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Artisans Angkor: Reclaiming Cambodian Silk Crafts under French Patronage (1992–2017)

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Abstract

Following the 1991 Paris Peace Accords that granted a return to a relative political stability in Cambodia, the non-profit organization *Les Chantiers Ecoles* was launched with the support of the European Union to revive local traditional crafts and sericulture that had nearly vanished under the Khmer Rouge regime. This vocational institute was the result of a cooperation between the French and the Cambodian government. It provided training to disadvantaged young villagers of Siem Reap's area in polychromic woodwork, stone carving, metal, lacquerware, and silk weaving. Eventually, the project turned into a social enterprise under the French name Artisans Angkor. Drawing its inspiration from the surrounding archaeological splendors of Angkor Wat, the company emphasizes its authentic making processes. Artisans Angkor welcomes tourists in its silk farm near Siem Reap, using this production site as a showcase for sericulture from silkworms breeding to weaving, promoting the revival of indigenous golden silk while selling a wide range of souvenirs goods. Relying on the performative value of silk craft practices, Artisans Angkor has developed an engaging storytelling, an educational and marketing tool which elevates crafts as tokens of Cambodian cultural identity. Praised by the Cambodians who consider the brand as a national success, the enterprise has however kept a French leadership. Tracing the company's history, this paper examines to which extent Artisan Angkor follows the definition of a Transnational Artisan Partnership developed by anthropologist Susan Falls and how it pertains to a form of soft power for the French. Through the analysis of its aesthetic and discourses, this case study highlights the project's hybrid nature and demonstrates how it relates to the colonial model of the School of Cambodian Arts implemented in 1920 under the French Protectorate to promote Cambodian crafts.

Keywords

Cambodia, sericulture, weaving, post-colonial studies, invented traditions, soft power

Introduction

Following a return to a relative political stability in Cambodia in the early 1990s, La Ligue Française de l'enseignement (The French League for Education) launched a large vocational training workshop program to provide employment opportunities to rural populations who had been deeply impacted by the country's recent upheavals. It offered training to disadvantaged young villagers of Siem Reap area in polychromic woodwork, stone carving, metal, lacquerware, and silk weaving. Eventually, the project exceeded its original goal and turned into a successful social enterprise under the French name *Les Artisans d'Angkor* in 1998, which then simplified into *Artisans Angkor*. It now occupies a monopolistic position in the Cambodian silk landscape, strongly benefitting from the proximity of the major archeological site of Angkor Wat. From a French NGO to a Cambodian enterprise, to what extent has Artisans Angkor kept a French approach in its structure, communication and development strategy? By tracing the company's history, this paper aims to demonstrate the hybrid nature of the project, comparing it to the colonial model of the School of Cambodian Arts implemented in the 1920s under the French protectorate. By looking at how Artisans Angkor has been shaping its relations with other major actors in the field, the emphasis is placed on identifying and describing the major strategies and power relationships used to reach the status of leader in Cambodian artisanal silk products. This case study exemplifies the difficulties in identifying agency within the local silk industry, both challenging and encouraging the crafting of national discourses about Cambodian cultural identity.

Methodology: Towards A Silk Network

In order to outline the complex structure of the silk production chain from weaving to distribution and highlight how the various national and international actors interrelate and have agency over this industry, this paper draws on theoretical concepts defining the key notion of the network. The Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) developed by the French sociologist Bruno Latour offers an invaluable framework to approach histories and interrelations of transnational institutions, non-profit organizations, social enterprises and private companies involved in silk weaving. With his thought-provoking methodology, Latour's argument positions the nature of groups, actions, objects, facts, and type of studies (science or social) as equals (Latour 2005:22). In a reverse approach, he claims that power is the result of a process and not the "reservoir that will provide an explanation" (Latour 2005:64). Applying this methodology of research to the realm of silk-making in Cambodia supports the definition of silk as a multilayered topic which combines a multiplicity of forces, actors, and elements: technology, humans and materials, movements and decisions, regional and national inputs, which are to be examined equally without hierarchy. The transformative and multi-dimensional quality

of his approach applied to design history studies suits the multiple nature of the silk sector, which answers to specific players that, in turn, resort to a series of processes, tools, and materials to produce silk objects. Over the last three decades scholarly interest in Southeast Asia among has grown, reflecting this region's economic, political, and cultural rise on the international scene. Regarding research on sericulture and silk weaving practices in Cambodia, the literature has remained fragmentary and particularistic, focusing mainly on one type of textiles or one historical period such as French anthropologist Bernard Dupaigne's extensive research on the field with weavers and Jean Delvert's account of sericulture in the 1960s (Dupaigne 1984:111-131; Delvert 1994:282-286). Additionally, textile specialists such as Gillian Green and Robyn Maxwell have built an invaluable and precise study of textile techniques, meaning and usage in Cambodia, in relation to other Asian productions, but mostly leaving out political and socio-economic factors (Green 2003; Maxwell 2014). On the other hand, non-profit organization reports, governmental surveys and recent research on the economy and anthropology of the silk revival by John Ter Horst, makes impressive contributions but largely ignores the materiality of silk as objects (Ter Horst 2008:17-303). My paper builds on these resources to trace the history of the revitalization of the silk weaving sector in Cambodia since the early 1990s to the present day by examining one of the main actors who emerged in this post-conflict framework. By choosing a multidisciplinary approach combining oral history, visual documentation collected during two periods of fieldwork in 2017-2018 and archival research, my goal is to highlight the implication of the key player Artisans Angkor, the shifting power balance between international and national prerogatives, the agency of French initiatives and its impact on the Cambodian silk sector from an economic, social, and cultural perspective.

A French Initiative Grounded in International Development Policies

After two decades of civil war and isolation from the international community, the 1991 Paris Peace accords opened Cambodia to the emergence of foreign aid presence (fig.1). Jon Bennett, an expert in international development, assessed that:

“By 1992, there were more than seventy international NGOs registered in Cambodia with expatriates present in most provinces of the country. With the arrival of United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC) the previous year, resources and trained personnel were very much concentrated in foreign hands” (Benett, 1995: 79).

