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## **A COMPARISON OF MOTIF DESIGNS BETWEEN TENUN PAHANG DIRAJA AND TERENGGANU SONGKET**

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### ABSTRACT

The songket weaving art has been passed down through Malay society for hundreds of years. The origins of this fabric can be traced back to the 13th century, during a period of trade between the Malays and the rest of the world, including India, China, Egypt, and the West. The trade relationship developed as a result of the Malay World's strategic location, which led to its status as the world's main trading route. Among the Malays, textile is known as the most desired merchandise, and it remains so to this day. Notably, silk and songket weaving are important local activities in Pahang, Terengganu, and Kelantan, where weavers incorporate local cultural values and identities in their motif pattern designs. The motif's design is prominent to emphasise the weaving's uniqueness in addition to incorporating the elements of daily life such as cultural, religious, aesthetic, and symbolic values. Many of the terms and designs that are used in weaving and songket motifs are similar. This textile design and aesthetic aspiration can be found in the fabrics of Tenun Pahang Diraja and Terengganu Songket. Songket weaving motifs are inspired by nature, such as flowers, plants, and animals. Despite their apparent similarities, the motif's touches on both fabrics displayed unique distinctiveness. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify the least visible differences in the motif

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designs of Tenun Pahang Diraja and Terengganu songket. This comparison also seeks to highlight how the overall traditional motif design is developed to create a work that stands out in its own right. The tangible articulation demonstrates that the local heritage textiles possess elements of the nation's cultural art tradition as well as the inventive ability to establish a detail on the production of a perfect look through product statement.

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## 1. Introduction

The Malay songket weave motif design is the result of nature's transformation, which has been fashioned and created through the formation of art elements that are based on the beauty and cultural norms of Malay society. The created motifs and designs are testaments to the fabric weaver's inspirations, which are brought to life through their creativity and are made tangible, beginning with object selection and ending with the creation of traditional artwork. The selection and creation of motifs is an important step in enhancing the beauty and uniqueness of a fabric.

According to Ahmad Farid Abdul Jalal (2013) in his work *Tenun Pahang Diraja: Warisan, Tradisi dan Falsafah*, there is a trend to diversify nature's elements in order to create a touch of luxury and exclusivity in design, as well as to present the entire structure of the fabric.

Fabric creation processes such as the cleaning of silk (*melikas*), dyeing, preparation of textile warp threads using a warping frame (*mengani*), connecting the warped threads to the *karap* or Handle Eyes (*mengubung*), and weaving have gone through tremendous changes since its introduction. This phase of transition gives the motif a new effect and appearance. Moreover, weaving techniques are constantly evolving in order to explore and process patterns in terms of colour matching and fabric patterns. The global advancement of textile art has resulted in a shift in the selection of newer songket weaving design styles (Habibah Abdul Jabbar *et al.*, 2015; Arba'iyah Mohd Noor; Norazilawati Abd Wahab, 2019), in keeping with the fast-paced fashion world of this decade.

Various parties initiated the effort to preserve silk weaving and songket weaving in the 1960s (Natipah @ Nortipah Abdul Kadir, personal interview, 19 July 2022). Weavers from Pahang, Kelantan, and Terengganu have been actively changing and creating new pattern designs. The changing inclination of weavers at the time ushered in a new phase of textile industry production. Weavers strive to surpass one another by creating designs that highlight local identity and essence (Siti Zainon Ismail, 2018). This attitude demonstrates their unwavering commitment to elevating the cottage industry. According to Halimatun Abdul Shukor *et al.* (2009), a weaver's skills and creativity are displayed through motif design, ideal weaving motifs, and consistency.

The idea of traditional and contemporary motif designs draws inspiration from a variety of natural sources, here, the weaver's surroundings usually influenced the creation of these motifs. These natural sources served as the muse for the concept of motif creation, which not only reflects the weavers' creativity and care when creating fine woven fabrics but also highlights the elegance of silk weaving and songket, which are steeped in tradition and heritage.

This study compares the Tenun Pahang Diraja fabric motif to the Songket Terengganu motif. Its goal is to educate the community about the differences in pattern design between the two fabrics. When appreciated through the wisdom of the plans that were orchestrated by weavers for each weave of the woven fabric and songket, the design of motif forms weaved from threads of cotton, silk, and metallic materials rich with meaning and aesthetical values are highlighted. The findings of this study are critical because the art of weaving and songket not only concerns its history and development, but it also fills a gap that is left by previous local researchers.

