

Transcribing 'Inabel' Indigenous Weaving Patterns into Wallpaper Design Using the Block Printing Method

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Weaving has been a part of Filipino culture since the pre-colonial period. It links Filipinos to their beliefs and traditions, handed down from generation to generation. Weaving is considered both cultural practice and recreational activity. This research study focuses on the indigenous textile designs from Northern Luzon – *Inabel* – and how they can be reproduced in another medium and technique. Furthermore, a list of feasible design patterns is offered to guarantee that the culture and tradition of the Iloco weaving community will be protected and upheld. The research uses hand-block printing and its methods and techniques to adapt the *Inabel* weaving patterns from textile to paper. This study, therefore, aims to promote, honor, and preserve Filipino indigenous weaving patterns – *Inabel* – by transcribing them into a wallpaper design using the hand-block printing method. The *Inabel*-designed wallpaper is then incorporated - as a wallcovering - into an interior setting, exhibiting its aesthetic value and the Iloco heritage.

Keywords: *weaving patterns, Inabel, wallpaper, hand block printing, wallcovering*

Introduction

There are no concrete records on when or how textile production and its associated processes began in the Philippines, but archaeologists found that our pre-colonial ancestors used locally sourced materials such as cotton, abaca, and pineapple fibers in their weaving. (Jimenez-David, par.1)

Weaving is an art form that is a tangible proof of the Filipino indigenous communities' expression of culture and tradition and connects our Filipino ancestors to their gods, goddesses, and deities (Moya, sec. origins). In Ifugao, for example, they considered *Punhold'yan* the origin of their weaving tradition. Furthermore, the B'laan tribe in southern Mindanao believed that *Furlao* gifted them the art and tradition of weaving (Fabella, sec. Beginnings of textile weaving in the Philippines). While there are weavers in Bicol and the island of Mindanao in the southern part of Luzon, weaving communities are primarily located in the island's northern Ilocos and Cordillera Regions (Fabella, sec. Filipino weaving communities). Most weavers are the women of the indigenous communities, and as a recreational pastime, they usually get together and interact while weaving (Moya, sec. origins). The community now makes money from the textiles it produces, particularly for the women who live there, which benefits their standard of living (Kelly 3). The weavers describe the act or ritual of weaving as a *habitus* (Bourdieu) that a sense of belonging with a community, a place, and a social structure can be enabled through weaving. Women can impose order on their life and well-being while weaving, but that order may disappear once they leave their looms.

North Luzon Indigenous communities

Weavers, however, are getting older, and only a few younger people are eager to learn the intricate designs. Aside from that, raw materials like hand-spun cotton thread and natural vegetable dyes are becoming increasingly hard to get, all of which contribute to the diminishing of this ancient craft. The elderly community weavers may be the last generation to transmit traditional craft skills orally in the Cordillera area of the Philippines and other parts of Ilocos Region.

Additionally, the Ilocos region (La Union, Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, and Abra) is known for its Abel weaving culture since they established the trade even before the Spanish colonial times. There are, currently, four remaining master weavers from the *Manabo* weaving group, who are Itneg ethnolinguistic speakers. Rachel Kelly explains in her article, "Creating Paradise Through a Palimpsest of Textile Higher Education and Community-Based Research," that the weavers said that "their weaving work is very difficult and tiring on both mental and physical levels, but it is noteworthy that the elderly women we met were independent, socially active, and are all still working as weavers" (Kelly 7). The textiles made by the Manabo weavers are distinctive and linked to their culture, ancestors' beliefs, and the land and reproducing the *Binakul* Pattern from memory is a weaving meditation method representing traditional tales (Kelly 7).

***Inabel* Design**

Moreover, in the Philippines, weaving is seen as more than merely a tradition kept alive for practical or ideological reasons; instead, it expresses one's religious views via art. A few examples are the rituals and ceremonies, represented through fabrics that use unique patterns and specific colors for courting, healing, war, crop harvest, and protection. Indigenous tribes also link colors to specific occasions. Red is said to be the color of power and is used mainly by healers, like in the Pinatubo Negrito community. Whereas brown or earthy hues are typically saved for matters relating to death and sadness (Moya, sec. Symbols). Aside from its religious purpose, the use of the *Inabel* as rags, table mats, runners, bed sheets, and pillowcases is widespread among Ilocano households.

In addition, there are three different terms for weaving textiles from the Ilocos region: *Abel*, *Abel Iloco*, and *Inabel*. In contrast, *Abel Iloco* is a term used to describe handloom woven fabrics that display characteristics particular to the Ilocos textile tradition. *Inabel* is the proper name for woven fabric constructed on an Ilocano loom. It exhibits the distinguishing qualities of an Ilocano Abel, made of cotton, well-woven and tidy, straight weave (Jose et al.).