Artisans Angkor craft company emerged from this rapid movement transitioning from an NGO-led project to a semi-public enterprise. As shown in figure 2, in 1992 La Ligue Française de l'enseignement (The French

League for Education) launched a program called Chantiers-Ecoles de Formation Professionnelle (CEFP) (Professional Training Workshops and Schools) in the area of Siem Reap with funding provided by the European Union and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and French Cooperation, under the approval of the Cambodian Ministry of Education. Led by Charles Maisonnave-Couterou (1932-2009), a French educator, The French League for Education coordinated funding and logistics for CEFP's plan. He collaborated on site with Jean-Pierre Martial who officiated as the director of operations ((Maisonnave-Couterou and Biache, 1996: 14). The aim was to encourage young Cambodians to play a role in their country's reconstruction effort by learning manual skills in construction work, agriculture, and the restoration of Angkor temples, which showed promising tourist potential (National Polytechnic Institute of Angkor 2018). Inspired by the French model of *Les Compagnons du Devoir* (The Companions of Duty), a century-old mentoring system based on the transmission of manual know-how from master journeymen to a community of apprentices, the program received the support of volunteer instructors who helped to implement nine workshops focused on a variety of manual skills including masonry, woodwork, and stone-cutting. Workshops were led in Khmer as the main language combined with French for technical vocabulary and the first year provided training for one hundred thirty young people.

Sericulture: A French Know-How

In the 1980s in the wake of the civil war, silk only represented about 0.8 tons of yearly production, as opposed to an average of fifty tons before the Khmer Rouge dictatorship (Cambodia Ministry of Commerce and ITC 2016:9). In 1991, CEFP team found that one of the districts near Puok village in Siem Reap area was “used for the traditional production of mulberry trees, silkworm breeding, cocoon treatment, dyeing, and weaving” (Maisonnave-Couterou and Biache 1996, 17). In his report for La Ligue de l'enseignement, Maisonnave-Couterou considered that the silk revitalization which took place in Les Cévennes in the 1970s was a good model for what he projected to do in Cambodia (National Polytechnic Institute of Angkor, 2018). This area was known in France as the main sericulture center which provided more than half of the country's silk cocoon production in the mid-nineteenth century (fig.3). Local production was heavily impacted in the 1860s by the disastrous spread of the silkworm disease called *pébrine* and the aggressive competition from Chinese and Japanese imports (Charlery de la Masselière 2004:145). As France established its protectorate over Cambodia in 1863, the French considered considered how to develop and utilize silk resources from Indochina to overcome the collapse of their own production (Ter Horst 2008:99).

In 1993 CEFP re-initiated this French-Cambodian connection by conducting a study in Les Cévennes with

the French silk expert Michel Costa, who had participated in relaunching French local sericulture via an organization called Serica. He then invited the French agronomist Alain Peyré to lead the project in Cambodia (Maisonnavé-Couterou and Biache 1996: 17). This led to the foundation of the National Silk Centre (NSC) in Puok village about fifteen kilometers from Siem Reap, a sericulture training center and a silkworm nursery. In 1995 with the funding of the French Development Agency (AFD), sericulture became a sector of its own, encompassing mulberry tree growing, silkworm breeding of the Cambodian *bombyx mori* species, fiber reeling, dyeing, weaving, and tailoring. Internal reports stated that 4320 mulberry plants were grown on two and a half hectares in Puok in 1995 with a plan to reach 25 000 plants in the following year (fig.4).

From NGO Program to Craft Company

In 1995 the program continued to expand in the craft sector offering training in silk weaving in addition to sericulture. CEFP focused on marketing and product development. With the success of its approach and the support of French funds, the question of the apprentices' integration into Siem Reap's economic fabric led CEFP to consider how to develop a new leadership structure (Maisonnavé-Couterou and Biache 1996: 17). As a result, the French League for Education progressively stepped down to let a new project emerge under the name Les Artisans d'Angkor in 1998. The training part and the National Silk Centre passed under Cambodia's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, a transfer presented on diagram 5. With the support of the European Union as part of a two-year program called "Replac," In the 2010s the name of the brand has been changed into Artisans Angkor to facilitate an international spelling. Artisans Angkor focused on producing and selling Cambodian handicrafts in dedicated shops in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Once the EU funding stopped, Artisans Angkor transitioned into a semi-public company conceived as a French-Cambodian social enterprise. The concept of social enterprise emerged in the 1990s in the United States, primarily designating "market-oriented economic activities serving a social goal" and encompassing a wide range of initiatives "from for-profit business engaged in corporate philanthropy to non-profit organizations engaged in mission-supporting commercial activity" (Defourny and Nyssens 2006:4). In 2003 the firm's shares were divided between four parties: thirty percent to the Cambodian government, twenty percent to the employees, ten percent to a group of investors and forty percent to VINCI, a French multinational company, leader in the concession and construction business (fig.6). The role of VINCI as majority shareholder has remained confidential in most of Artisans Angkor's communication. This information only appears on VINCI's website on a page dedicated to the multinational's involvement in Cambodia. This website also

reveals that through the group Cambodia Airports, VINCI has been operating international airports in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and more recently Sihanoukville under a forty-five-year concession agreement with the Cambodian government dating back to 1995 (VINCI 2018).

Soft Power and Issue of Ownership

This type of transaction between France and Cambodia has been common since the reopening of the country to foreign investment. Ranging from humanitarian support to private funding, France remains Cambodia's fourth top donor after the Asian Development Fund, Japan, and the United States (OECD 2015). The economic connection back to colonization as Cambodia passed under the French protectorate from 1863 to 1953. The relationships with France continued in the second half of the twentieth century until the rise of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. When the country reopened in the 1990s, these previous connections were facilitated and re-established in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA), a term describing international aid flow "with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective" (OECD 2017) (fig.7). Shifting from colonial control, this renegotiated relationship pertains to soft power, in the definition of Professor Joseph Nye, Jr., with the purpose of building a relationship of mutual advantage between France and Cambodia (Nye 2005:158). Soft power often relies on nation-state's values and cultural products to exert its attraction (Hayden 2011:5). Craig Hayden, expert in diplomacy, argued that soft power also resorts on "the growing efficacy of transnational social advocacy via NGOs" (Hayden 2011:6). With its transnational ties and involvement in the cultural sector, Artisans Angkor exemplifies an attractive model of public diplomacy, that is, when "an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public" (Hayden 2011:9). As a result, the backing of powerful key players in Cambodia and in France positioned the craft company on a successful path. The social enterprise reached financial equilibrium in 2005, which enabled it to launch an in-house training program on handicrafts, with the exception of sericulture which would still rely on CEFEP's expertise. It has become an active member of the International Silk Union (ISU), a Chinese-led organization founded in 2015 to foster international collaboration on the promotion of the silk industry (International Silk Union 2018). VINCI's involvement opened new business opportunities such as the decoration of Siem Reap international airport (VINCI 2016). The company's origins rooted in two distinctively-French associative structures, namely La Ligue Française de l'enseignement and Les Compagnons du Devoir, and the active presence of VINCI as the majority shareholder complicates the idea of a full Cambodian ownership. Artisans Angkor's products are displayed in the largest retail spaces at the main airport's commercial areas, the brand

