

The Aesthetics of Striped Design Motifs and Market Demand on the *Songket Tenggara* as the Malay Royal Ceremonial Attire

Mohd Jamil Muhamad Amin¹, Arba'iyah Ab. Aziz^{1*}, Nor Azlin Hamidon¹,
Nabilah Mudzafar¹, Inda Murni Hairul Anuar¹,

¹ Department of Visual Culture Studies/College of Creative Arts/Fine Art Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Puncak Alam, 42300, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding Author: arbaiyah@uitm.edu.my

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30880/rmtb.2024.05.02.008>

Article Info

Received: 30 September 2024

Accepted: 01 November 2024

Available online: 01 December 2024

Keywords

Malay 1, Pahang Pahang 2, Songket
Tenggara 3, Striped 4, Design
Motifs 5

Abstract

Textiles have become a very prominent material culture in the Malay world since the early stages of history. Malay traditional textiles show the high achievement of Malay development in aspects of civilization, material culture, customs, art, history, culture, and heritage. Many of the Malay traditional textiles had internal and external influences through maritime and trade relationships. The *Songket Tenggara* is one of the Malay traditional textiles produced by the Malay weavers, and it shows many aspects of the aesthetics and beauty of Malay world textiles. Nowadays, many youngsters lack knowledge about *Songket*, especially *Songket Tenggara*. On the other hand, market demand for Malay songket is getting worse, which is affecting Malay traditional textile production. The purpose of this research is to study the aesthetic elements of *Songket Tenggara* striped design motifs and their market demand as the Malay royal ceremonial attire. The qualitative method is implemented to gather research data and findings from observation of the Malay royal ceremonial costumes worn by the Malay royalty and nobles. The aesthetics theory of Zakaria Ali is used by researchers to analyze the design and motifs of *Songket Tenggara*. This research signified the beauty of the *Songket Tenggara* from an aesthetic point of view and main choices amongst the Malay royals as their royal ceremonial attire. The aims of the study also to give the public a better understanding of the beauty of *Songket Tenggara* as Malay traditional textile art and heritage. While this research also gives more knowledge about the textiles of the Malay world in terms of the material culture of Malays.

1. Introduction

The Malay world, also known as Nusantara, adapted a name from Sumpah Palapa and recited it from the Patih Gajah Madah oath during the 13th century of the Majapahit Empire in Java. Other than that, the Malay world is also referred to as the Malay Archipelago, which includes the modern territories of the Malay Peninsula, Indo-Cina, Sumatera, Java, the Philippines, and islands located in the Pacific Ocean until Madagascar island in the Indian Ocean (Abdullah, 2022). Refers to Abdullah (2022), trading and commerce activities have contributed to many aspects of social, political, historical, cultural, crafts, and economic development amongst Malays since the early era of the Malay Empire. Since the early Malay Empire, textiles have been the most dominant stuff involving trade and commerce activities. Malay textiles are becoming major commodities and highly demanded by the local and external markets of the Malay world. Nowadays, traditional Malay textiles lack familiarity and

demand in the local Malaysian market due to imported fabric from India and Pakistan (Rosli, H., 2022). Additionally, Malay traditional textiles, especially *Songket Tenggara*, are less acknowledged by Malaysia society as the beauty of Malay traditional textile collections in Malaysia. The main purposes of this research are to study the aesthetic elements of *Songket Tenggara* striped design motifs and their market demand as the Malay royal ceremonial attire, and the aim of the study also gives Malaysians a better understanding and market demand on the *Songket Tenggara* as Malay traditional textile art and heritage. This research signifies the beauty of the Malay traditional textile from an aesthetic point of view. While this research also gives more knowledge and gives much business opportunity to local Malay traditional textile weavers to promote the textiles of the Malay world in terms of the riche's material culture, it belongs to Malays. A map 1.0 below shows the Malay World map drafts made during Portuguese invention in Malacca City circa the 16th century.



