

## Function and Meaning of Palembang Songket Fabric Decorative Varieties

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### Abstrak

Songket merupakan sebuah kain khas Melayu, banyak daerah di Sumatera yang memiliki Kain Songket. Namun dari banyak daerah tersebut, Kain Songket Palembang yang paling terkenal. Songket khas Palembang terkenal akan keindahan dan kemewahannya. Songket sendiri merupakan bentuk dari kebudayaan tinggi masa Sriwijaya yang seratnya akan makna. Oleh sebab itu, penelitian ini ingin menelusuri lebih dalam makna dari berbagai motif serta fungsi dari berbagai jenis Songket. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode historis dengan tahapan heuristik, kritik, interpretasi, dan historiografi, diharapkan hasil penelitian ini dapat memberikan hasil yang memuaskan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan jika tiap motif yang tergambar pada selembar Kain Songket memiliki makna tersendiri, makna tersebut secara umum menggambarkan kebesaran Sriwijaya sebagai sebuah Kerajaan yang besar.

**Kata kunci:** songket, makna, fungsi, kebudayaan, motif.

### Abstract

*Songket is a typical Malay cloth, many areas in Sumatra have Songket Cloth. However, of these many areas, Palembang Songket Cloth is the most famous. Palembang's typical songket is famous for its beauty and luxury. Songket itself is a form of high culture from the Sriwijaya era that is full of meaning. Therefore, this research wants to examine more deeply the meaning of various motifs and functions of various types of Songket. This research uses the historical method with stages of heuristics, criticism, interpretation and historiography. It is hoped that the results of this research will provide satisfactory results. The research results show that each motif depicted on a piece of Songket Cloth has its own meaning, this meaning generally describes the greatness of Sriwijaya as a great kingdom.*

**Keywords:** songket, meaning, function, culture, motifs.

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, culture is important for every nation. Because of its culture, a nation has characteristics that differentiate it from other nations. More than that, culture reflects the long history of a community group, which includes skills, beliefs, arts, customs, morals, as well as habits and skills that humans have acquired as members of society.

Indonesia as an archipelagic country has very abundant ethnic wealth. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency

in the population census, it is recorded that Indonesia has ± 1.300 ethnic groups. Each tribe has its own unique culture which is reflected in customs, beliefs, language, art, food and clothing.

The various ethnic cultures in Indonesia were born due to many things, starting with the topography of the region which has implications for the daily lives of people in it. The fact that Indonesia is an archipelagic country is also the cause of the diversity of culture in Indonesia. Culture has a very close relationship with

man because culture is a collection of ideas, thoughts and human experiences from time to time which continue to be preserved by a group of people (Made, 2018). This form of culture can take the form of objects, norms, oral speech, writing, food, religious rituals and traditional clothing. Clothing is an important thing for a group of people, because clothing is something that is attached to the human body so that its use often has its own meaning and meaning for each ethnic group (Herlina et al., 2022). The fundamental element of clothing is cloth, and each region in Indonesia has its own unique cloth which usually reflects the long history of that region, such as the songket cloth of the city of Palembang.

Palembang City, South Sumatra, already famous for its rich culture, will start from the preliterate era until the contemporary era, from food until clothes (Annisa, 2022). Songket cloth, originating from the city of Palembang, is one of the proofs of culture in the land of Sumatra.

Palembang songket cloth is famous for its beauty and luxury. This cloth is identical to the bright red and gold, which are then combined with various patterns. These motifs and patterns are not merely decorative but have a special meaning in them, which connects the traditions and beliefs of the people of Palembang City.

Until now, songket cloth has been preserved and guarded from generation to

generation. Unfortunately, the rapid movement of the times has given rise to shifts and even a decline in sacred values embedded in the songket cloth. This matter can be seen through use, darling; it is now available to anyone. Even though it was in the past only nobles and rulers who had the opportunity to use songket (Miranda & Dina, 2022).

The word songket comes from the word sungkit, which means "to hook" in Malay and "to gouge" in Indonesian. This planting is based on the process of making the songket cloth itself, namely by taking and attaching a small amount of gold thread, which is then started to be embroidered with woven cloth (Mainur, 2018).