becoming the flagship for the Cambodian cultural industry for the international crowd visiting the country. The investment and endorsement of the Cambodian government conferred Artisans d'Angkor an authority in representing Cambodian crafts. This governmental acknowledgment participates in the phenomenon of “invented traditions” as defined by Hobsbawm’s, i.e., the establishment of new symbols as part of the construction of national identity, especially resorting to discourses of preservation of an intangible heritage (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:7).

A Prior Model: The School of Cambodian Arts

The construction of this hybrid model of craft company in post-conflict Cambodia resonates with a historical model implemented in 1919 during the French protectorate by Georges Groslier which called the School of Cambodian Arts. Anthropologists Susan Falls and Jessica Smith defined this type of project as a Transnational Artisan Partnership (TAP), a structure combining philanthropic and artisanal practices implementing “working relationships between Third-World artisans, skilled in crafts, and organizations (either for-profit or not-for-profit) that are funded, managed and/or run by First-World designers, activists or entrepreneurs” (Falls and Smith 2011:255). The TAP model is characterized by design strategies embedded in philanthropic and preservationist perspectives which tend to romanticize local craft practices (Falls and Smith 2011:255). Falls and Smith identified Groslier’s initiative as the primary example of a TAP. Born in Cambodia and educated in France, Georges Groslier (1887-1945) was a French artist, architect and educator commissioned by the French Governor General Albert Sarraut to organize a program of training in the arts for Cambodian populations (fig.8). He transformed the Royal Palace workshops into a school combined with a museum, which has now become the Phnom Penh National Museum. Groslier cultivated discourses about the impending vanishment of skills and artistic knowledge, a narrative of decline that was pervasive during colonial times (Edwards 2007:148). He diagnosed that Cambodian arts were on the verge of disappearing because of Europeans’ negative influence. He considered that the Cambodian elite had turned away from local craftsmanship to purchase imported goods from France, which resulted in a consequent loss of activity for local artisans (Groslier 1925:395-422). Groslier urged the colonial power to preserve what he had identified as traditional crafts. Benedict Anderson, contemporary political theorist, identified a “progressive” movement including colonials as well as natives in the early twentieth century which encouraged the colonial state to become “the guardian of a generalized, but also local, Tradition” (Anderson 2006:186). By preserving and reviving the cultural highlights— and the archaeological sites in particular— of its colonies, the

colonial state incorporated these sites of prestige in its global map, thus instrumentalizing these examples to reinforce its global influence (Anderson 2006:186).

Groslier implemented a campaign claiming the decline of Cambodian culture which helped him to launch his conservationist project. He created a school designed as a “conservatory” with six workshops: drawing and architecture, sculpture, woodworking and gold plating, foundry, silverware, and weaving. A Cambodian master craftsman was in charge of each workshop. For instance, the silk weaving workshop was composed of twenty-five young female weavers (fig.9).

Elleke Boehmer pointed out that colonials who questioned the colonial efforts to reconsider local culture had become precursor modernists (Boehmer 2005:119). As the first French man born in Cambodia, Groslier responded to this description as he expressed a deep interest for Cambodian local arts and crafts and positioned himself as a mediator between the colonial government and the colonies. However, Groslier’s perception of the artisans remained in line with the colonial mentality of the time. He perpetuated an essentialized vision, describing them as a passive community in need for guidance with an innate talent “fundamentally contemplative and artistic,” simply noticing that: “many women knew how to weave and dye boldly colored silks which are essentials to every home” (Groslier 1925:401). These accounts fit Boehmer’s definition of the “colonial gaze” showcasing “the curious scrutiny of the colonized by the colonizer” where “there was much of the attitude of the voyeur as well as of the map-maker” (Boehmer 2005:68).

To exploit these skills and improve the production process, Groslier founded artisans guilds regrouping makers in the same discipline called *Corporations Cambodgiennes* (Cambodian Corporations) in 1924 with a total of 200 members. *Le Service des Arts* (The Service of the Arts), an office emerging from the School of Cambodian Arts, acted as the intermediary between customers and artisans, receiving orders, purchasing raw materials, and ensuring a controlled sales price (Groslier 1925:419). *Le Service des Arts* emphasized on the production of Cambodian hip wrappers called *sampot hol*, which designates a type of polychromic silk cloth showcasing a range of ikated stylised motifs, usually worn during cultural ceremonies by Cambodian women (Edwards 2007:400). At the time, aside from the royal manufactures, Cambodian weavers produced a wide range of textiles from as a side activity from farming. By encouraging the development of one style of textiles, Groslier turned Cambodian silks into a commodity promoting only one specific aesthetic. French sociologist Madeline Akrich has designated the technical content inscribed in the objects as a “script,” a notice designed by the creator/maker for the future users (Akrich 1992:208). In the case of the silk *sampot hol* produced by *Le Service des Arts*, the final artifacts appeared as a multilayered construct encapsulating the artisanal work achieved by the weavers, a controlled expression of Cambodianness, and a decorative function.

Using the museum as a tourist attraction, silk products were developed and sold with foreign customers in mind, especially Europeans settled in Southeast Asia and international tourists attracted by Angkor Wat, which Groslier defined as “a rich client base, avid of exoticism and always ready to acquire souvenirs and testimonials of far away countries that they visited” (Groslier 1925:415). From 1921 to 1926, three thousand silk *sampot* were ordered for this clientele (Agence économique de l’Indochine 1925:25). As it appears on figure 10, a large selection of *sampot hol* was also exhibited during colonial exhibitions, and in this case in Marseille in 1922. The pieces were sold to a French audience enthused by an orientalist craze.

