



## Sericulture

### Nakamura Fumiko

Sericulture and silk culture comprise one historical layer within Asian culture. In China, silk fabric was produced from approximately 4750 years ago and traded beyond borders as treasures valuable as gold. In Japan also, sericulture has been valued since times of antiquity.

However, sericulture and silk culture remain unconfined to the linear and rigid framework of “traditional national culture.” To begin with, Japanese silkworm eggs are considered to have been introduced from China. Furthermore, Japanese sericulture was greatly influenced by the European silk-spinning techniques during its course of modernization. Under the slogans of the Meiji era—“rich country, strong army” and “promotion of industries”—sericulture and silk spinning culture were also incorporated into the state system.

The influx of extraneous cultures and capital into sericulture and silk can also be seen in different areas across Asia. It was the American businessman and former soldier Jim Thompson who revived Thai silk and promoted it worldwide. The Japanese fabric-dyeing artisan Morimoto Kikuo restored silk production in Cambodia, which had been fading in the ravages of civil war.

In such ways, multiple factors have woven together the history of silk. Furthermore, as silkworms are livestock that cannot survive without the help of humans, we are also led to examine anew our relationship with nonhuman species. Also of interest is how sericulture has often been discussed in relation to femininity.

It is for these reasons that there are many contemporary artists who not only commit themselves to the inheritance and preservation of traditional sericulture and dyeing arts, but also incorporate sericulture and silk as motifs in their work from a more critical perspective.



Endo Kaori, *Handkerchief/Silk fabric/Thailand/1945*, 2019, Collection of Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art



Endo Kaori, making process of *Handkerchief/Silk fabric/Thailand/1945*

## Related Links

- Endo Kaori, *Thanks, Jim Thompson* series at Bangkok Biennial, 2018  
<https://youtu.be/gUcA5vR-wQg>