The use of gold thread was done because, in the past, only important people could wear songket, so songket cloth was identified, also known as luxurious woven cloth. Songket weaving is a "tradition carried out by the people of Palembang. Usually, songket cloth is used at celebration parties or receptions (Riski, 2023). A songket is usually worn like a sarong, namely wrapped around the waist, and can also be worn as a shawl worn around the shoulders.

Palembang's typical songket cloth has privileges in comparison with cloth weaving from other regions. Palembang songket cloth depicts the greatness and patience of songket weavers. This is reflected in the materials and complexity

of the manufacturing process. In fact, precision is needed to produce high-quality songket cloth (Devella & Novia, 2020). Thereby, cloth songket can be said to be one of the legacies of the Sriwijaya Kingdom.

Appropriately A left-behind past culture, songket cloth fiber will have meaning. By simple definition, meaning is an effort to give meaning to something; meaning is not an absolute and static concept that can be found in a message, just like that, with thereby meaning no can appear alone, however meaning that given (Djawad, 2016). In the context of the history of giving meaning, no can be done in an autonomous way; however, it must be based on historical facts. And inside the cloth songket, experts explain meaning in three aspects. Starting from meaning symbolic, meaning aesthetic, as well as meaning philosophical.

Diction Symbol comes from the basic verb *symbollein* in Greek, meaning 'to match; the two parts that are matched are called symbols. Symbols are basically words, objects, or even mutual signs used to interpret things that have happened and understood together (Laksmi, 2010). Culture is identical with symbols; even in a number of literacy programs, culture is interpreted as a series of symbols that are used as a means for humans to adapt and interact with the physical environment and the symbolic environment. Every area owns respective symbols, and this is what

happened characteristically, so area 1 may own the same symbol, but it is different in meaning (Hendro et al., 2020). Apart from being functional as a medium for channel-thinking craftsmen, symbols also add aspects of aesthetics to a craft like a cloth songket.

Aesthetics comes from the Greek *aisitanesthai*, which means "to feel.". The Oxford Dictionary defines aesthetics as "knowledge that comes from the senses" (Natalia et al., 2022). According to Beakley and Chilton, aesthetics can be explained as a pattern related to art that expresses elements such as beauty and positive impressions and, therefore, is closely related to activity and the appreciation of authenticity (Lestari, 2020). A craft-like cloth songket Not only add element aesthetics as decorators, but element aesthetics also have philosophical aspects to each of them.

Something historical remains for sure; fiber will have philosophical meaning inside his. Meaning philosophical refers to the result. Of the concept of human thought in assessing a particular object wisely and judiciously. Apart from that, meaning philosophical on songket is business giving meaning in form, material, as well as the pattern displayed on the songket cloth itself.

Deep-patterned cloth songkets have very abundant diversity. Patterns this represents the splendor of the Sriwijaya Kingdom; the pattern usually drawn is like

flora and fauna patterns. Almost all regions in Indonesia use various decorative flora as a supply of objects for various decorative designs. This is because people can easily find decorative floral motifs in the surrounding area. There are several forms of decorative flora, such as flowers, leaves, seeds, shoots, fruit, roots, twigs, and even trees.

Use variety Decorate the flora and fauna inside a cloth songket with its own deep meaning and mark culture within it (Robert, 2021). However mature Many people do not understand or do not know the meaning and history of the cloth songket that alone. So that marks culture from songket that has diminished, ignorance. This is also caused by the increasing development of the times. Now, the usage cloth songket no is again as exclusive as it was during the era of the Sriwijaya Kingdom. Everyone is free to use a cloth songket at big events, regardless of their respective social status.

Based on the background behind the research this aim is to examine the function and meaning of variety in ornamental cloth (Palembang songket). Study this only will examine history, meaning, and the value contained in Palembang singket. This is because songket is not only in the city of Palembang; there is also songket from other cities in South Sumatra, so discussion will only be limited by songket originating from Palembang city. Study

This is expected to be beneficial for society as a new addition to knowledge of community history.

## **METHOD**

In accordance with the objective study this so method that will used in study. This is the method that will be used in the study or method historical. The is carried out through analysis critical to historical method traces of the past The characteristic of the historical method is that it relies more on primary data than secondary data. The aim of the historical method is to reconstruct past events systematically and objectively by collecting and presenting data as evidence to support factual claims and draw necessary conclusions analyzing. In the process method this own or required process carrietheto obtesults can stage process truthensure. There are steps that must be taken, such as the following: (1) Heuristics (Data collection), the first thing to do is heuristics or data collection. At the team heuristic stage, the researcher will gather as much as possible data, both primary and secondary data, linked to discussion or the object that the team wants to study. This data collection process will be done through a literature study and interviews. Literature study will be centered on collecting historical documents or written writings that still have their own linkages with the object to be studied. Meanwhile, an interview will

be done with RM Ali Hanafiah, a cultural practitioner in Palembang City. Additionally, team researchers will visit the South Sumatra State Museum to get additional data. (2) Source Criticism, after the team researcher gets the required data and has it categorized in accordance with his interests. These data will start to be criticized or verified. The goal of this process is to get data in the form of facts. There are two types of verification: authenticity or genuineness of the source, known as external criticism, and reliability or habitual trust, known as internal criticism (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). (3) Interpretation, after the data has been completely verified, it can be referred to as history data and will begin the interpretation process. The interpretation process in a simple way can be interpreted as a search process thread in the history story. A team researcher will give an interpretation of each data point and then look for patterns and relationships between one data point and other data points. (4) Historiography, if researchers already have thread red from the data set, they will start writing the results in the form of a text, description, or story.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Function and Meaning of Various Decorative Songket Cloths in Palembang

As a high level culture, knowledge of the manufacturing process cloth songket guarded with lowered from generation to

generation. Based on interview with Mr Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin IV explaining that songket cloth depicts the Sriwijaya Kingdom as a magnificent Kingdom Again powerful with color her breasts were striking as well as decorated with gold and silver. Apart from that, fabric songket also describes the greatness of the Sriwijaya Kingdom as a city trade, lots of inner motives cloth songket is acculturation from culture outside like China or India indicated if Palembang city is center trading Asia at that time.

In his time Songket is the most famous type of cloth throughout the world, which has been attracted by foreign countries because of its luxury and beauty. Songket is not an ordinary cloth, but rather a high quality cloth which is considered the queen of all types of cloth. This is because the process of making and using it has very positive meanings and values for people's lives, such as sacredness, beauty, precision, perseverance and patience (Dedeh, 2013).

Songket Cloth is decorated with lots his variety ornamental, use variety ornamental no simply only give mark aesthetics. However more from the, usage variety ornamental in cloth songket give description mark certain as well as characteristics of Sriwijaya society.

Based on an interview with Mr. R.M. Ali Hanafiah, the decorative variations contained in this cloth motif reflect human hopes. The colors of songket cloth

are obtained from natural dyes, such as kesumbo for green, purple, burgundy, turmeric for yellow, and sepang bark for red. The purple color can also be produced from the skin of the mangosteen fruit. All songket cloth dyes come from natural sources, the use of colors from songket cloth also looks at the plants in the land of Sriwijaya. Proper knowledge is also required to process it into ink. The process of combining these colors produces bright and beautiful colors.

The forms of decoration on songket cloth motifs are taken by weavers from depictions of the living environment of the surrounding community, such as depictions of mythology and the beliefs they adhere to and then visualized into two types of decoration, namely floral or plant decorations and fauna or animal decorations. The decorative variations of the Palembang songket motif are mostly plants, such as bamboo shoots, ferns, flowers, and plants (Sukanti, 2000).

Each color in songket cloth has a special meaning that can reflect the status of the wearer, not only wealth status but also social status. Like the colors green, yellow, and red used by a widow. Meanwhile, use bright colors like red and gold used by nobles. The following are the team's motives, which the researcher found on the Palembang songket cloth.

### **Nago Besaung Motif**



Figure 1. Nago Besaung motif  
Source: Private Collection of RM Ali Hanafiah

Based on obedience, the RM Ali Hanafiah Nago Besaung Motif is one of the motifs that illustrates the acculturation culture with other cultures. Like Name, this motif takes the form of a character animal in the form of a dragon, which is very identical to the culture of China. In Chinese culture, dragons are depicted as giant snakes with horns, golden scales, and four legs that resemble the strong legs of a fowl. Dragons are believed to have a positive influence on life and are considered a symbol of fertility. The power of the dragon can help provide salvation for humans (Rustarmadi, 2012).