The Khmer Empire, A Long-lasting French Interest

Between the French colonial era in the 1920s and the post-conflict humanitarian development in the 1990s, the context is fundamentally different. There is, however, a continuity in certain strategies which illustrate how neocolonial models are still at play in the silk sector, especially amongst French policymakers. Susan Falls astutely pointed out “that the narratives and labor habits developed to implement these desires continue to be reproduced to take advantage of the Western consumer zeitgeist” (Falls and Smith 2011:261). French colonials expressed an interest in Cambodian crafts as a tool to reclaim the cultural luster of the Khmer Empire (802-1431 AD). Their involvement in Cambodian craft production had a clear political impact. It was meant to demonstrate the respect of French rulers for an ancient heritage put under their protection, but also to assert Cambodia’s cultural identity against the growing influence of the Kingdom of Siam in the Southeast Asian region (Abbe 2008:62).

Historically, this interest for Cambodian arts and handicrafts dates from the early 1860s following the publication of explorer tales of Henri Mouhot and Louis Delaporte and the discovery of the ruins of Angkor, the former capital of the Khmer Empire located in Siem Reap area (fig.11). Historian Penny Edwards referred to “Angkor as a site for the generation of European imaginings about Cambodia, from the arrival of the explorer Henri Mouhot in 1860 to the construction of an Angkor pavilion at Marseille in 1906” (Edwards 2007:16). From this time onwards, the Khmer Empire has remained the peak of the Cambodian civilization in Western mentalities, becoming a key element in both foreign and national political discourses to revive crafts and encourage tourism. Similarly, in his 1995 report, Maisonnave-Couterou praised Siem Reap area for being “a major site of Khmer culture, a legacy of the creative artistic effort of the Cambodian Kings and their people” (Maisonnave-Couterou and Biache 1996:6). This sort of narrative supported the implantation of CEFP’s craftsmanship programs near Cambodia’s main archaeological site. This phenomenon of persistence and mimicry in French perspectives on Cambodian culture and by extension on local silk crafts falls within

what Hobsbawm described as “a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:4). Hobsbawm inferred that traditions are always constructed and established “in continuity with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:1). These dynamics led to the development of hybrid projects. Edwards used the qualifier “memorabilia” to describe the cultural objects produced as part of colonial nostalgia, a “glamorized” version colonial society offering a “re-evocation of the context that produced such images” which is “excised from their historical context” (Edwards 2007:10). In this sense, the silk *sampot* produced at the School of Cambodian Arts of Phnom Penh appeared as renegotiated reproductions of ancient textiles practices, developing a ‘template of the Original Khmer and chart the specific coordinates of the Khmer race, temperament, and nationality’ (Edwards 2007:11). In the present day, the craft company Artisans Angkor has framed the promotional material of its handcrafted products in this Khmer Empire nostalgic template. The company has praised the ‘truly Cambodian touch’ of its designs, presenting the silk products as the result of an ancient tradition dating back to the thirteenth century and the Khmer Empire” (Artisans Angkor 2018) (fig.12). The products developed by Artisans Angkor are, in Hobsbawm’s words, “responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:1). The narrative on Cambodian traditional crafts exists in the repetition of ancient models as a reaction to the destructive effects of the civil war and globalization.

Artisans Angkor, A Hybrid Structure

In Cambodia was marked by the ‘entanglement’ of colonialist and nationalist views to craft national culture (Edwards 2007:7). We have examined how in the 1920s Groslier cultivated an ambiguous stance on how to perpetuate crafts. On one hand, he praised the Cambodian artisans to practice their work as “before the arrival of French in Cambodia; using only local and traditional products and tools; applying only the recipes from their ancestors” (Groslier 1925:404). On the other hand, he himself would define what should be considered a pure art form in the Khmer tradition worth being taught at the School of Cambodian Arts. This contradictory approach still prevails in Artisans Angkor’s design strategy. For instance, since its foundation, Artisans Angkor has been supervised by a French CEO designated by VINCI, whose influence we previously discussed, along with employing a majority of Cambodian nationals (Indochina Aviation Conference 2017). Presenting itself as the largest employer in Siem Reap province, the company “provides employment to over 1100 people, including about 800 artisans,” of which half are involved in producing silk accessories and garments (Artisans Angkor 2017). Craftsmen from all sectors, except silk, have responded to design guide-

lines implemented by a Cambodian artistic director in the person of the contemporary artist Svay Sareth, born in 1972 and trained in a French fine arts school. Svay Sareth benefits from international recognition for his artistic work (Artisans Angkor 2018). For silk, the company has relied on a series of French design consultants and in-house foreign fashion designers for periodical consultations. Pav Eang Khoing, who has been appointed silk director in 2003 to supervise the silk production chain, worked with these successive designers. He now oversees new design developments with the marketing team (fig.13). He currently manages three weaving workshops and two sewing workshops at the silk farm in Puok for a total of 230 weavers, 10 people doing the tying for ikat patterns, and 17 people in charge of dyeing. For sericulture, there are ten people in charge of raising silkworms and preparing the cocoons, and twelve more for threads spinning (Pav Eang Khoing 2018) (fig.14-15-16). For ikat weaving, independent weavers would usually complete all the required tasks by themselves or collaborate with other family members in the village for the tying and the dyeing processes. At Artisans Angkor, tying threads, dyeing, and weaving are three separate activities conducted by different groups of artisans (Pav Eang Khoing 2018). In its structure, Artisans Angkor has deconstructed its chain of command, separating design from production and rationalizing the different processes to reduce the costs. As a result, weavers remain separated from the decision-making and the design process.

Artisans Angkor, Between Transnational and Local Prerogatives

Artisans Angkor is well-known by urban Cambodians from the upper middle class, Cambodians from the diaspora who often visit the country, and by those who work in the tourism industry and bring their clients to the main shop in Siem Reap. The craft company mostly focuses on foreign visitors in its commercial strategy by especially targeting a growing audience coming from Asia and China in particular. According to Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, thanks to Siem Reap and Phnom Penh as main tourist attractions, the number of international tourists doubled within five years (2008–2013), representing more than four million of visitors with seventy-eight percent from Asia (Cambodia Ministry of Tourism 2014). The company sells a large range of handwoven silk products including textile accessories, womenswear and menswear, woven and printed home textiles, pillows, and throws but also a wide selection of home decor gifts; and markets them as high-quality souvenirs, which attracts Asian customers in particular (Cambodia Ministry of Commerce and International Trade Center 2016:57). Falls and Smith determined that, in the case of a TAP, these type of products are usually locally handcrafted and marketed as commodities for tourist markets (Falls and Smith 2011:255). Silk accessories range from entry price silk muslin scarves at fifteen dollars to more complex

models of shawls in multicolored ikat sold for 150 US dollars, sometimes accompanied with names evocative of the Cambodian traditional weaving techniques with terms such as “*hol*” (ikat), “*lboeuk*” (damask), and “*chorebap*” (brocade) (fig.17-18-19). The colorways display a variety of sophisticated and saturated tones destined to a foreign market: turquoise and navy blue, teal grey, black, powder pink, deep crimson red, fuchsia pink, acid green. Eighty percent of the silk fiber is a white industrially-produced fine silk sourced from a specific supplier in China, ten percent is the artisanal Cambodian golden silk both produced by Artisans Angkor and purchased from silk farmers in Phnom Srok area, and about ten percent of raw silk coming Vietnam (Pav Eang Khoing 2018).