Fig 1 Malay Archipelago Map Circa 16th century by Portuguese Courtesy (Tome Pires of *Suma Oriental*, 1944)

2 *Songket Tenggara* in Malay Peninsula

Malay Peninsula, also known as Semenanjung Tanah Melayu, is located surrounded by the Malacca Straits at the west and the South China Sea at the east. The geographical area of the Malay Peninsula made this land very prominent in the history of trade and commerce. Since centuries ago, the Malay Peninsula was also referred to as Survanabhumi, or golden peninsular, by Indian traders because of its riches and diversity in aspects of art and culture. Having many of the transition eras of the Malay Peninsula began with periods of pre-historic, Hindu-Buddhist, Islam, and modern eras, the Malay Peninsula has been the main place of maritime activities in the Malay world. Textiles have been the main trade commodities throughout the Malay Peninsula, specifically at Malacca Port, since the 15th century (Harris, 2010).

In the Malay ancient manuscript known as *Sejarah Melayu*, it is stated that Malay *Songket* was much practiced in the Malay world during the 15th century and was worn by the Malay-Malacca royalty and nobles during official royal occasions and events (Ahmad, 2013). According to Ahmad (2013), the Malay *Songket* is expensive and pricy for Malay textiles, even though it could be exchanged for luxuries. Ahmad (2013) explained that Malay *Songket* is woven by the Sumatera Minangkabau weavers, who sell them to Malacca port and exchange them with servants at Malacca port. Through this statement, it is shown that Malay *Songket* became luxurious and demanded Malay textiles during the golden era of the Malay-Malacca Sultanate of the 15th century (Ahmad, 2013). *Songket Tenggara* is derived from the striped design motif of Malay *Songket*. According to Aziz (2009), *Tenggara* is referring to the Malay textile pattern and design of vertical and striped patterns and motifs also practiced on *Kain Limar* or *Kain Limar Bersongket*.



Fig. 2 The 28th Sultan of Kedah, Al-Mu'tassimu Billahi Muhibbudin Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah ibni Almarhum Sultan Badlishah (1927–2015) during the Royal Kedah ceremony. Circa 1950s (Arkib Negara Malaysia collection)

According to Ismail (2018), the eastern coast of the Malay peninsula has many Malay traditional weavers, and it has become the main center of Malay traditional textile weavers, namely Terengganu and Kelantan. Besides, Pahang is actively producing their traditional Pahang woven and Pekan becoming the main for Royal Pahang woven production. In fact, the Malay-Terengganu woven technique spread from Terengganu to Riau, Sumatera, during the 18th century. This fact is supported by Aziz (2018), who states that the art of Malay-Terengganu *Songket* entered the Riau, Sumatera, during the reign period of Sultan Mansur Riayat Syah 1 ibni Almarhum Sultan Zainal Abidin Shah 1 (1725 AD–1798 AD), the royal highness also known as Tun Dalam or Marhum Janggut. The similarities between Malay-Terengganu and Riau *Songket* could be found in terms of technique and design motifs.



Fig. 3 The Sultan, Sir Abu Bakar Ri'ayatuddin al-Mu'azzam Shah (1932–1975), wore a Songket Tenggarung royal ceremonial attire during a Malay royal event. Circa early 1970's (Muzium Sultan Abu Bakar, Pahang collection)

3 Research Methodology

Qualitative research methods are applied to data collection, and grounded theory was implemented to seek research findings through primary and secondary data collection. The researcher uses the observation method to analyze the physical artifacts of Malay royal ceremonial costumes that belong to the Malay Peninsula Royal collection and are kept and exhibited at museums and galleries. The detailed observation analysis was also done by the researcher through photo collections of Malay Royal attire, either from museums, archives, or social media, namely Instagram, Facebook, and the websites of Malay Royals. To gain more validity in this study, the

researcher applied the aesthetics theory of Zakaria Ali to analyze the beauty concept of Malay art forms related to *Songket Tenggara* striped design and motifs. The beauty concept of Malay aesthetics can be categorized into six categories: delicate, kontras, usefulness, symbolism, functionality, and meaning, which are implemented in analyzing *Songket Tenggara* design motifs in detail. Below is the research design and framework implemented by the researcher for a study.

