



MEE 2.0: ICLT2022
International Virtual Colloquium on Multi-Disciplinary Research Impact (3rd Series)
International Conference of Logistics and Transportation
Best Western i-City Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, 05-06 Oct2022



Using Motif Songket to Creating Geometric Islamic Artwork

Wan Samiati Andriana Wan Mohamad Daud, Mursyidah Zainal Abidin

Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

samiati@uitm.edu.my, mursyidah@uitm.edu.my
Tel +60122750539

Abstract

The motif shape of the songket consists of elements and parts taken from nature. Due to the method of weaving itself, all forms of motifs are born in geometric styles. National Cultural Congress was set up to encourage artists to project a sense of internal pride and identity in their oeuvre. Creating artwork is thought to give the meaning of geometric shapes and motifs of songket based on the characteristics of the Tauhid Aesthetic, introduced by Al-Fauqi regarding the modular structure. This artwork will emphasise the formalistic aspect.

Keywords: motif, songket, geometric, Islamic art

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2022. The Authors. Published for AMER ABRA cE-Bs by E-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behavior Researchers), ABRA (Association of Behavioral Researchers on Asians), and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behavior Studies), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v7iS19.3952>

1.0 Introduction

This paper centres on the Malay songket motifs, images found in the textile art of Malaysia. The motifs provide a means of exploring the relationship between cultural identity, national identity and government policy. The songket motifs also symbolise the very essence of Malay cultural identity expressed in the creation of its motifs through the practice of oral traditions.

Motifs seem to have a very close relationship with art creation. Visual arts, perceived as beautiful, refined and intricate, encompass various fields such as architecture, drawing, painting and sculpturing. Besides being part of the culture, visual art aims to produce pleasurable and satisfying creations. The issue discussed is traditional songket motifs, which are only applied to the fabric. The understanding of geometric Islamic Art has been utilised to research and search for appropriate *songket* motifs. Besides, other principles have also been studied, such as repetition and arrangement of *songket* motifs like modular structure, sequential combination and repetition.

Songket is more than just glitter and intricate designs and themes. Its effects on Malaysia's cultural politics, production, and outwardly visible cultural identity are deeper. Utilising songket motifs needs planning and organisation. Because the songket motif involves measurement and accuracy, the work's balance is crucial. From the point of view of the work, each result needs to communicate and receive feedback from the viewer.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Motif Songket

Songket is a traditional Malaysian woven fabric representing fine Malay handicrafts (Siti Zainon Ismail, 1987). It is also referred to as "kain benang emas" (golden threading fabric) and is used to make garment accessories. Songket is a Malay name for flower weaving made

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2022. The Authors. Published for AMER ABRA CE-Bs by E-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behavior Researchers), ABRA (Association of Behavioral Researchers on Asians), and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behavior Studies), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v7iS19.3952>

with golden thread on silk warp, also known as *menongket*, *menolek bunga*, or flower weaving. The thread is wove using a "Lidi," or coconut vein or stick, to create ornamental designs (embroidering).

Although it is still unknown where songket originated in Malaya, most of the greatest weavers are centred on the east coast states of Pahang, Terengganu, and Kelantan. Given that the Peninsula has been exposed to the cultures of China, Cambodia, India, and the Middle East for centuries, it is possible that these states influenced weaving techniques.

The Malay community uses songket as a sarong, side or shawl. It symbolises luxurious classical fabrics or textiles for customary use such as weddings, circumcision ceremonies, celebrating Hari Raya and attending funerals.

Before the 19th century, this textile was cultivated under the auspices of the king, and their respective relatives imposed various taboos on its use. Usually, the yellow textile cloth is reserved for the king's use. In the beginning, the gold and silver woven songket could not be used by the people except on the wedding day. Only the design of the edge of the cloth was allowed, and the design was given the name 'king of the day'. (Selvanayagan, 1990)

Norwani (1989) said that most songket motifs are designed and are given names based on diverse themes such as flora, fauna, and environment. Some examples of flower motifs are 'Bunga Tanjung', 'Bunga Kemunting Cina' and 'Bunga Cengkih' (cloves). As for fruit motifs, the ones often used are 'manggis' (mangosteen), 'kesemak' (persimmon), 'pomegranate' (delima) and 'buah cermin' (bears fruit). Additionally, the animal motifs are 'unduk-unduk' (seahorse), 'gigi yu' (shark's teeth), 'gigi belalang' (grasshopper's teeth), 'kepala lalat' (fly's head), 'siku kelawar' (bat's elbow) and 'kaki lipan' (centipede's feet). Besides that, the environment theme depicts samples such as 'pokok pucuk rebung' (bamboo shoot motifs) and 'awan' (clouds). These motifs represent the love and bond between the weaver and the natural surroundings.

