



A Comparison of the Motifs on Kuala Terengganu Block Batik Sarong

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Abstract

This investigation delves into the art of traditional batik sarongs through the batik block method, with a specific focus on Mokhtar and Ibrahim batik from Kuala Terengganu, emphasising the structural elements of ornamental patterns. Concentrating on Kuala Terengganu, a comparative analysis is necessary to determine the similarities and distinctions in thematic content. While commonalities exist, deliberate processing variations augment and diversify existing embellishments, fostering the evolution of this traditional art form. Therefore, this study adds a lot to our understanding of the complex methods and nuanced approaches used to make batik sarongs, showing how this culturally important tradition is always changing.

Keywords: Block Batik; Comparison; Kuala Terengganu; Motifs

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1.0 Introduction

The art of batik has a rich history deeply embedded in the cultural heritage of Malaysia, and one of the noteworthy expressions of this traditional craft is found in the Kuala Terengganu block batik sarong. This distinctive textile showcases a fusion of artistic prowess and cultural significance, with motifs that tell stories of the region's history, beliefs, and daily life. Looking at the differences between them, we look at the intricate designs on the Kuala Terengganu block batik sarong and talk about what makes it different from other traditional Malaysian batik. By exploring the motifs, we aim to uncover the cultural symbolism, historical narratives, and artistic techniques that contribute to the distinct identity of the Kuala Terengganu block batik sarong. Batik, as an ancient art form, involves a meticulous process of wax-resist dyeing on fabric, resulting in vibrant and intricate patterns. The choice of motifs in batik reflects the cultural nuances, societal values, and historical influences of a particular region. Kuala Terengganu, known for its rich cultural tapestry, has developed a unique style that sets its block batik sarong apart. Through this comparative analysis, this study seeks to highlight the diversity and uniqueness of the motifs found in Kuala Terengganu Block Batik Sarongs, showcasing the skillful craftsmanship that goes into creating these textile masterpieces. As we explore the motifs, we will also touch upon the cultural significance attached to specific patterns and designs, providing a deeper understanding of the stories woven into the fabric of Kuala Terengganu's batik tradition.

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2.0 Literature Review

Malaysia and Indonesia are well-known in Southeast Asia as prolific batik makers. For more than a century, the history of batik in both countries has been strongly linked (Mohd Kari et al., 2018; Syed Shaharuddin, 2021). According to history, batik first appeared on the Javanese islands in the 12th century AD. Therefore, the word batik may be taken from the Javanese words "titik" and "mba," which mean writing or writing dots. Dots, in the actual sense of motifs, are on the surface of white cloth. Another Javanese word is "ambatik", which means cloth patterned with tiny dots (Sylvia, 1988; Legino, 2012). The term "batik" is also taken from the process of using wax that has been melted (heated) by dripping it on the surface of white cloth through canting. In Java, it is called "cecek" or "trectek", which has the effect of a drop of wax and leaves a white dot effect when dipped in dye. Batik is a textile art still inherited and produced by applying wax to cloth and colouring it with dye (Hughes, 2022; Mulyanto, 2022; Setyawati, 2021; Nuryasman, 2020). The batik tradition was initially sustained as present, but it changed over time. Certain batiks can still be produced without using dye or wax by using stencils or screens; however, such creations do not qualify as batik because the process requires the application of wax.

Batik fabric and its production process are believed to have existed for the last 2000 years in Egypt and Persia. Referring to Donohue (2013), wax resist on fabric has a long history, dating back to 4 BCE in Egypt, where it was used to wrap mummies; in Indonesia, it was before even written records. Egypt was the first country to apply wax resistance to cloth. Even today, the intricate patterning in traditional batik fabrics is used to identify royalty, and it has ethnic and spiritual significance, even for the artist who creates it. Meanwhile, Sari and Miftah (2020) stated that the development of batik was believed to have existed since the Majapahit era. As Zahidi (2017) mentioned, batik can be characterised as a decorative fabric created, especially by writing on cloth and processing it in certain methods. The use of blocking materials such as wax to create patterns on cloth is known to have existed in Meir in the 5th and 6th centuries AD and in the Middle East, India, East Turkestan, China, Japan, and West Africa. In the context of batik, the first thing that comes to mind is the superiority of beautiful Indonesian batik. Batik has reached the most advanced level in Indonesia, especially in the Javanese Islands. The specialty of Indonesian batik is also synonymous with creating batik tools such as canting, block batik, and silkscreen. The art that has been produced as a result of the wisdom of the Malay people is of the highest quality. The art form known as batik originated in Java but has since become deeply ingrained in Malay culture. There is not a single historian who is competent enough to provide accurate information regarding the beginnings of batik.