## **2. Tenun Pahang Diraja Fabric Pattern and Motif Design**

On May 8<sup>th</sup>. 2009, the late Sultan Ahmad Shah Al-Musta'in Billah Sultan Abu Bakar Ri'ayatuddin Al-Muadzam conferred the title "Diraja" (Royal) during the branding ceremony and launch of the Tenun Pahang Diraja logo. This demonstrates the continuation of the role that is played by the royals, which was first initiated by DYMM Tengku Ampuan Meriam in 1903 and is now gaining the attention and support of DYMM Tengku Puan Pahang Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah Binti Almarhum Al-Mutawakkil Alallah Sultan Iskandar Al-Haj, to continue the preservation of traditional Pahang art. On June 25<sup>th</sup>. 2007, the idea of establishing the Tengku Ampuan Afzan Tenun Pahang Diraja Institute at the Kampung Pulau Keladi Cultural Complex in Pekan was born out of a deep interest in the arts of this nation's heritage.

The Tenun Pahang Diraja fabric is distinct from other songket weaves. The simplicity of the designs and motifs show special features, and they are matched with high-quality silk colours and combinations, emphasising its status as royal family wear. Previously, woven fabrics had no pattern (Yaakub Isa, 2009; Fatimah Ismail, 2009). Weavers began to experiment with new techniques over time, which resulted in the development of patterns and decorative patterns.



*Figure 1. Traditional Patterns of Tenun Pahang Diraja*  
*Source: Pahang State Museum Collection (Photo by Sahaimi Abd. Manaf et al., 2006)*

Each sheet of woven cloth that is produced has moved away from the original influence of Tok Tuan Keraing Aji, a Bugis high official in the 17th century AD. Checkered patterns, vertical stripe patterns, and horizontal stripe patterns were among the first patterns that had been introduced. At the beginning of the development of the weaving techniques, aristocratic pattern designs such as the Eminent Person Pattern (*Corak Orang Kenamaan*), the Mayor's Pattern (*Corak Datuk Bandar*), and the *Tok Muda* pattern began to emerge. There is a significant change as Tenun Pahang continues to create a new dimension with the emergence of exclusive and simple contemporary patterns. The Cross Tie Pattern (*Corak Ikat Bersilang*), Comb Pattern (*Corak Sisir*), Wajik Cut Pattern (*Corak Potong Wajik*), and Broken Rice Pattern (*Corak Beras Patah*) are a few examples. Bamboo shoots (*pucuk rebung*), chicken tails (*lawi ayam*), four-burst flowers (*bunga pecah empat*), and six-burst flowers (*bunga pecah enam*) are popular fashion adornment of the fabric (Yaakub Isa, 2009; Zubaidah Sual, 2013). These motifs are also similar to songket. Tenun Pahang Diraja's speciality is the design of its motifs using the *colek* technique. Weavers in Pahang demonstrate their creativity by developing new motifs that are also more contemporary, sometimes solely based on individual interpretations and observations (Ahmad Farid Abdul Jalal, 2013; Zubaidah Sual, 2013). Motifs are used as the primary element in creating the woven fabric's unique identity.

### **3. Terengganu Malay Songket Adornment Motif**

According to Siti Zainon Ismail (1994) and Maznah Mohamad (1996), the cooperative relationship that was established with the Bugis community around the 17<sup>th</sup> century had created opportunities for textile development in Terengganu. Looking at the complexity of the songket-making process as well as the sharpness of the motif decoration mindset, it becomes clear that not only expertise is required, but also patience and diligence, which results in fine and high-quality handiwork (Norwani Mohd Nawawi, 2002).

Recognising the significance of using textile motifs as decorative styles in the production of Terengganu songket, inspiration from nature relates to the community's culture of thought. Tenderness and decency are used in accordance with the Malays' life philosophy, which adheres to Islamic principles (Haziyah Hussin, 2006) to discourage the use of animals in each design. As such, floral and geometric motifs take precedence, while fauna motifs are abstracted so that they do not resemble animate elements.

Flora motifs (flowers, leaves, stems, fruits, shoots, and trees), fauna motifs, material world and nature motifs, food motifs, cosmos motifs, and calligraphic motifs are the most common types of songket motifs (Arba'iyah Ab. Aziz, 2018; Norwani Mohd Nawawi, 2002; Siti Zainon Ismail, 1997; Haziyah Hussin, 2006). The bamboo shoots and chicken tail motif is a popular decorative motif in songket, and is used as a decoration on the sarong's head.