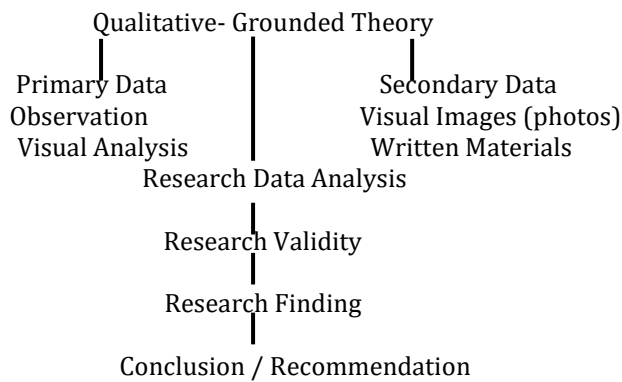


Fig. 4 Research framework and design

3.1 The Malay Aesthetics Theory and Principles

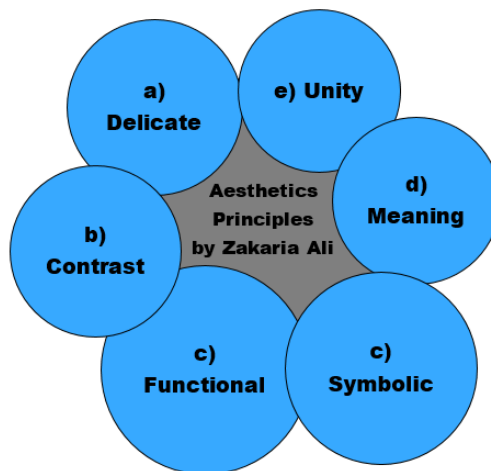


Fig. 5 Aesthetic principles (Ali, 2006)

This research finding has been analyzed using the aesthetics theory and principle of Zakaria Ali (2010), and the researcher evaluates the striped design and pattern on the Malay royal attire through the Malay beauty principle towards the Malay socio-cultural context. At the same time, the researcher conducted this study by using six principles of the Malay beauty concept, which are: delicate, kontras, functional, symbolic, meaning, and unity. These Malay beauty concepts are always embedded into the Malay art and crafts, especially on the *Songket Tenggara*. While Zakaria Ali (2010) stated that the Malay traditional textiles, especially the Malay royal attire, portray the beauty of the Malay royal costume and have also been symbolized in Malay traditional textiles art by the utilitarian philosophy of Malays.

4 Data Analysis and Findings

The research found that the striped design motifs of Malay Royal Pahang attires had types of cosmology and Malay ornaments and accessories of Pending. The motif of crescent moon and star is related to cosmology elements, and it is becoming a symbol of Islam as the main religion in the Malay Peninsula (Al-Attas, 2022). Meanwhile, the motifs of Pending show the beauty of Malay ornaments and accessories worn by the Malay royals and nobles (Jamal, 2010). These two design motifs were delicate aesthetic values, and they're related to the five theory and principles of Zakaria Ali which are: delicate, kontras, functional, symbolic, meaning, and unity Zakaria Ali (2010). On the other hand, the striped design motifs also refer to social rank and status among the Malay royals and nobles.







Num	Malay Royal Attire	Motifs	Pattern
1.	 <p data-bbox="264 1151 743 1178">Sources: Arkib Negara Malaysia collection</p>	 <p data-bbox="863 1086 1023 1146">Crescent Moon and Star</p>	 <p data-bbox="1066 992 1417 1052">Striped design pattern on Royal Malay attire.</p>
2.	 <p data-bbox="268 1664 815 1691">Source: Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia collection</p>	 <p data-bbox="895 1664 991 1691">Pending</p>	 <p data-bbox="1066 1507 1417 1568">Striped design pattern on Royal Malay attire.</p>

Fig. 6 The Malay Royal Attires Motifs and Pattern Design

4.1 Delicate

Songket Tenggarung is embedded with a value of finesses through a making process. The Malay weaver and artist organized good ethics and manners to create a high-value textile art piece through design motif usage. Elements of nature like cosmology were adapted by Malay weavers to make *Songket Tenggarung* more spectacular as Malay royals and noble ceremonial costume designs.

4.2 Contrasts

The value of contrast in Malay crafts was determined by the combination of more than one element of design and form. *Songket Tenggarung* governs this value of contrast with regard to their own design and motif, which combine two forms of cosmology, the crescent moon and star. These elements are signified by the understanding and knowledge of Malays on cosmology elements through Islam as the main principle of religion and belief.

