



The Batu Bara Malay Songket: Meaning and functional analysis

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the functions and meanings of motifs of Batu Bara Malay songket. The motifs are famous among the Batu Bara Malay people because they are typical and specific. The motifs as well as colors show the life and personality and become parts of local customs. This study is described using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory. The method is qualitative and descriptive and involves observation method, interview, and documentation. The results of this study indicate that the existence of the motifs is very closely related to local plants, fruits, flowers, and animals, for example, bamboo, mangosteen, betikam (stabbing each other), diamonds, pandanus, silver, flowers, jasmine, cempaka fruit, and so forth. The meanings of each of these motifs, such as, pucuk rebung (the shoots of bamboo sprouts), floral, and cempaka and jasmine flower motifs delineate ethnic Malay characteristics of politeness, elegance, and firm.

Keywords: Malay Batu Bara, songket, function, meaning, motifs

1. Introduction: Background

Songket is a traditional Malay woven fabric and derived from the term *sungkit* meaning *mengait* 'to crochet' or *mencungkil* 'to poke', so songket is related to the method of making by hooking and taking a dash of woven cloth and then tucking the gold thread. There are eight steps in the songket making, such as, menorou, wheezing, menoto, rubbing into Karab, inserting into comb, raising to okik, picking (making motifs), and finally weaving. Batu Bara is regency located in North Sumatra and produces songket with good quality. The motifs successfully attracts many foreigners from Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam as well as from Thailand. This songket is currently considered capable of expressing cultural values and becomes one of the handicrafts that play a role to show Malay identity. Songket is rich of cultural treasures which have very prominent motifs. The motifs that exist in Stone Coal songket is sourced from local nature, from King's favorite foods, and from diamonds. Such sources give inspirations to the birth of motif names and of basic forms of objects, for example, the pandanus shoots and bamboo shoots have inspired the pandanus shoot motifs and bamboo shoot motifs. Each pattern of motifs always brings particular functions and meanings.

2. Theoretical Framework

Semiotics comes from the Greek word: semeion meaning 'sign' which is something that communicates meaning by interpreters. Meaning can be deliberate like a word spoken with a certain meaning or unintentional. Signs can be communicated through the senses, visual, hearing, smell, or taste. In the semiotic tradition developed by de Saussure's 1998 (referred to as semiology), the relationship of dyadic marks is known, consisting only of the sign (marker) and its meaning (marked). Meaning can be intentional such as a word uttered with specific meaning or unintentional, such as,

a symptom being a sign of a particular medical condition.

Semiotics is an analytical model based on symbols. These marks are considered representative of a representative object. It could be said that semiotics is a science that examines the sign in human life, that is something we have to give meaning. The term semiotics is often used in conjunction with the term semiology. The first term refers to a discipline whereas the second term refers to the science of it. Both semiotics and semiology are often used together, depending on where the term is popular. Usually semiotics is more directed to the de Saussure's tradition which discusses the sign system which he called linguistics and suggested that language is a system of signs. In addition, he also argued that the existence of a science is hoped to examine the life of signs in the science community as part of social psychology or semiologie. This tradition is closely followed by Pierce who mentions the sign is something else because it resembles something taken. Something he took to mean the shape of the properties of the object that evokes the same sensation in thought because of its equality with Umberto Eco. While the term semiology is widely used by Barthes.

3. Definition of Songket

Songket is derived from the Malay term *sungkit* meaning 'to hook or to gouge' (Kartiwa 1996: 11). This name is related to the method of making which is carried out by hooking and taking a dash of woven cloth and then by tucking golden threads.

4. Results and Discussion

The motifs of songket is taken from natural surroundings in the form of plants or food. It is found 16 motifs which are categorized into two main motifs. The first motif is the basic motifs, the basic motifs that dominate each songket weave, for

example, betikam shoots motif, silver shoot motif, pandan shoot motif, and caul shoot motif. The second is an additional motif which is meant to add the beauty of the songket motif and its position is not the same as the basic motif and is usually positioned on the bottom or edge of the songket cloth. The positions can be horizontal and vertical in songket cloth, and this additional motif is terminated with chisel edges, such as, bamboo shoots, mangosteen shoots, flower sarongs, cauliflower, jasmine flowers, cape flowers, cempaka flowers, tebar flowers, lawan clouds, elbows, wajik (sweet rice), and palace fences.