*Figure 2. Full Pattern Songket*  
Source: Norwani Mohd Nawawi (2002)

#### **4. Methodology**

The research began with the collection of data from primary and secondary sources, including documents and photographs, that were related to the designs of Tenun Pahang Diraja and Terengganu Songket. This study was based on field studies that had been conducted in the vicinity of Pulau Keladi, Pekan in Pahang, and Kampung Bukit Depu, Kuala Terengganu in Terengganu. Accordingly, to confirm the collected data, field investigations and informant diaries were the most helpful. The weavers, entrepreneurs in Pulau Keladi, Pekan in Pahang, and Terengganu, fashion designers, textile experts, academic experts, the *Yayasan Tenun Pahang Diraja* (Tenun Pahang Diraja Foundation), the *Perbadanan Muzium Negeri Pahang* (Pahang State Museum Corporation), and the *Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia* (Malaysian Handicrafts Development Corporation) Terengganu and Pahang Branches, as well as numerous secondary sources were used to obtain the data. In addition, a thorough interpretive review of weaving, design, and influence is analysed.

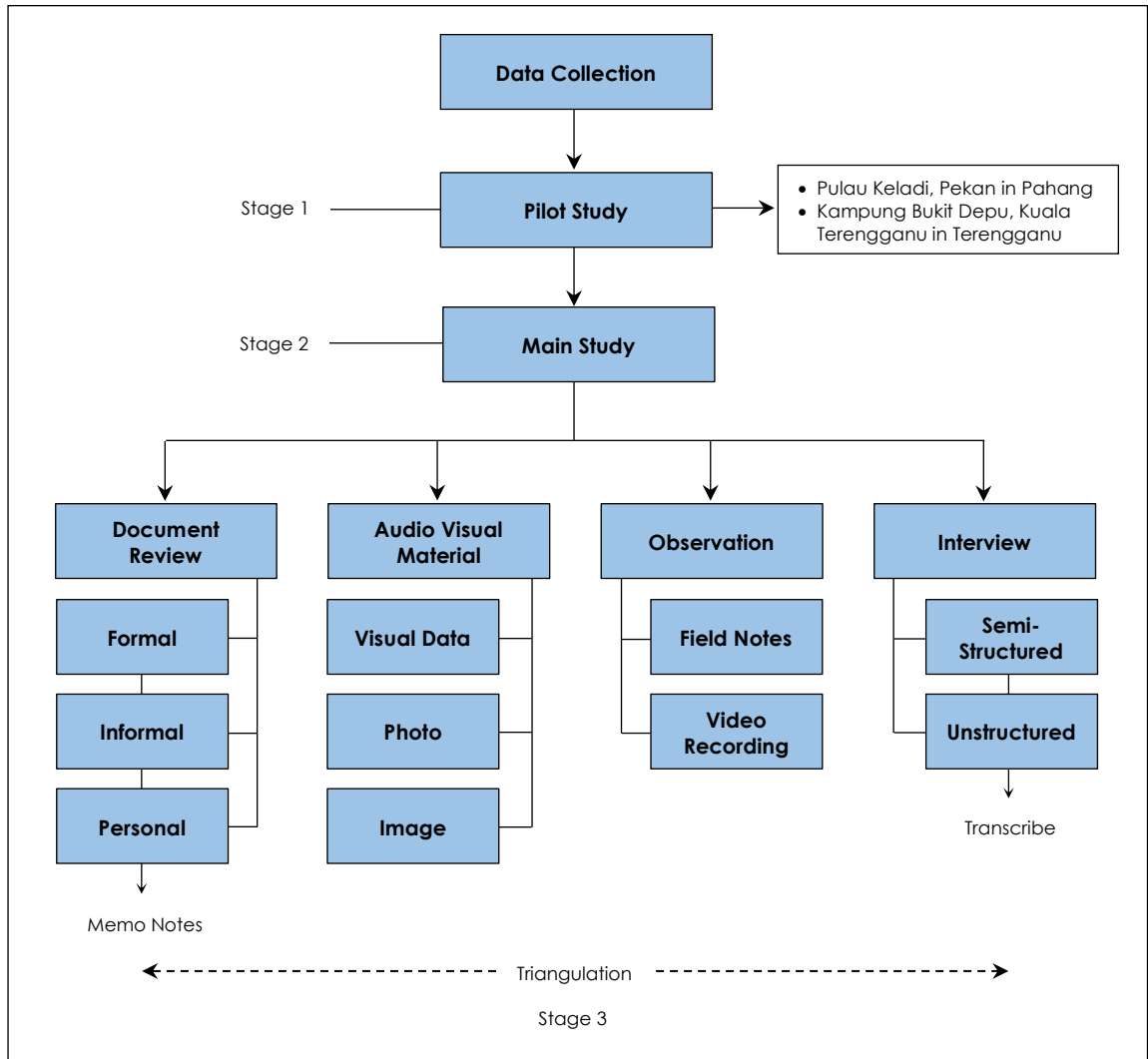


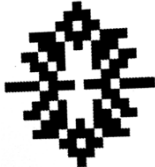



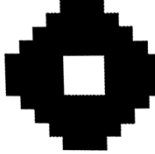







Figure 3. Data Collection Method  
Source: Mas Ayu Zainal @ Ismail (2023)











5. **Motif Design Difference Between Tenun Pahang Diraja and Terengganu Songket**

Table 1  
The motif design difference between Tenun Pahang Diraja and Terengganu Songket

No.	Motif	Tenun Pahang Diraja	Terengganu Songket
1.	Star Flower Eight Burst Flower (Bunga Bintang Bunga Pecah Lapan)		
2.	Sun Flower (Bunga Matahari)		
3.	Cempaka Kembang Flower (Bunga Cempaka Kembang)		
4.	Cermai Flower (Bunga Cermai)		
5.	Cloves (Bunga Cengkih)		
6.	Blooming Mushroom Flower (Bunga Cendawan Kembang)		

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<p>7. Star Anise (<i>Bunga Lawang</i>)</p>		
<p>8. Kembang Semangkuk Flowers (<i>Bunga Kembang Semangkuk</i>)</p>		
<p>9. Ylang-ylang Flower (<i>Bunga Kenanga</i>)</p>		
<p>10. Henna Leaves (<i>Bunga Daun Inai</i>)</p>		

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The above table illustrates some of the design differences between the Tenun Pahang Diraja fabric motif and the Terengganu songket. The weaver's keen observation and imagination in his creation demonstrate that both have their respective distinctiveness. Similarities can be seen simply by looking at the elements that have been inspired by the same object.

The floral motif is portrayed as a key motif and a fan favourite. In her work, Norwani Mohd Nawawi (2002) demonstrates how weavers alter existing designs to create motifs to their liking.