4.3 Usefulness

Malays have a significant value of usefulness, especially in their craft design. A principle of usefulness also governs *Songket Tenggarung* as a royal Malay textile art form. As a reference, Malay craft art is usually applied useful elements as utilitarian philosophical amongst Malays (Ali, 2015).

4.4 Functional

The Malay craft design, especially *Songket Tenggarung*, is embedded with functional elements, and it should be shown through its functionality and usage as ceremonial costumes and textile for the Malay royals and nobles. The *Songket Tenggarung* is woven by skilled *Songket* weavers and also contains many functional factors in terms of material usage, technique, pattern, and design.

4.5 Symbolize

Many of the Malay crafts always carried symbolism elements, making Malay crafts more beautiful with Eastern values. *Songket Tenggarung* symbolizes the greatness and magnificence of the Malay Sultanate empire. The Malay royal costumes, mainly made by *Songket Tenggarung*, show rank and symbolize the power and authority of the Malay rulers and kingships. Other than that, the motifs of the crescent moon also carried symbols of Islamic faith and sign culture in the Malay world.

4.6 Meaning

The element of meaning is delivered in all of the Malay crafts. In the context of Malay textiles, especially *Songket Tenggarung*, is always added a meaning value. This particular value of meaning is shown in the pattern and motif design of *Songket Tenggarung*. The crescent moon design motifs are related to the Islam faith and culture of Turk-Ottomans in the Malay world. On the other hand, every motif and design of *Songket Tenggarung* has many meanings for Malay form and content.

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, this study signifies the Malay textile art in the context of material culture, visual style, and motif design of the Malay world textiles, specifically Malay royal costumes. Next, the emphasis on Malay traditional art is most important, particularly in *Songket Tenggarung*, and it could make these Malay traditional textiles more widely produced and promoted for market demand in local Malaysian society in a way to generate income for local Malay weavers. This study by the researcher on *Songket Tenggarung* could provide more knowledge and information and create an economic opportunity for market demand and supply on *Songket Tenggarung*, especially for Malay royal and aristocratic market demand, while also giving more appreciation for the beauty and aesthetics of *Songket Tenggarung*.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Universiti Teknologi MARA for its support..

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** M.J.M.A., I.M.H.A. and A.A.; **data collection:** N.M. and N.A.H.; **analysis and interpretation of results:** M.J.M.A., A.A.A., N.A.H. and N.M.; **draft manuscript preparation:** M.J.M.A., I.M.H.A., and N.A.H. reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

References

- Abdullah, S. (2022). Travel Sketches of Malaya by Sir Frank Swettenham. *Melayu Jurnal Antarabangsa Dunia Melayu*, 15, 161-176.
- Abdullah, D. A. R. H. (2022). *Sejarah Pemerintahan Islam Di Alam Melayu*. Hijjaz Records Publishing.
- Ahmad, A. S. (2013). Edisi Pelajar Sulalatus Salatin Sejarah Melayu Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Ali, Z. (2010). *Malaysian Art Selected Essays 1979 - 2009*. Penerbitan Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.
- Ali, Z. (2006). Thoughts on the aesthetics of Malay Artefacts. *Wacana Seni Journal of Arts Discourse*, 5.
- Ali, Z. (2015). *Kuliah Estetik* [Lecture Notes].
- Aziz, A. i. A. (2018). *Simbolisme Dalam Motif Songket Melayu Terengganu*. Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka Kuala Lumpur.
- Aziz, A. (2009). *Rupa & Gaya Busana Melayu*. Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Harris, J. (2010). *5000 Years of Textile*. British Museum Press.
- Ismail, S. Z. (2018). *Reka Bentuk Kraftangan Melayu Tradisi*. Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.
- Pries, T. (1944). *The Hakluyt Society the Suma Oriental of Tome Pires and The Book of Francisco Rodrigue*. The Hakluyt Society.
- Rosli, H. (2022). Kemasukan songket luar malapkan industri tenunan Terengganu. *Berita Awani Astro*. <https://www.astroawani.com/gaya-hidup/kemasukan-songket-luar-malapkan-industri-tenunan-terengganu-357566>
- S. M. N. Al-Attas (2022). *Islam Dalam Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Melayu*. Penerbitan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- S. A. Jamal (2010). *Rupa Dan Jiwa*, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka.