipui* means 'tiger', *zang* means 'the back of the animal' and *zia* is 'pattern'. This pattern emulates the striped pattern of a tiger's skin.

8. *Senior zeh or senior par*

By the very term 'senior', it can be assumed that the pattern is a later improvisation. The word *zeh* means pattern and *par* means 'to bloom' and, here, it also means 'flower'.

9. *Sawhthing par*

Sawhthing par means 'ginger flower'. This pattern is combined with other patterns but generally the shape of 'ginger flower' is woven or placed on top of other designs.

10. *Arsi par*

Arsi means 'star' and *par* means 'flower'. This pattern is an imitation of the stars in the sky.

11. *Kikiau*

Kikiau simply means 'zig zag'. Within this pattern, smaller patterns of four or five are arranged in a diamond shape and are woven in zig zag pattern.

12. *Kawkpui zik zial*

Kawkpui is the name of a fern. *Zik* means 'tender part of the leaf' and *zial* means 'twist or twirling'. It is a pattern that evolves from the twirling of the tender part of a fern at the tip.

13. *Herhsawp par*

Herhsawp means a bamboo stool. The pattern resembles the shape of the stool.

14. *Pangpar*

Different flowers like roses, tulips etc. are also used as patterns for the *puan*. In a *puan* with floral patterns and the colour combination is where the skill of the weaver is often reflected.

In modern Mizo *puan*, the traditional patterns have been modified and a number of new patterns that do not necessarily emulate nature or traditional tools have evolved. Some of them have a combination of different traditional patterns whereas some are just patterns without names.

References

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