Siti Zainon Ismail (1997) also mansion that another source of inspiration for the songket weavers will be the local Malay delicacies such as 'Potong Wajik', 'Tepung Talam', 'Madu Manis', 'Potong Seri Kaya' and 'Potong Pulut'. Besides, songket motifs are also originated from beliefs and cosmos such as 'Lidah Bota', 'Bunga Semangat', 'Sinar Matahari', 'Bintang Beralih', 'Pergunungan' and 'Tampuk Semesta'. Animal motifs are modified because Islam forbids the exact representation of animals and humans in any art presentation. As a result, weaving techniques and methods are frequently expressed geometrically.

All songket motifs and designs are woven using golden or silver thread and are woven on plain, coloured fabric such as dark blue, black, red and other materials. The choice of thread will enhance the contrasting and outstanding selection of colours.

The songket motifs depict the traditional establishment of the Malay political system (associating spirituality with Divine Kingship), a largely agrarian economy and social system expressing communal activities. These motifs also indicate the reshaping of cultural values through assimilation with the Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic cultural influences combined with the animist traditions. However, the concepts of 'growth,' 'sense of unity,' and 'human spirituality' will remain a part of the Malay cultural identity portrayed in the songket motifs.

2.2 Geometric Islamic Artwork

Ismail R. al-Faruqi dan Lois Lamya 'al-Faruqi (1992) defined Islamic art as a manifestation of suitable aesthetic values because it is bound to the real or actual knowledge which discloses Islam based on the Quran. In other words, any message in Islamic artworks should be based on and in line with the real or actual knowledge and message in the Quran. Robert Irwin (1982) states that Islamic art is also referred to as Islamic culture and is not only art related to Islam. Furthermore, Islamic art is not an art of a particular era or for a particular place or people and does not restrict to a specific movement.

Faith has become the key factor in the construction of Islam. Islam began when the Muslim artist proclaimed his testament with La ilahaila Allah (There is no god but Allah) and accepted the notion of Tawhid (Oneness) that Allah is One. Tawhid is a solid concept that not only describes the Muslim worldview of God but also their worldview of the world and their role in life as individuals and members of society.

Azhar (2012) stated that Aqidah (Belief) in terms of linguistics means faith or strong belief. The knowledge of Aqidah is the science of faith discussing matters related to belief and confidence towards Allah SWT. At the same time, Aqidah in terminology means a definite belief and a fixed decision which is not mixed with any suspicion or doubt, regardless of whether it is true or not, based on the two types of proof, *dalil naqli* and *aqli*. A *dalil naqli* is derived from a textual source, taught and transmitted to the one making the argument, while *dalil aqli* is derived from formal or informal logic, inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, or other modes of intellection.

The West still think of art as something related to the moral and idealistic in which art has two different approaches, first, art for the sake of art and second, art for the community. Art for art is to make or create any artistic creation to deliver good or bad messages. On the other hand, art for the community is social, political and moral.

The formulation of the National Culture was agreed to at a Congress on National Culture called by the Malaysian government in August 1971 in response to the 1969 racial riots. The three interrelated principles constituent of the National Culture are (Deraman, 1994, p.178): 1. The National Culture of Malaysia must be based on the culture of the people indigenous to the region, the Bumiputera, the sons of the soil. 2. Elements from other cultures that are suitable and reasonable may be incorporated into the National Culture. 3. Islam will be an important element in the National Culture.

3.0 Methodology

The motif shape of the songket consists of elements and parts of nature. Due to the method of weaning itself, all forms of motifs are born in geometric styles. Optical art has been used as an approach in researching and finding that fits the songket motif, especially in producing new works of art. In addition, several other principles have also been used and studied, such as repetition and arrangement of songket motifs such as modular structures, sequentially combined and repetition. Geometric shapes, combined, repeated, connected, and

arranged into complete combinations in one of the hallmarks of censorship in Islam, which is 'Arabesque'. The following are a number of compotes that are thought to give the meaning of geometric shapes and motifs of this songket based on the characteristics of the statement of the Tauhid Aesthetic, introduced by Al-Fauqi regarding the modular structure. Songket shows that the styling of Malay and Islamic culture has further enhanced the beauty.