Functions of Songket Motifs

The main function of Songket motifs is not only to give a distinctive identity for the Malay people and their culture but also to beautify the appearance of the person who wears it because it has nice decorations. The motifs are also able to determine the communication medium conveying the purpose of certain intentions from the people who see it. The motifs are not only to contain the uniqueness of Malay songket but also to show the social status because certain motifs are only owned by certain person but do not belong to other common people.

In the past the songket motifs were sacral, but today, because many people of all levels of society can purchase and wear songket easily, the function has shifted. Songket motifs are not only found in the fabric or woven songket but now the motifs have been used for Muslim cap (or peci) and household materials, such as, table cloth, pillowcase, refrigerator cover




and so forth.


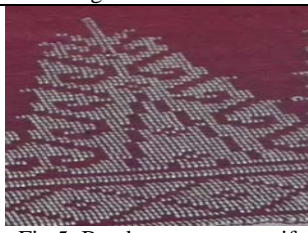





Meanings of Songket Motifs


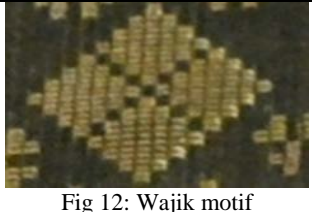

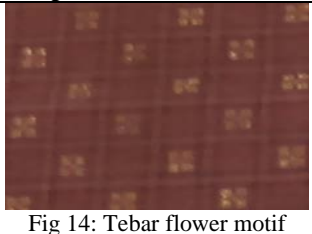

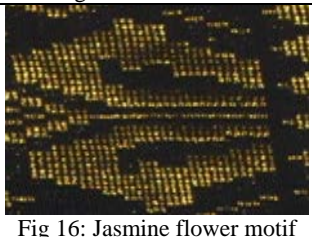
Each songket motif possesses meaning and philosophical values which are intended by the weavers personally to show their capabilities of absorbing local environment, of sending messages, of disseminating, of transforming teachings, and of placing the appropriate course. Moreover, each motif also refers to the habits or culture, and the local community trust. The name also gives a lot of influences on the meaning of the songket motif, for example, before the entry of Islam the songket motif primarily used animals, for example, Naga Besaung (Besaung snake) or deer motifs but after Islam was accepted by local people as their religion, the motifs changed drastically; this was caused by the prohibition in Islam that animals as motifs could not be exploited since this will lead to *shiriq* (making god into two). The songket motifs are also linked or correlated to the character of ethnic Malay.

The dominant motifs in songket are flowers which can become the symbol of freshness and the diversity of aroma and joy; all these indicate that weaving activity has close relationship to nature and reflects that songket is commonly used by women. In ancient times, songket was woven by a woman while she was waiting for the arrival of her prospective husband. Although the songket motifs were known hundreds or even thousands of years ago, but the motifs do not undergo changes and additions. To know a thorough information in relation to songket motifs, readers are hoped to consider the followings:

Table 1

Motif Name	Motif Meaning
 <p data-bbox="175 1371 383 1398">Fig 1: Betikam motif</p>	<p data-bbox="456 1205 1495 1314">The betikam tips motif means that each edge (or shoots) meets and this motif is inspired from bamboo shoot. Although the bamboo has different positions but between the end of one with the other end meet. This motif brings the ideas about the nature of ethnic Malays who are friendly and greet each other when they meet and who always build mutual cooperation among them; this cooperation is still found till today.</p>
 <p data-bbox="175 1661 383 1692">Fig 2: Silver motif</p>	<p data-bbox="456 1503 1495 1587">The silver tips motif is considered to be the symbol of prosperity, perfection, and glory to the Malay kingdom in the past. In addition, the motif is also related to the respects the palace servants gave to their king.</p>
 <p data-bbox="175 1923 383 1948">Fig 3: Pandanus motif</p>	<p data-bbox="456 1776 1495 1860">The pucuk pandan (pandanus tips) motif can be interpreted as the fragrant aroma and is the symbol of progress that human beings should achieve when they live in the world. The fragrance always brings peace as its is shown the pucuk (tip or shoot) of pandanus leaf.</p>