Designed as a tourist attraction and a showcase for the sericulture and silk weaving artisanal processes implemented by Artisans Angkor, visitors are offered complimentary tours at the Angkor Silk Farm in Puok village where they can learn about the whole silk production process, from silkworm breeding to silk weaving, focusing only on the artisanal process of golden silk cocoons sericulture, which, as mentioned above, only represents ten percent of silk fibers used for production. Small groups of tourists are accompanied by a guide following a course in a series of workshops spaces where Artisans Angkor staff members are working (fig.20). The visitors’ endeavor at the silk farm exemplifies the hybrid essence of Artisans Angkor’s as a Cambodian artisanal enterprise, which pursues educational and commercial goals. Dean MacCannell notes that in tourism ‘the tour is characterized by social organization designed to reveal inner workings of the place’ (MacCannell 1973:595). In the case of Artisans Angkor, it offers the visitors the multilayered experience of a renegotiated tradition, between what Dean MacCannell has described as “staged authenticity” and a form of embodied authenticity with the live enactment of silk practices by local makers (MacCannell 1973:595).

Conclusion

Basing its communication on a combination of social impact, traditional handicraft, and heritage, Artisans Angkor successfully comforts its consumers in the legitimacy and quality of its products. However, as Falls and Smith express it, this project which “appeals to our own aesthetic sensibilities” may also rely on “the promotion of an Orientalist logic” (Falls and Smith 2011:2). Positioned as the champion of “traditional Cambodian crafts,” Artisans Angkor’s claims that: “it is still important to remember that Artisans Angkor is way more than just a tourist attraction or souvenir shop,” stressing that it “should not keep Cambodian history and traditions as a simple ‘background’ to sell products” (Artisans Angkor 2018). In this specific case, the post-colonial narrative developed by Artisans Angkor seems uncontested by the Cambodians, who

praise it for its success and consider it a Cambodian brand. It holds a unique position in the silk sector in comparison with other French NGOs based in Cambodia, which are still considered foreign-owned. Taking the cue from the “decolonizing anthropology” movement, anthropologist Elizabeth Tunstall has advocated for a decolonized design approach, freed from neocolonial Western ideologies (Tunstall 2013:232-250). This methodology offers tools to reconsider design practice in the developing world in order to implement new policies of learning, creating and producing. A company as established as Artisans Angkor could consider engaging in territories which would “foster autonomous development among designers and developmentalists,” thus exploring an alternative Cambodian voice in the production of silk goods in this post-colonial, post-conflict, globalized context (Ghose 1989:44).

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Fig.1
Map of Cambodia, 2018. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

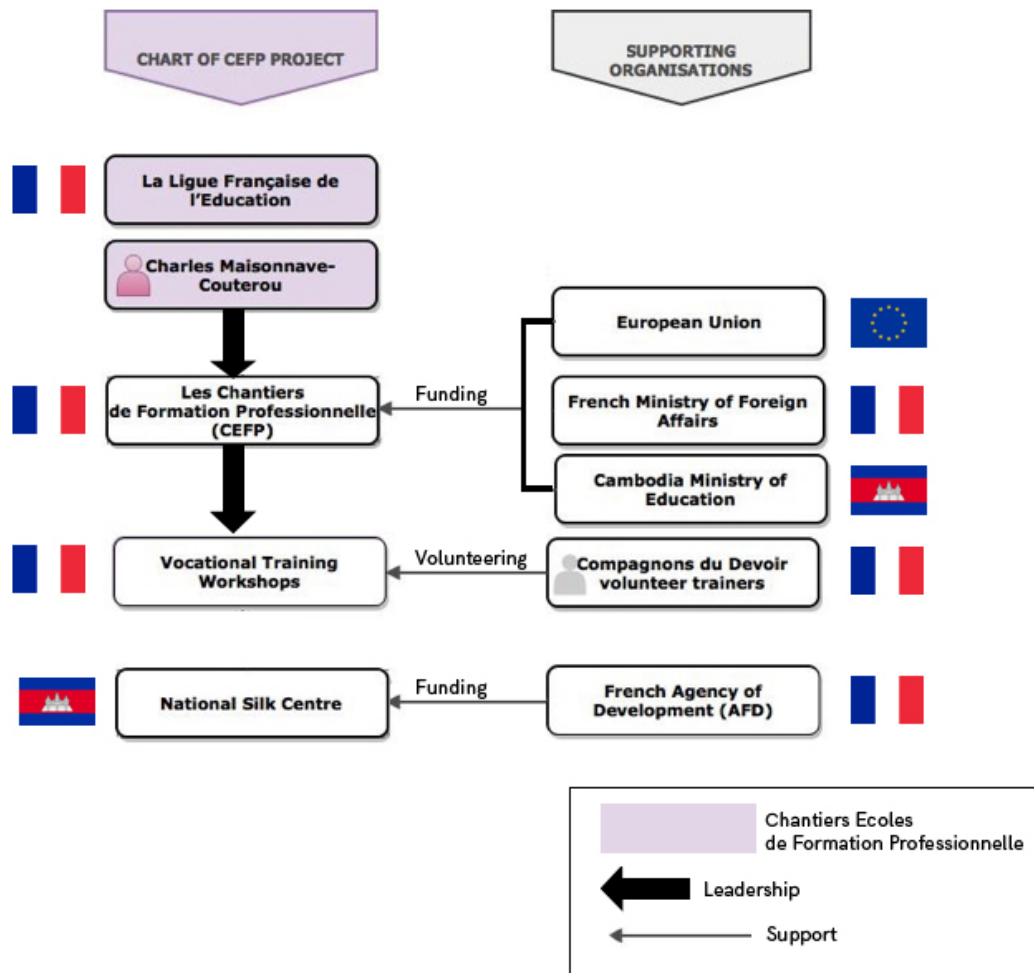


Fig.2
Chart of Les Chantiers Ecoles de Formation Professionnelle (CEFP) 1990-1995.