From the context of art, the NCC has given a significant impact, in which the appearance of Malaysian artworks after that started to show the story of socio-cultural history and mythology of the country that is so deep and give more focus about the Malaysian. Siti Zainon Ismail states that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports intends to build a pleasant relationship between all people and unite them to discuss and create a pattern of national art in various fields of art.

4.0 Findings

An artist will consider the motive when determining, designing, or altering the work that will be produced. Using concepts like reference material or subject matter, imagination, and symbols, Dzul Haimi Md. Zain (1985) analyses how motives might be erased in the context of work.

The visible language or language of human connection with other beings in both the real world and the world of illusion is made up of symbols, imaginations, and motifs. It involves things that are both objective and subjective, or, to put it another way, external and internal. According to Siti Zainon Ismail (1987), motives can be expressed using one of two methods, namely:

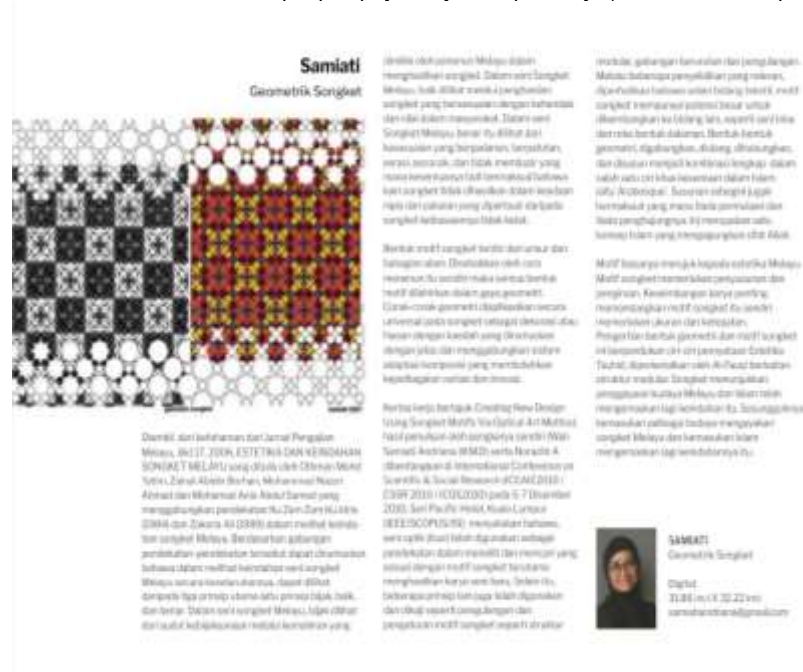
- i. Ideas from the actual form to the process of simplicity (simplicity), abstraction, addition and distortion that emphasise the visible elements or formalistic aspects such as design elements and principles to obtain a form that fits the purpose of creation.
- ii. In terms of the meaning to be conveyed, philosophical and conceptual thinking through scientific thinking emphasises more emotion, expression, intuition or from the aspect of iconography.

The idea of description and meaning must be in line with the nature, importance and existence of its environment. The design presented is able to be accepted by the community or tribe. Consistent with the culture, economy, politics and beliefs of a particular community.

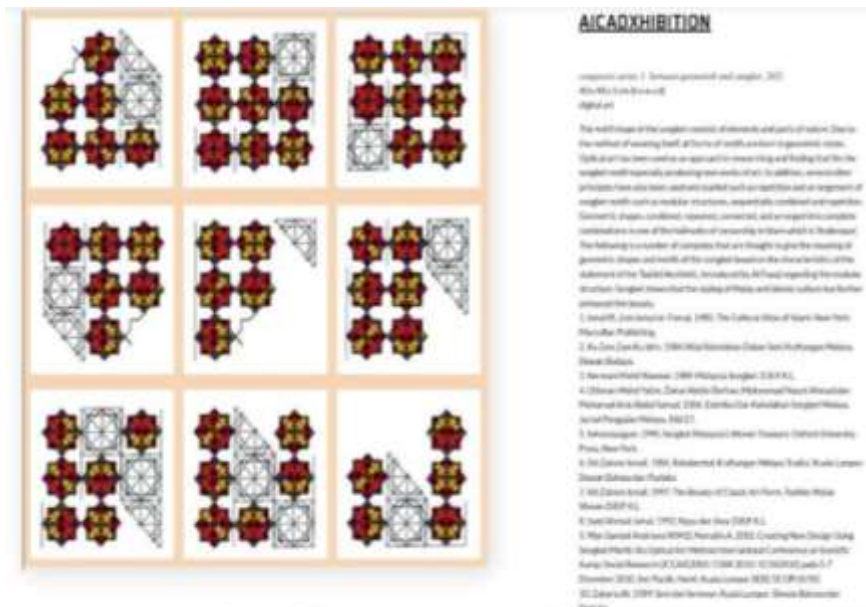
In Principle 1 of the National Culture Policy, the rich oral traditions of the Malay culture are reflected in the thoughts and ideas that they embody. Additionally, the themes stress and encourage the oneness of the populace by representing the Malay etiquette in their patterning. The Malays who arrived in Malaysia with foreign cultural traditions absorbed the symbolic meaning contained in the motifs.