There are, also, several distinct forms of *Inabel*, each using a different technique: 1) *liniston*, (2) *pinilian*, (3) *tinumbalitan* or *binutuagan*, (4) *rinimasan*, and (5) *binakol*. The *liniston* have the *banderado* from the term *bandera*, which means flag, and *kinurkuros*. *Banaderado* is a three or four-paneled patterned textile that "usually features a single-color band of either black or yellow on white background, or two to three-color band combination of red and black or yellow and green; or red, green or blue, and yellow on white background" (Jose et al. 54). The *kinurkuros*, on the other hand, is a plaid patterned textile that is typically sewn into long wide skirts (*pandiling*), wrap-around (*dinnua*), dresses (*bado*), and *barongs*.



Figure 1. Pinilian textile

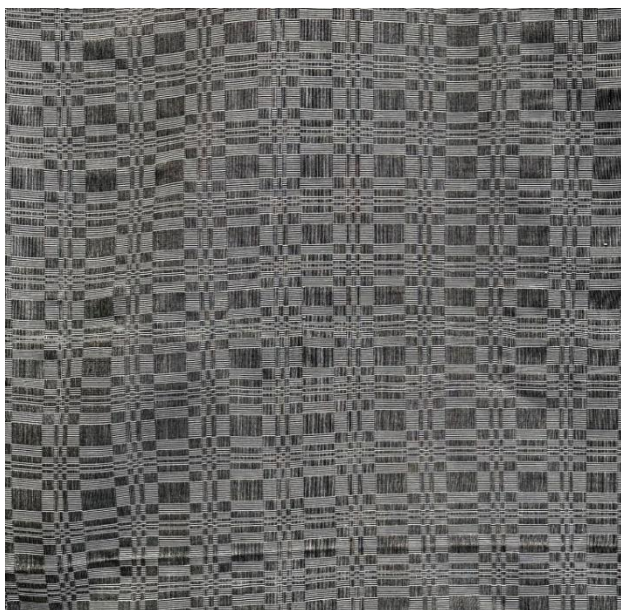


Figure 2. Binakol Textile



Figure 3. Ikat or Rinimasan Textile



Figure 4. Liniston Textile

The *sinan bulong ti bua* (areca palm leaf), *sinan lopes* (cotton ball), and *pako-pako* or *pakpako* (edible fern) are the three most popular designs in *pinilian*. The popularity of the abovementioned patterns highlights the richness of these plants in Ilocos and attests to their significance and worth in the Ilocano way of life (Jose et al. 76).

Multi-heddle weaving creates *binitbituka*, a geometric pattern of six to eight heddles. The textured weaving resembles the gut lining of a pig. The patterns' alternation of projecting and recessed components create a highly tactile overall design. Some of the blankets produced with this weaving technique have designs of root crops (*kinarkarot*), sesame pods (*lineng lenga*), morning stars (*sinan baggak*), and interlocking circles (*estopel*).

Patterns of *Inabel* are more varied, with most natural motifs such as fruits, plants (flowers and leaves, crops and trees), animals, heavenly bodies (stars, skies, et. cetera), and other elements of the environment (Jose et al. 161). Among the abovementioned patterns, the *sinan gikgik* is considered the most significant since it holds a religious connotation for the Ilocanos. *Sinan gikgik*, or the double-headed, yellow-legged bird or chicken, is one of the pets of Lam-ang and is supposed to have supernatural powers. The pet of Lam-ang, known as *karurayan*, is venerated and feared by some Ilocanos who consider it a vessel for anito or spirits. *Karurayan* is honored and placated by including it in textiles, particularly in blankets (Jose et al. 98).

The Itnegs of Abra are another community that continues to use *tayum* (*Indigofera tinctoria*), *sapang* (*Caesalpinia sappan*), and other plant dyes in their textiles, according to the article “Philippine Natural Dyes: A Short Overview” (Kwan, par.4).

Ilocanos and Tinguanos use two hues of one color to fend off evil spirits to make optically repeating patterns. The majority of textiles that make use of decorative weaving and dyeing techniques have colored design patterns. The same hue is used for similar designs, a defining property of all ikat. In the *binakol*, identical squares or rectangles appear to be the same hue, creating a repetitive pattern of squares and rectangles.