Fig.3
Gathering of mulberry tree leaves in Les Cévennes Print by
Cousy, from a photo by Lackerbauer, 1870, Gallica, BNF.



Fig.4
Mulberry tree fields at Artisans Angkor Silk Farm in Puok, Siem Reap province, 2016. (Source: Personal collection)

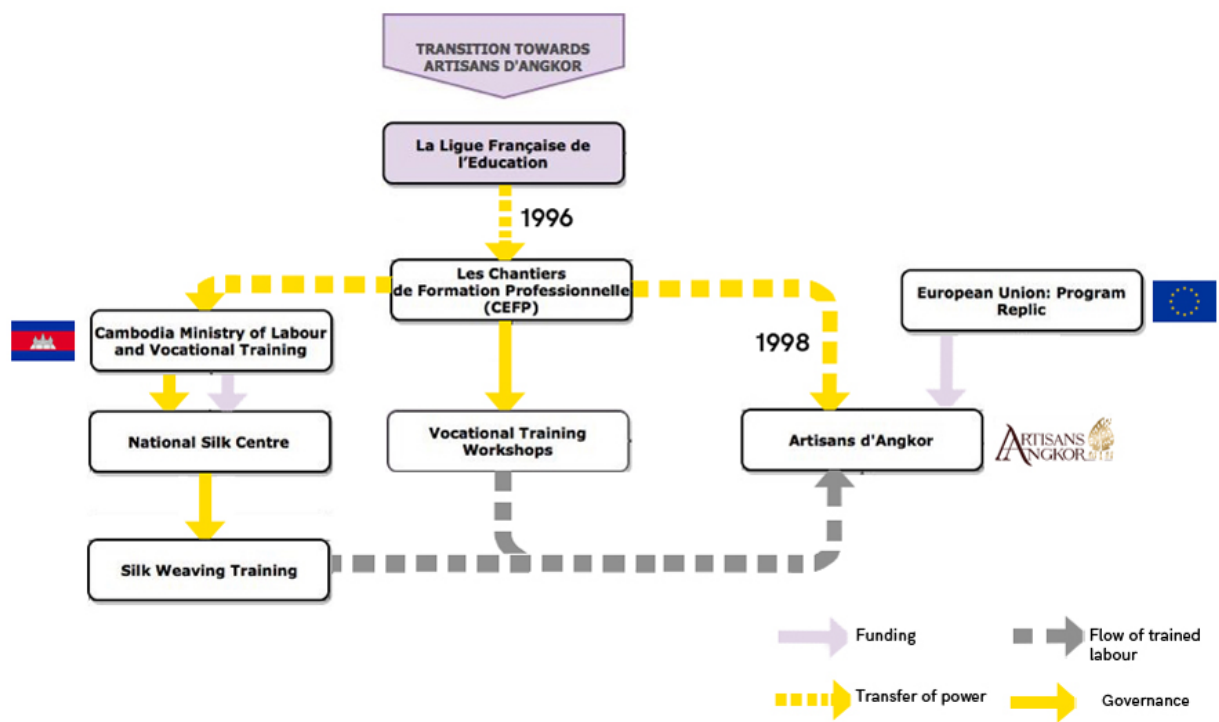


Fig.5
 Transfer of leadership from La Ligue to CEFP and Artisans d'Angkor (1995-2000). (Source: Personal collection)

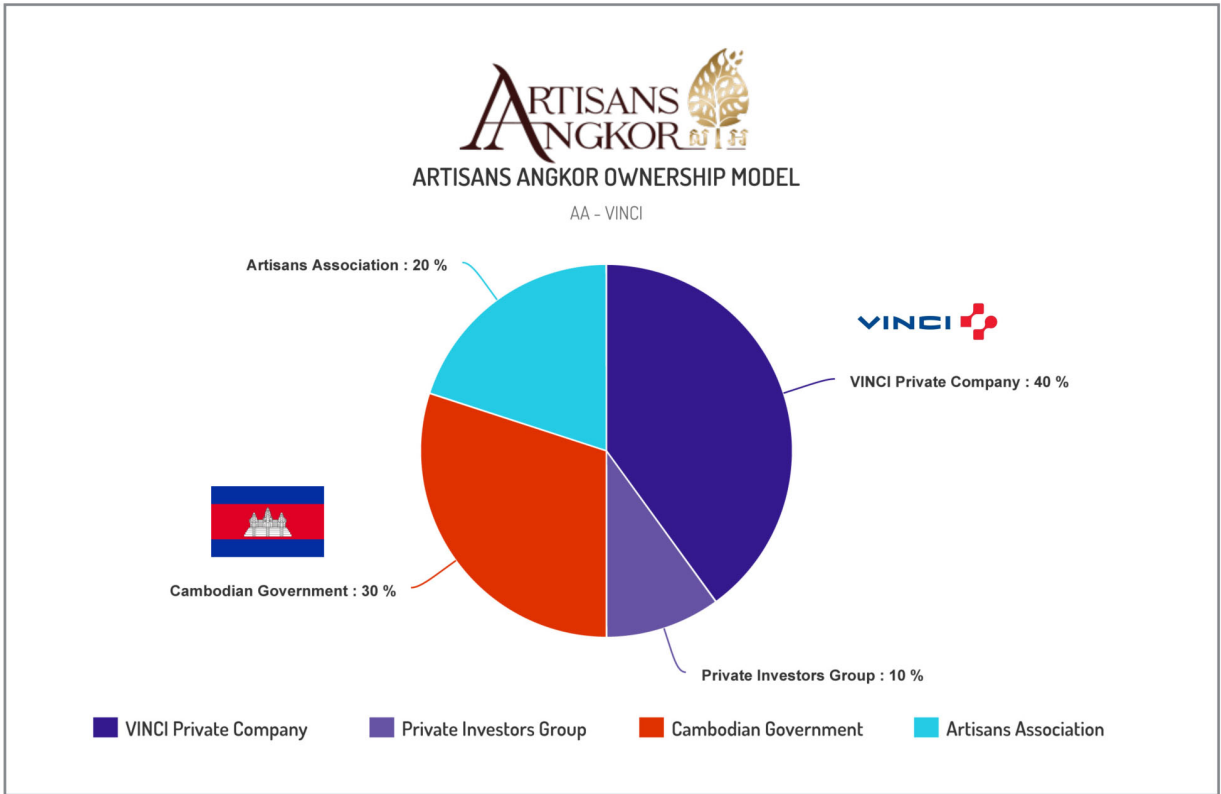


Fig.6
Artisans Angkor ownership model since 2003 (Source: Personal collection)