On the other hand, the cultures of Java and Malay are where the origins of batik can be found. They continue to preserve batik textiles for future generations to inherit, which they all have in common (Sunarti & Fadeli, 2021). Regarding Harrison (2010), relations between Indonesia and Malaysia are often marked by diplomatic pleasantries, with frequent references to shared values, "special relationships,' and the same cultural traditions,' all of which are reportedly grounded by the same racial and ethnic stock (*serumpun*). Politicians and the media in Malaysia, in particular, frequently refer to the familial connection (*persaudaraan*) between the two nations based on a shared language, culture, and history. In various places in Malaysia, batik is one of the most widely made fabrics. Batik in Malaysia began in the 15th century and has evolved since World War II (Hafiza et al., 2022). Batik became known in the Malay realm through accounts of trade that took place here. Historically, traders who arrived in Malaya were instrumental in expanding the Malay cultural sphere and developing the art of Malay batik. The batik industry is considered a part of the small and medium industries, which are the backbone of the country's industrial sector. Malaya (Malaysia) began to produce batik in the 1920s; most batiks then were cultivated on a small scale and limited to specific places in Kelantan and Terengganu. The local batik is known for its superior design and craftsmanship, and it serves as a representation of the community's contribution to handicrafts (Sunarti & Fadeli, 2018). Through batik makers from Indonesia, who introduced techniques such as batik blocks, hand-drawn batik, and batik silkscreen, entrepreneurs on the East Coast are still working on batik blocks. This applied batik is produced using wax application techniques using flower nests.

Entrepreneurs in the textile business in Malaysia are contributing to the expansion and development of the batik industry. In the state of Terengganu, the Malay community is in charge of the creation of batik sarongs, and the traditional batik sarong has evolved into a garment that the Malays use for a variety of purposes in their day-to-day lives (Zuhir et al., 2022). At first, the cloth is blocked with black flowers, then applied with yellow flowers. In 1936, a method of processing using copper blocks and wax was introduced. Haji Ali learned this skill from the Javanese people in Singapore. He then took it back to Terengganu to be copied and used as a model for making new motifs. Then Mr. Awang opened his own batik company in Kampung Seberang Takir, which his son and then his grandson continued. Similarly, Haji Mat also opened his own batik company in Kampung Ladang, which was run on a small scale and passed down to his children and grandchildren. Haji Ali bin Ismail founded the first batik business in Kampung Hiliran in Kuala Terengganu, which has since grown to be Terengganu's biggest batik business. Apart from Kampung Hiliran, there are several other batik companies, such as Kuala Ibai, Bukit Bayah, Pasir Panjang, Cendering, Pulau Rusa, Beladau, and Marang. Batik terap is a cloth made from cotton that is about two yards (1.8 m) long and 42–44 inches (1.07–1.12 m) wide. It is folded in half, joined at the end and base, and sewn to form a sarong. It is different from Batik Kain Lepas, which is not joined. The word "sarung" is probably one of the oldest words in the Malay language that has been adopted in English in the last 150 years. The word "sarong" (spelled with the letter "o") is recorded in English dictionaries and encyclopaedias. Ahmad et al. (2023) noted that the sustainability of traditional Malay metal crafts on Malaysia's East Coast is a critical concern. These crafts, thriving for over two centuries, have faced decline and near extinction since 1948. Metal plays a crucial role, particularly in crafting blocks for batik.

Both men and women frequently wear the traditional batik sarong, made using the batik block technique, which is a timeless component of Malay culture. Essential to authentic Malay clothing, batik sarongs are a defining element. Women in Peninsular Malaysia typically pair a shirt with a sarong, while men wear a shirt with a sarong tied at the waist. These batik sarongs are intricately worn with specific Malay traditional clothing styles. The design layout is unique; it was invented with a balanced composition and is suited to the function of the sarong (Legino et al., 2017). Different styles, such as *baju kurung* and *baju kurung Kedah* (traditional clothing), involve unique fabric ties and patterns.

3.0 Methodology

A way to do a comparative analysis of batik sarong designs is to look at the main parts, elements, or traits of several different designs and find patterns, trends, and things that are the same or different about them. Selection of batik sarongs: choose a representative sample of batik sarongs for analysis. Ensure diversity in design styles, colour schemes, and motifs. The method of analysing through tracing using tracing paper is done to recognise every motif on the batik sarong cloth. Define the criteria for comparison: identify specific criteria for comparing the batik sarong designs. These criteria could include motifs and patterns: types of motifs, patterns, and their arrangements of colour palette; colour combinations and their significance. Cultural influences: regional or cultural variations in design. Historical context: consider any historical or traditional influences. Visual analysis: conduct a visual analysis of each batik sarong, focusing on the predetermined criteria and taking note of any unique features, variations, or innovative design elements. Selected batik sarongs—from Mokhtar batik and Ibrahim batik—were taken as examples for analysis. The comparison between Mokhtar batik and Ibrahim batik motifs is used as a measurement to find out the similarities and differences between the motifs. Sources of information about batik sarong from Kuala Terengganu are obtained through individuals, batik block traders, and reviews of related documents. Visited institutions that kept historical information were significant, such as the Malaysian Handicraft Centre (Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Lumpur), Kuala Lumpur National Museum, Kuala Terengganu Losong Museum, Kelantan Museum, Universiti Malaya Asian Art Museum, and Kuala Lumpur Textile Museum. The method assists in analysing the chosen batik sarongs comprehensively for comparison.