Wallpaper and the Block Printing Method

On the other hand, the history of wallpaper encompasses more than just a collection of beautiful patterns and artwork. Ingenuity in technology, shifts in consumption trends, and changes in domestic taste are all fascinatingly documented throughout history (Victoria and Albert Museum, "A Brief History of Wallpaper · V&A," par.1). Rather than the lavish homes of the aristocracy, wallpaper was used in the 16th century to decorate the interiors of cabinets and smaller rooms in merchant's homes. Stylized floral designs and specific pictorial themes copied from contemporary embroideries were usual features of early wallpaper. They were printed with black ink on small sheets of paper roughly 40 cm high by 50 cm broad in monochrome. In the middle of the seventeenth century, single sheets were connected to create long rolls of wallpaper. This innovation spurred the creation of larger patterns and the emergence of block printing, which was used to create more expensive wallpapers until the mid-twentieth century (Victoria and Albert Museum, "A Brief History of Wallpaper · V&A," sec. How was wallpaper made?).

In addition to tying all the topics of this paper, block printing is a type of relief printing that involves applying ink to fabric or paper using a carved object, usually made of wood, linoleum, or rubber. A mirror image of the carving is produced due to using the block as a stamp. Woodblock prints can be anything from tiny motifs meant to be repeated in a pattern to massive works of art requiring a big printing press. Block printing has also been used in the past to print books. Each print can potentially contain a high level of detail, depending on the knife's size and the material's quality. However, no two prints are identical since the procedure is often done by hand. *Block printing* is a craft that has a long history and is thought to have emerged in China in the third century (Rowan). Its presence was discovered in Egypt and other regions of Asia in the fourth century, from which it expanded to Europe and the rest of the world. The Diamond Sutra is the earliest example of a block print with a known date. It was created in 868 A.D. (Ganguly and Ganguly, sec. Introduction).



Figure 5. Block Printing on Fabric (India)

Method

There are four phases of creating the *Inabel*-inspired wallpaper and its integration in an interior setup: (1) the Search phase, (2) the Concept Development phase, (3) the Iteration phase, and (4) the Execution phase.

The first two phases consist of: a comprehensive strategy involving discovery, exploration, and historiography on the topics, better to develop a hand-block stamp with an *Inabel* design pattern; and content analysis which is the foundation and basis for the output production – the wallpaper and its application to an interior set-up. This endeavor seeks to promote Filipino art and design, thus raising in the young Filipino generation an appreciation for the weaving art form and other genres of art.

The research is currently in its third phase, which has determined that the design patterns for the wallpaper should center on those used for casual and everyday activities excluding those patterns or designs with religious symbolism used for sacred rituals and events. A list of plausible design patterns is, then, provided to ensure respect for the culture and tradition of the Iloco weaving community.

Moreover, traditional and digital techniques are used to create the wallpaper with an *Inabel*-inspired pattern. By using a digital program called Adobe Fresco and an iPad Pro with pencil capabilities, preliminary sketches are created using several conceivable *Inabel* patterns and colors with a modern twist, which then are carved from the soft-cut rubber stamps. The infusion of a modern twist in the design and concept, and the use of pastel colors are current trends, and this also gives a clear distinction that the output is only an inspired art and not a replica of the *Inabel*.

And lastly, the following methods of gathering qualitative data, aside from those stated above, are also used hand in hand in the execution phase: *observations*, *in-home videos*, and *lifestyle immersion*. These three qualitative methodologies gauge the viewer's reaction and perception of the exhibited *Inabel*-inspired wallpaper in an interior set-up. The data gathered during this phase help determine if the product, *Inabel*-inspired wallpaper, is marketable and profitable.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Again, qualitative data are vital for comprehensively understanding the underlying causes and motivations influencing the viewer's response. An unstructured interview best fits this methodology to have an organic approach to the process wherein random questions are asked from a set of prepared questions in a conversation with willing participants during the art exhibition. On the other hand, observation and in-home videos employ a different approach and process and is mostly assessed by the research team.

Results and Discussion

The focus of the pattern is *Inabel*, omitting any patterns or designs with a religious connotation used for sacred rites and occasions. A list of feasible design patterns is presented to guarantee that the culture and tradition of the *Iloco* weaving community are protected and upheld. These design patterns are typically created for informal and everyday applications and can be seen on tablecloths, clothing, accessories, et. cetera.

Seven design patterns are chosen among the hundreds of *Inabel* design patterns because they are unique and can represent *Inabel* objectively. These patterns are produced through the weaving technique known as brocade or *pinilian*, which results in patterns that seem to float on the fabric's surface, which makes them the perfect options for wallpaper design.