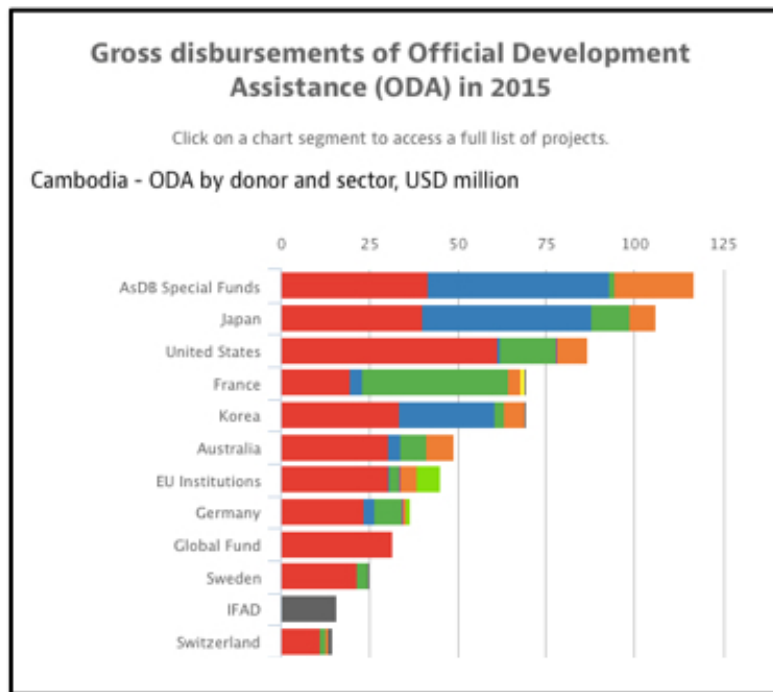


Fig.7
 Official Development Assistance (ODA) by donor in USD million in Cambodia (Source: OECD, 2015)



Fig.8
George Groslier in his office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, by Martin Hurlimann,
1926. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

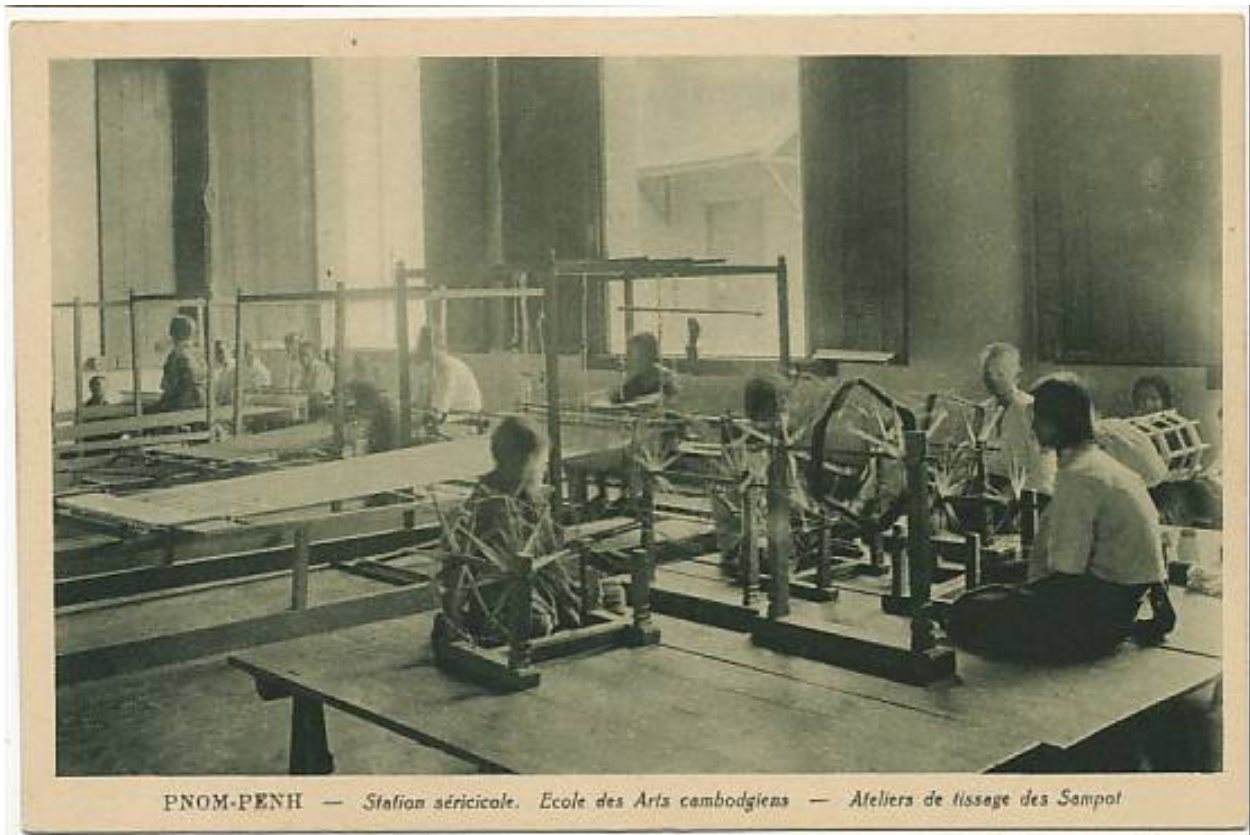


Fig.9
Postcard reproducing a picture of the silk sampot weaving workshop at the School of Cambodian Arts, Phnom Penh, c. 1925.