The Nago Besaung motif is a songket motif specifically intended for palace circles such as the sultan's family and princes (Efrianto et.al, 2012). In this motif, two dragons are depicted facing each other face-to-face with a golden ball or jewel in between the two dragon heads. At first, the two dragons tried to fight over gold or gemstones until Apda Finally, those who have gold have a self.

People believe that the use of songket cloth with the Nago Besaung motif reflects the highest social strata. Dragons are considered holy animals in Chinese culture. Apart from this motif, which has very intricate details and requires time and patience in the manufacturing process, only kings or permitted authorities can use cloth songkets with this motif. In contrast, the general public, such as those living in the city of Palembang, uses Songket Limar cloth, which is simpler and only contains the values of everyday life. As a valuable good since formerly cloth songket with the Nago Besaung motif Already a valuable commodity until it became a commodity in the barter system, the beauty of Nago Besaung songket cloth has given it a high value in society. Songket cloth is not only a means of exchange but has also made a positive contribution to the economy and the standard of living of the craftsmen. Because of its high price, the songket cloth business has excellent potential for improving the welfare of its craftsmen (Riski, 2023).

Motif Nago Besaung has a tight connection with the traditional wedding customs of the Palembang people. The Nago Besaung motif is depicted with a caged dragon, This symbolizes the maintenance of the marriage bond that remains intact. In the Palembang people's conception, the dragon is a symbol that reflects the strength, advice, images, and

history of his ancestors. The power of the dragon, which is manifested in the visualization of sewet songket, is expected to represent the lives of the bride and groom or become a representative symbol of themselves (Danesi, 2012).

### Jando Beraes Motif



Figure 2. Jando Beraes Motif  
Source: South Sumatra State Museum Collection

Basically, usage Songket is also possible to become society's way to differentiate their status from others. Like songket with a special Nago Besaung motif For rulers and nobles, this motive is also the same. Based on Anna Kumari's narrative, one of the cultural practitioners original to the city of Palembang said, like the name, the fabric motif Jando Beraes songket is special for women who have become widows.

Unlike traditional songkets, which typically use gold thread and various decorations, this style differs. Jando Beraes motif This will consist of at least 2 elements that show beauty within simplicity. Basically, subtraction of two elements This is related to the woman's status, which requires that they come on

stage with more simplicity compared to women who are still or have been married.

By philosophical this motive creates an impression of a woman with simplicity. Without frills, gold or gems are inherently beautiful creatures. This motif is also used by widows when they want to marry again. When this Songket cloth is worn by a widow, the widow will look elegant and modest (Resianty, 2015).

### **Nampan Perak Motif**



Figure 3. Nampan Perak Motif  
Source: South Sumatra State Museum Collection

Nampan Perak Motif is possibly said to be derived from the Nago Besaung motif. This motif is intended for the princes who don't own connection blood in a way direct with kings or noblemen with names or similar kiagus, masagus, kepak, and others. In this motif, an animal in the form of a dragon is still used. However, there are two big differences that are striking compared to the original motifs, namely Nago Besaung. There are two differences among others: (1) In the Nago Besaung motif, the two dragons are interconnected

face-to-face and fight over the gold bole or jewel in the middle; on the gold ball, the Nampan Perak motif or gemstone is replaced with a flower. (2) If the flowers are in the Nago Besaung Motif-shaped round, on a Nampan motif, a silver flower has a facet four and symbolizes a Nampan. In the manufacturing process, the Palembang people will always refer to incidents or activities daily. And Nampan is equipment that has a tight connection with lots of ceremonies. Apart from being an equipment complement in activities with customs, the tray or baki is also used as a tool to convey letters to the sultan from both internal and external environments.

The philosophical meaning of the Nampan Perak motif comes from the word "Nampan" which was previously used as a container to serve all the king's needs, such as food and letters. This motif depicts the glory and loyalty of the royal servants as a symbol of their loyalty and devotion to the King.

### **Bungo Pacik Motif**



Figure 4. Bungo Pacik Motif  
Source: South Sumatra State Museum Collection

The bungo pacik motif is identical; use colored silk thread. Gold, silver, or the other colors aren't too striking, so they give an elegant impression to the person who uses them. This motif is also a common one that is often found in many places. But this motive is usually used by native women from Arab countries when attending events in (Ramadhanti, 2022) Palembang.