In the Tenun Pahang Diraja process, the *colek* technique involves only a few layers of threads to create a luxurious finish with a lustre that enhances the motif. Terengganu songket, on the other hand, employs numerous layers of threads to create the embossed effect, which also serves as an identity marker for the state's weavers.

## 6. Conclusion

Woven fabric and songket is a luxurious fabric that employs a variety of decorative threads that are highly prized, particularly among courtiers and royals. Traditional motifs that are based on natural resources are still present in this fabric. Each motif represents a philosophy and the weaver's nature, which prioritise Malay identity and culture, in addition to the individual's appreciation towards his or her respective historical links and past cultures. It is common practice for the weaving art to be passed down through families. Weaving skills are not only dependent on the weaver but

also on his or her bearings and attitude, which clearly emphasises certain beliefs during the weaving process.

Malay culture is synonymous with woven fabric and songket. As a result, it is one of the great arts that should be preserved. The meaning and philosophy behind each pattern design reflect the Malays' ingenuity and thought process, which are inherent in their cultural values. The elegance and pattern of motifs emphasised the master weaver's creativity, sensitivity, and appreciation. Aspects of psychology, philosophy, and Malay culture coexisted with motif design styles.

To understand the roles of motifs in highlighting the distinct characteristics of fabric design, it is necessary to examine the design pattern and adornment that styles Tenun Pahang Diraja fabric and Songket Terengganu. Tenun Pahang Diraja fabric was adorned in the most understated manner. Songket Terengganu, on the other hand, emphasises every inch of its head, fabric body, and border sections that boast its unique function based on these sarung demarcations.

As a result, similar studies, particularly those focusing on motif design in textile art, should be conducted. Pattern design studies could provide new insights, allowing distinct elements in obscure designs to stand out. Hence, the elegance of a creation exudes its uniqueness, transcending the role of merely being an ensemble of one's attire. In fact, each material, technique, pattern, and motif plays a unique role in the creation of a high-quality, exquisite fabric.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

No conflict of interest is associated with this publication.

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