4.0 Discussion and Result

"This study centres on comparing motifs found on Kuala Terengganu block batik sarongs, specifically those created using the traditional batik block technique. The motifs include flora or plant elements, geometric patterns, and cosmic themes, serving as two-dimensional decorations arranged in accordance with the inherited structure of decorative sarong cloth. The study encompasses a variety of traditional motifs, some preserved and others modified to meet contemporary market demands. Mokhtar and Ibrahim batik sarongs, featuring two, three, four, and five layers of block batik, showcase both traditional and new designs. The analysis focuses on eight pieces of Mokhtar Batik and Ibrahim Batik Sarong Cloth, aiming to identify both similarities and differences through a comparative analysis. The study provides analytical results highlighting patterns found in batik sarong cloth, as shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1: The traditional batik sarong Terengganu, head of cloth part
(Source: Legino, 2012)

Table 1 shows the comparison motif design analysis between Mokhtar and Ibrahim batik. It is possible to re-identify the motivations of both entrepreneurs by sharing a recent experience. Findings from the motif analysis between Mokhtar batik and Ibrahim batik showed that the batik sarongs they made had a lot of patterns from Malay nature plants, geometry, and the cosmos. Both batik companies have their own style and uniqueness of sarong batik production without changing the structure of the actual sarong batik pattern, which must have a head, border, body, and edge of the cloth. The changes that were tried to be applied to Mokhtar's batik are visible in the five-layer batik sarong fabric, which uses a variety of decorative structures from Perkalongan Javanese batik. The yam leaf flower motif is used on the head of the cloth and the body of the cloth. This is a combination and change in terms of using plant motifs in Malay nature without using motifs from fauna elements as used in Javanese batik decoration. Based on the analysis of Ibrahim's batik, the motifs of plant elements, geometry, and the cosmos are very clearly used in all parts of the fabric. The single flower motif inside the bamboo shoot frame is reused on the two-layered, three-layered, four-layered, and five-layered sarongs, except for the body part of the fabric,

which uses different motifs. The layout of repeated motifs can show the balance and beauty of the decorative structure of Ibrahim's sarong batik fabric.

Table 1. The comparison motif design analysis between Mokhtar and Ibrahim batik

Similarity		Differences	
1.	Both entrepreneurs produce the same batik fabric, which is two-layered, three-layered, four-layered, and five-layered.	1.	Batik Mokhtar and Batik Ibrahim produce distinctive motif designs.
2.	Both entrepreneurs also use motifs from the elements of flora or plants, geometry, and stylish cosmos.	2.	The size of the motif on the side of the fabric and the edge of the Batik Mokhtar fabric are different.
3.	The main design choice for both entrepreneurs' fabric heads is a motif of bamboo shoots.	3.	Flower motifs are used in the centre of the fabric in Mokhtar's batik sarong, which has five layers of colour.
4.	The motif of creeping flowers is repeatedly arranged on the sides of the fabric, and both entrepreneurs use the edge of the fabric.		
5.	Motifs on the body of the fabric are arranged vertically, horizontally, alternately, and diagonally.		
6.	A filler motif or isen motif is used for the background part.		
7.	Using a combination of traditional motifs and new motifs.		

5.0 Conclusion

The conclusion is drawn from analysing and comparing the motifs found in Mokhtar's Batik and Ibrahim's Batik Sarongs from Kuala Terengganu. These entrepreneurs stand out as dedicated practitioners preserving the traditional art of batik block. The intricate beauty of batik blocks is evident in the arrangement of motifs on the fabric's unique structure. Both Batik Sarong entrepreneurs ardently uphold the artistic heritage passed down through generations. While originating from Java, their batik blocks now uniquely feature motifs inspired by the natural environment of the Malay world, including flora, geometric patterns, and cosmic themes. When you look at how the motifs are used, you can see that Batik Mokhtar and Batik Ibrahim have much in common. For instance, they use motifs like flowers, leaves, twigs, stems, and buds to make them appear carved. To grasp the philosophy behind these batik motifs, one must delve into the philosophy of carving motifs. While not entirely transferable to batik art, only certain aspects can be integrated into fabric design. Incorporating technology, particularly the use of iron or copper tap blocks, allows for the production of batik motifs with increased delicacy and variety. This technological advancement preserves cultural and artistic aspects and enhances commercial value.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

Contributes significantly to the related field of study by offering a comprehensive analysis of motifs in traditional block batik sarongs.

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