In the collection at the South Sumatra State Museum, Songket Bungo Pacik is made from purple silk thread with white decorations and gold thread. The tumpal motif consists of bamboo shoots, turmeric flowers, roses, jasmine flowers, flying dragons, and other geometric motifs. The main motif is Bungo Pacik (octagonal star), which is located in the middle of the cloth, which is also equipped with a Bungo Inten (Bungo Tanjung) motif made of gold thread (Efrianto *et al.*, 2012).

In other words, bungo refers to flowers, which are motifs on fabric songkets. Whereas Pacik is the designation for Muhajirin Woman, anchored Arabian to Palembang. The uniqueness of this motif is that the minimum use of thread replaced gold with silk thread. This is a symbol of Islam's teachings that it is not recommended for adherents to wear excessive clothing (Mainur, 2018).

This Bungo Pacik songket consists of: some usual floral motifs; this motif will depict jasmine flowers and tanjung

flowers. Jasmine flowers symbolize purity and politeness, while tanjung flowers symbolize welcome and hospitality. These songket motifs are used when attending weddings or important events in the Sultanate (Putri, 2020).

### Bungo Cino Motif



Figure 5. Bungo Cino motif  
Source: South Sumatra State Museum Collection

Like the Pacik bungo motif, the Cino bungo motif was created especially for Chinese society. Based on its history, this type of motif started with the making rules by Najamudin. If using cloth, Songket Lepus is not allowed by people outside the palace, so it was created (Tahrir *et al.*, 2017).

Like objective, it becomes a special motif. For Chinese society, then the manufacturing process of cloth This highlights culture in China. If Bungo Pacik was created with more calm and elegance as appropriate with the characteristics society in Arabic (Efrianto *et al.*, 2012). So it's appropriate with culture; China is more like splendor and luxury; the Bungo Cino motif is dominated by the colors red

and purple, as well as using thread gold. Apart from that, another characteristic of this motif is that the core part is decorated with the Bungo Inten motif. The tumpal part is wide with turmeric flower motifs, Tanjung flowers, and various other geometric motifs (Syarofie, 2012: 18).

The Bungo Cino motif is divided into two types, namely the straight Bungo Cino pulir, which has a sprinkling of flowers in the form of a straight slope, and the Balinese pulir Bungo Cino, which has flower peaks with broken accents. The name "bali" here refers to 49 in the Palembang language, which means return or return home, referring to the weaving process. When weaving songket with this motif, after pulling the thread to form the motif, the process does not continue downwards but is repeated upwards. This is what makes this motif with flowers in the form of pulir flowers called "bungo cino pulir bali." Many other motifs were developed from these early songket motifs, which add to the richness of Palembang's culture, especially in terms of clothing (Syarofie, 2012).

The Bungo Cino motif also adopts a variety of floral decorations, such as those found in the Bungo Pacik motif, using jasmine, rose, and tanjung flower motifs to symbolize welcome and friendliness (Yohannes, 2023). The Bungo Cino songket motif can only be worn by women of Chinese descent who have become Muslims. From this, it can be assumed that

songkets of this type and motif were created specifically for people who are not native residents so that they feel recognized as part of Palembang society. This motif is usually worn by women of Chinese descent in Palembang, especially nobles who have married at a young age when attending busy events and mungga brides. During the sultanate, they wore them to attend official events at the palace (Dafril & Nurlaini, 2001).

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that Palembang songket is a tall cultural form. Songket was born during the Sriwijaya era. This has been proven with found There are songket motifs on several statues from the Sriwijaya period. The presence of motifs such as stars, stripes, bamboo shoots, ferns, and sunflowers, which are geometric and inspired by plants, is clearly visible on these statues. The research results also show if the decorations contained in this cloth pattern reflect human hopes. The diversity in songket can be explained as the result of a cultural acculturation process that involves influences from Malay, Chinese, and Javanese cultures. Weavers take the forms of decoration on songket motifs from descriptions of the environment of the surrounding community, such as mythological stories and the beliefs they adhere to, which are then realized in two

types of decoration, namely floral or plant decorations and fauna or animal decorations. Based on the motives explained, it is also known that initially, during the Sriwijaya Kingdom, songket cloth motifs used motifs of living creatures such as humans, animals, and plants. However, after the arrival and development of Islam in Palembang, decorative plant motifs dominated songket cloth motifs because they were in accordance with Islamic teachings, which did not allow the use of animal motifs or animate creatures as motifs.

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