These are the *Sinan gikgik* (bird with diamond patterns), *Pabo* (peacock design), *Pilekis*, *sabong ken mais* (small bird on top of maize plant and flowers), *Inik-ikan* or *Ikikan* (kissing fish design), *Rositas* (roses design), *Sinan bulong*, *pako-pako* or *pakpako* (edible fern design), and a recurring embroidered pattern from *Balay ni Atong's tukak* or frog.



Figure 6. Embroidered Tukak (Frog)



Figure 7.
Corn Design



Figure 8.
Rositas

And using the information gathered during the research, two initial *Inabel*-inspired wallpaper designs have been made. The first one is derived from the *Pilekis, sabong ken mais* (small bird on top of maize plant and flowers) with earthy neutral palette while the second one is derived from a combination of several *Inabel* patterns like the *Sinan gikgik* (bird with diamond patterns) and *Rositas* (roses design) with a color palette of pastel colors.



Figure 9. Artist's own rendition of *Sinan-Gikgik*



Figure 10. Artist's own rendition of *Rositas*

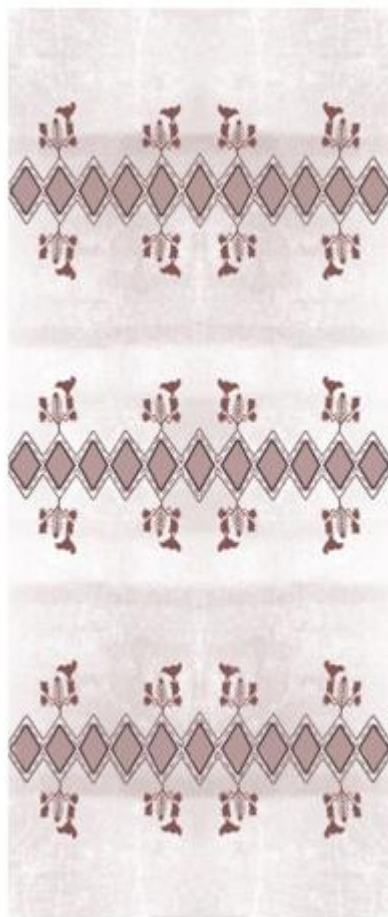


Figure 11. Initial *Inabel*-inspired Wallpaper Design (A) with color scheme

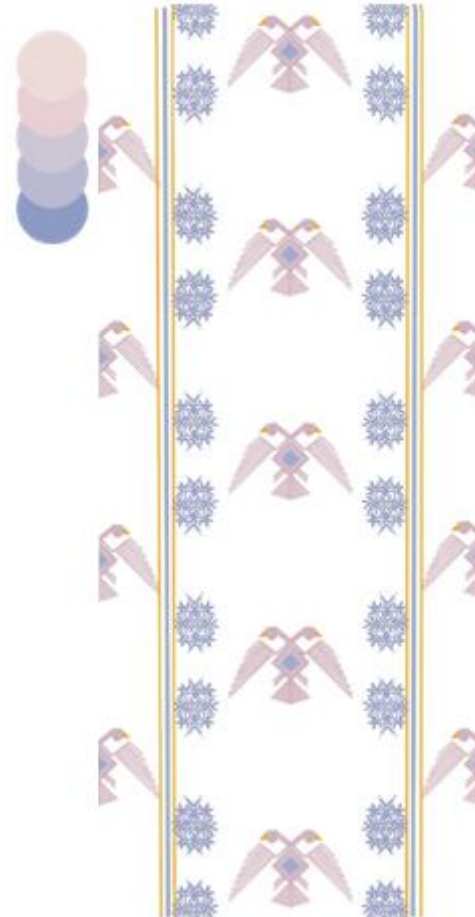


Figure 12. Initial *Inabel*-inspired Wallpaper Design (B) with color scheme

Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Inabel*-inspired wallpaper with the block-printing method will and can promote art appreciation among the younger and next generations and revive the traditional textile weaving art in the Philippines as traditional weaving techniques and textiles struggle to remain relevant in the modern era despite being readily available, less expensive substitutes. Because of globalization and industrialization, the rich cultural history of the indigenous communities in the Philippines is often disregarded, even though it can be seen in the crafts and traditions.

The wallpaper created from this paper hopes to help people understand that the *Inabel* design and other indigenous Filipino weaving patterns studied in the future are marketable and can be identified as being made in the Philippines. By examining and researching the history, customs, and features of *Inabel*, wallpaper, and block printing, this article attempts to give a coherent material for translating indigenous weaving patterns—*Inabel*—into wallpaper.

Moreover, an interior set-up using the *Inabel*-inspired wallpaper as an accent wall will showcase the wallpaper's aesthetic value and the output's economic possibility. The stamp containing the pattern will also be featured in the exhibition that the artist will be curating.

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