 <p>Fig 4: Cauli motif</p>	<p>The cauli flower motif is planned and made with a very perfect fabric and style and might indicate that ethnic Malays always try to give their best for their life, their communities, society, religion, and for their ethnic.</p>
 <p>Fig 5: Bamboo sprouts motif</p>	<p>The bamboo sprouts is the embryo of bamboo and when it is used as a songket motif, it can be interpreted as the foundation of life. The motif become the symbol of brotherhood and the sense of highness. Since bamboo is tall plants meaning it is strong and is easily beaten or collapsed by winds. Therefore, the bamboo sprouts motif is seen by local Malays as a solid principle so that they are not easily affected by things that benefit for a moment or temporarily and as a symbol of long lasting, meaning that Malays will not be extinct from the earth. This is relevant with the slogan Malays have: Tak kan hilang Melayu di Bumi (It is impossible that Malays will disappear from the Earth). Another meaning of this motif is that ethnic Malays always think straightly.</p>
 <p>Fig 6: Mangosteen motif</p>	<p>Mangosteen motif can be interpreted that members of Malay ethnic always help each other and when there are neighbors who need assistance, other people in their neighbourhood will come to their houses with open hands. Malay's philosophy is 'living harmoniously, peacefully, and in cooperation'. This motif is also related to the notion that Malays are clever and bring benefits in the society.</p>
 <p>Fig 7: Sarong with flower motif</p>	<p>The sarong with flower motif can be the symbol of combination of cologne and of beauty. This motif is generally found in Batu Baru and can be translated as the symbols of wanting and strong and inner beauty.</p>
 <p>Fig 8: Cauliflower motif</p>	<p>The cauliflower motif is used in songket because the cherry blossoms symbolize simplicity. The cauliflower, when it is peeled one strand, still remains other strands. This illustrates that the surrounding nature provides sustainability to the people. This means that Malay ethnic has a simple community.</p>
 <p>Fig 9: Chrysolite flower motif</p>	<p>Chrysolite flower motif can be found in the songket as well as jasmine flowers which have fragrant headlands. The cempaka flowers are also combined with these two flowers; all these flowers can be interpreted that the Malay ethnic really need beauty and always look after their politeness as well as they will not easily forget their Creator.</p>
 <p>Fig 10: Flower headland motif</p>	<p>The flower headland motif is very fragrant and its fragrance is said to adorn the earth. This flower means that Malay ethnic is very fond of paying visits and member of Malay ethnic are very hospitable when they welcome their guests who come to visit them.</p>

	<p>The larsome cloud motif is inspired from clouds in the sky that move slowly when they are blown by wind. Landing clouds are a series of motifs which are neatly arranged side by side and are inter-connected. The sources of this motif can be from roots, leaves, and flowers. This motif means that there are harmony and cohesiveness among members of Malay ethnic groups by keeping their own words.</p>
	<p>The wajik is a Malay King's favorite food which is made of pulut (glutinous rice) and brown sugar. These diamonds are very difficult to separate because there are tight relationships among each other. This motif means that the Malay people live in togetherness and are easily broken apart and boxed by other sides.</p>
	<p>The palace fence motif is always on the edge of the songket or is placed under the bottom. Its shape looks like a fence which is interpreted that Malay ethnic are always ready to maintain the integrity, peace and togetherness in their daily life.</p>
	<p>The tebar flower motif is a collection or a combination of motifs, for example, mangosteen. mangosteen motif meaning that only one motive just means ethnic Malay must help each other, then helping each other is the philosophy of the bunga tebar motif so that when everything is carried out together, it becomes light and is quickly finished. Another philosophy of this motif is that parents becomes the nature of mutual assistance and it is always reminded.</p>
	<p>The shape of the elbows motif is really connected to the notion that members of Malay ethnic have firm concepts on nature and that they hold their responsibilities, mandate, obedience, and firmness.</p>
	<p>The jasmines are beautiful flowers and have fragrance. The jasmine flower motifs are interpreted that the Malay ethnic always maintain their politeness, sanctity, and elegance in the community.</p>

5. Conclusions

The study of songket motifs can be concluded as the followings: Batu Bara produced several conclusions, among others:

1. There are two deviations of motifs, for example, basic and additional motifs. The first might include betikam, pandan, silver, and cauli flower motifs. Finally, the additional motifs can function to add the beauty of songket. These motifs generally cover the followings: bamboo, mangosteen, clouds, elbows, keluang, sarongs, cauliflower, cempaka, jasmine, palace fence, diamonds, and spreading flowers.

2. Each motif has their respective meanings such as motifs of mangosteen whose shape looks like 'hand in hand' which is interpreted that members of Malay ethnic love cooperation.

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