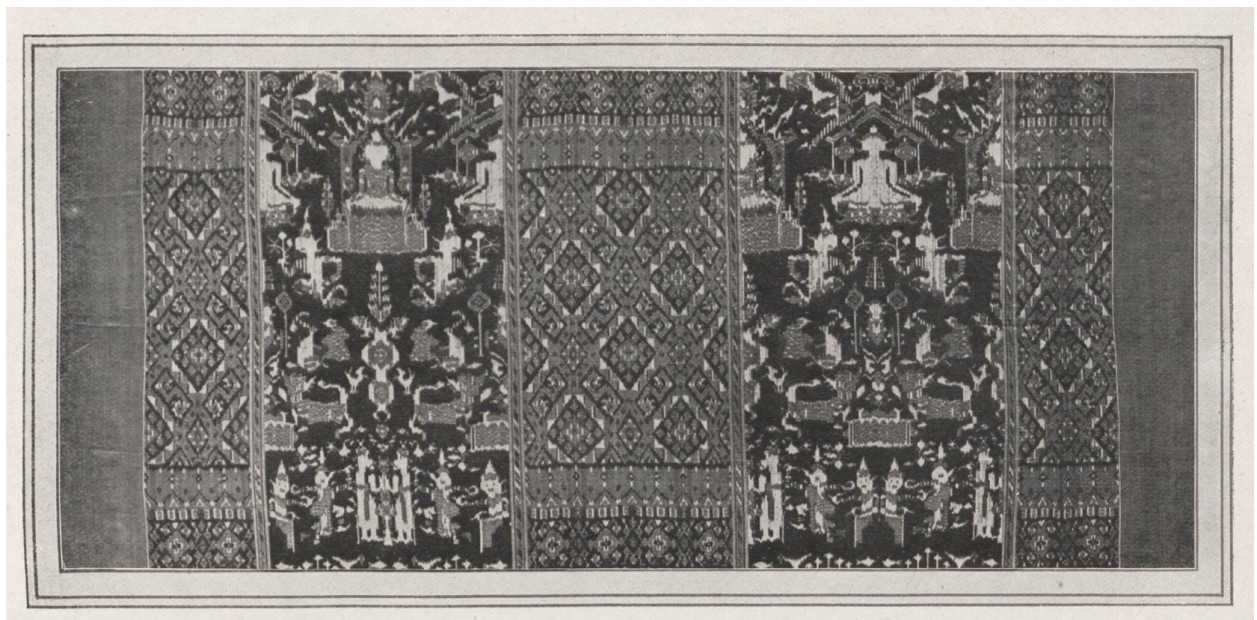


Fig.10
Silk *sampot hol* woven at the School of Cambodian Arts showcased at the Marseille Colonial Exhibition, 1927 (Source: *Vogue*, issue January 1927)



Fig.11
Ideal view of Angkor Wat, by Louis Delaporte, watercolour, c.1866. (Source: Réunion des Musées Nationaux)



Fig.12
Silk *hol* scarves displayed in Artisans Angkor shop in Siem Reap, Cambodia, 2016. (Source: Personal collection)



Fig.13
Pav Eang Khoing, Silk Director at Artisans Angkor, showing one of his latest silk development at the silk farm, Puok, Siem Reap province, 2018. (Personal collection)



Fig.14
Sewing workshop at Artisans Angkor silk farm facility, Puok, Siem Reap province,
2018. (Personal collection)



Fig.15
Pav Eang Khoing showing the work of a weaver tying a new pattern on a bamboo frame, Puok, Siem Reap province, 2018. (Personal collection)



Fig.16
Weaver working on a loom at the weaving, Puok, Siem Reap province, 2018. (Personal collection)



Fig.17
Display of Artisans Angkor's silk and handcraft products at the
company's shop at Siem Reap airport, 2017. (Personal collection)

LBOEUK



Fig.18
Close-up of a silk scarf woven in a diamond damask with ikat called *lboeuk* from Artisans Angkor collection, Artisans Angkor website, 2018.

CHOREBAP

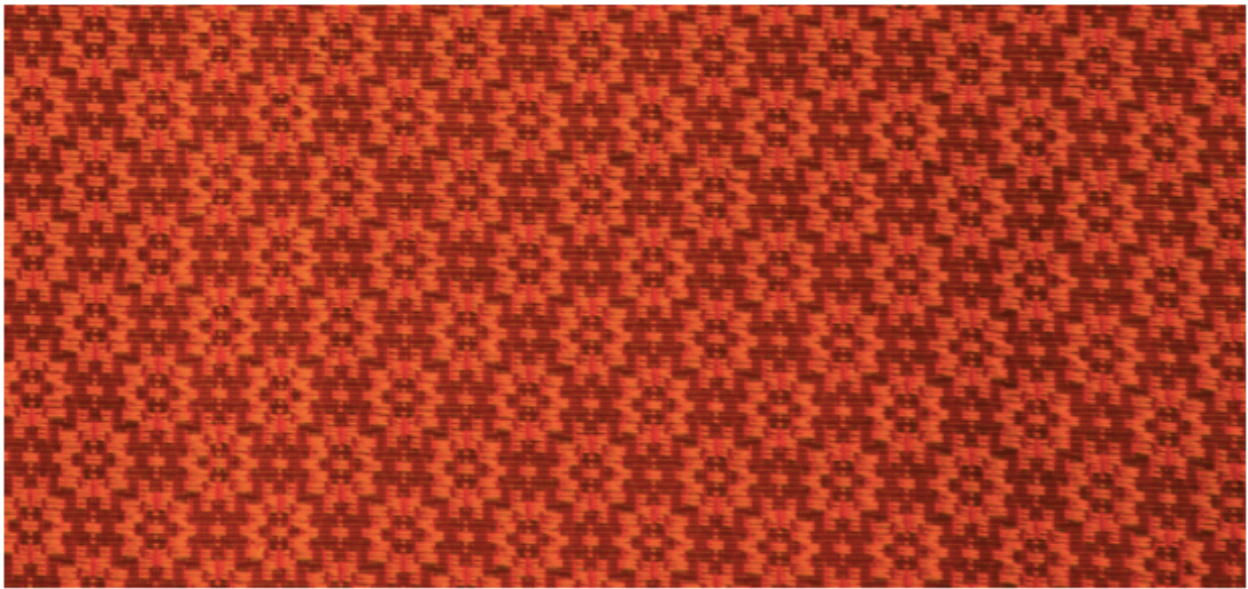


Fig.19
Close-up of a brocaded silk scarf called *chorebap* from Artisans Angkor collection, Artisans Angkor website, 2018.



Fig.20
Guided silk tying demonstration for the tourists visiting Angkor Silk Farm, Puok, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 2016. (Source: Personal collection)