Principle 2 in the policy makes for various cultures to coexist, particularly the Chinese and Indian cultures, which challenge the supremacy of the Malay mainstream culture. According to this concept, our cultural identities are reflections of our shared cultural norms and historical experiences, which give us, as "one people," constant, unchanging frames of reference and meaning that lay underlying the varying divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history (Hall, 1990, p.223).

Principle 3 of the National Culture policy stated that Islam would be a significant component of the cultural identity. Sociologists in Malaysia currently hold the opinion that the modernisation of Malay culture began following the conversion of the Malay people to Islam, which dates back to the 12th century. Islamization of the Malays caused them to change their perspective on life and adopt "the world of rationality, intellectualisation, and the entire character of people, physically and spiritually" (Deraman, 1994, p.114).



Picture 1: Design DECODED 2021 Virtual Art Exhibition Catalogue, 24 August - 31 December 2021



Picture 2: AICAD Virtual Art Exhibition 2021 Catalogue, 15 Dec 2021 - 30 Jan 2022

Picture 1 and Picture 2 show artwork which takes the element of motif songket that is put together to form Geometric Islamic Visual Artwork. A pattern that has no prefix and no suffix that gives a picture of the universe is the best way to express it in the art of monotheistic doctrine. The structures created for this purpose are what characterise all the arts of Muslims. Muslim art is often considered to be *saujana* or infinity art which is also called *arabesque*. Arabesque should not be limited to the type of leaf pattern or just two-dimensional or stylish plant shapes. Instead, arabesque is in line with the aesthetic principles of Islamic ideology. Nature though beautiful in its diversity and perfection but is only a stage where human beings do work to fulfil the will of God. The characteristics of the statement of Aesthetics of Tauhid introduced by Al-Fauqi, namely the modular structure, help to further strengthen the arrangement of the new design of this songket.

1. Abstraction or *mujarad* - the infinite pattern in Islamic art is abstract or *mujarad*. The body of nature is used, the body is subject to denaturalisation and stylistic techniques more suitable for the denial of naturalism than as a fitting picture of natural phenomena.
2. Modular structure-Islamic works of art contain many parts or modules that are combined to produce a larger design.
3. Sequential combinations-combinations that are repeated, diversified and connected with other smaller or larger entities to form other more complex combinations.
4. Repetition - a combination of Islamic art mix using repetition of motifs, structural modules, and also using sequential combinations that appear to be continuous *ad infinitum*.
5. Dynamism - Islamic design is dynamic, which is a pattern that must go through a period of time.
6. Intrusion or complexity - this feature of intrigue or complexity adds to the ability of any pattern or arabesque to draw the attention and focus of the audience to the structural entity being depicted.

The songket process itself creates this pattern, and the usage of bogan flowers, spirit flowers, and eight-pointed star flowers is an aspect of nature that has through a stage of denaturalisation. Motif combinations make beautiful designs and are essential. Each of these themes is a distinct entity that possesses a level of culmination and perfection that enables it to be viewed as a satisfying, expressive unit on its own.

The repetition, diversification, and connection of large motif combinations with smaller ones results in new, more complex combinations. The dynamic at issue in the design of this theme is the usage of space. i.e., creating them using points, lines, forms, and volumes. With the increase of complexity to the execution and the addition of the combination, motive momentum can be accomplished. Because the songket motif itself demands effort and accuracy, accurate calculation, as well as balance, are crucial. In actuality, the creation of this new songket design places more emphasis on the setting of the concept, however, the creation process is a little challenging.

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The researcher's practice exemplifies how the flat songket visuals are transformed into artworks. The technique involves the artworks in order to show how the motifs' roles vary in a gallery setting. The evolution of these motifs serves as an illustration for the study of the changing Malaysian cultural identity in relation to songket motifs.

In producing an artwork, artistic elements such as appearance, space and the use of contrasting colours play an important role. Principles of art such as balance, movement and harmony are also interesting displays to study.

Appearance can be illustrated by sketching a skeleton that contains recognisable features such as round, oval and square shapes. These shapes act to fill the space. Appearance is permanent and permanent, although the role of space has the potential to change. Through the use of different appearance sizes, an object being depicted may be the same, but the illusion is different in terms of distance.

Size can also be described by the use of colour. Colours on a look or shape may vary, and this can also create space. The use of warm colours gives the illusion as if it is closer compared to cool colours. The existence of space and size can be seen horizontally or vice versa.

The symbolic meanings of the songket motifs are considered vital to transforming the songket motifs into artworks. Context plays an important role in relating to the meaning of the motifs. Malay traditional context relates the motifs with customs and rituals, while the contemporary context of an art gallery sees and frees them from a specific cultural reading. The 'flat image' state of the motifs merely transcribes the meaning, whereas Islamic Art transforms the meaning.

Acknowledgements

Highest gratitude towards Allah the almighty for the blessing and guidance for within the time constraint and shortcomings, this study can be successfully conducted and produced. The authors would like to thank the College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, Malaysia, for the funding and support for the writing workshop and ReNeU UiTM, for the publication incentive provided through Program MEE 2.0. Alhamdulillah. Besides, a string of gratitude is expressed towards all those, directly and indirectly, involved in this research. To end, it is hoped that this research will give benefits as well as be blessed by the almighty. InShaaAllah.

References

- Azhar Abdul Rahman. (2012). *Memahami Kerangka Islam*. Shah Alam: UiTM.
- Aziz Bahauddin. (2002). *Contemporary Malaysian Art: An Exploration of the Songket Motifs*. *Intercultural Communication Studies* XI: 2
- Deraman, A. A. 1994 *Masyarakat dan Kebudayaan Malaysia*. 2nd. ed. Kuala Lumpur: Cahaya Pantai.
- Dzul Haimi Md. Zain. 1985. *Pembentukan Sesebuah Karya Seni Halus*. Katalog Pameran Lukisan Ruang. 11 Oktober 1985.
- Hall, S. 1990 *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. Cited in Rutherford, Jonathan. (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hall, S. 1993 *Cultural Identity in Question*. Cambridge: Polity (Cited in I. Gevers, *Cultural Identity: Fiction or Necessity*. Third Text. Spring 1993. Kent, UK: Kala Press).
- Ismail R., Lois Lamy al- Faruqi. 1985. *The Cultural Atlas of Islami*. New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- Ku Zam Zam Ku Idris. 1984. *Nilai Keindahan Dalam Seni Kraftangan Melayu*. Dewan Budaya.
- Ruzaika Omar Basaree, "Kuarator Tamu: Keseniaan Islam Suatu Persepektif Malaysia" Ogos 1995
- Norwani Mohd Nawawi. 1989. *Malaysia Songket*. D.B.P. K.L.
- Othman Mohd Yatim, Zainal Abidin Borhan, Mohammad Nazzri Ahmad dan Mohamad Anis Abdul Samad. 2006. *Estetika Dan Keindahan Songket Melayu*. *Jurnal Pengajian Melayu*. Jilid 17.
- Selvanayagam. 1990. *Songket Malaysia's Woven Treasure*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Siti Zainon Ismail. 1986. *Rekabentuk Kraftangan Melayu Tradisi*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
- Siti Zainon Ismail. 1997. *The Beauty of Classic Art Form, Textiles Malay Woven*. DBP KL.
- Syed Ahmad Jamal. 1992. *Rupa dan Jiwa*. D.B.P. K.L.
- Wan Samiati Andriana W.M.D, Norazlin A. 2010. *Creating New Design Using Songket Motifs Via Optical Art Method* International Conference on Scientific & Social Research (ICCAIE2010 / CSSR 2010 / ICOS2010) pada 5-7 December 2010, Seri Pacific Hotel, Kuala Lumpur (IEEE/SCOPUS/ISI)
- Zakaria Ali. 1989. *Seni dan Seniman*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.