

# Characteristics of the Local Malay Traditional Pelangi Cloth Motifs and Patterns Design

# Mohd Azhar Samin, Rafeah Legino

College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

> azharsamin@uitm.edu.my, <u>rafeahl@uitm.edu.my</u> Tel: +60198571964

#### Abstract

This project established the characteristics of the local Malay traditional Pelangi cloth motifs and the specialty of their pattern design. The field research was conducted through observation at selected museums around Malaysia Peninsular, and interviews with curators and textile experts at the national craft institute, to gather the data and information through visual documentation of Pelangi cloth, for analysis purposes. The result discovered how the identification approach showed the recognition of motifs and patterns design was developed according to the Pelangi cloth traditional characteristics base on textile structure, motifs shape, pattern design arrangement, colour, technique, and product processes. This paper also shows the comparison between the local traditional Pelangi cloth with one of the traditional textiles in Malaysia to look into the relationships between them. This paper also successfully explains the types of traditional Pelangi cloth motifs more clearly since this textile industry has died out and is still not highlighted to the public.

Keywords: Traditional Pelangi Cloth; Characteristics; Motifs; Patterns Design

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### 1.0 Introduction

The role of ancient Malay rulers in forming the direction of the Malay arts and culture field by inspiring local textile motifs and designs. The Malay rulers of ancient times were so concerned about the development of cultural arts. Many of the Malay artisans at that time worked in the palace court under the patronage of the sultan, queen, and palace dignitaries who not only encouraged, but also donated beautiful motifs, designs, and clouds to artisans who were well-versed in their respective fields (Aziz, 2006, p. 38).

According to Samin, Mohd Azhar (2020), in the past, appreciation for textile arts manufacture was further expanded through the support of the Malay Rulers and the Palace as patron for the industry. At that time, the Pelangi cloth was often used as a garment and decoration in the daily lives of the Malay rulers and nobles. Textiles were commonly used in attending various occasions and ceremonies in certain official customs. The beautifully crafted and delicate artwork of Pelangi's cloth was often used as a gift to the people who served the king and the State. Apart from that, the Pelangi textiles were also used as gifts in the form of complete garments and souvenirs from the King to the guests who came to the palace for various affairs and purposes (Aziz, 2006; Ismail, 2006; Jamal, 2007).

Today, the community is still not exposed to and recognises the motifs and design of the traditional Pelangi cloth rather than other local traditional cloth motifs and designs, and the making of those textiles is still ongoing. This situation has caused misunderstanding due to the lack of understanding toward the Pelangi cloth. The major misconception is the question of how the motifs and characteristics of the traditional Pelangi cloths exist in this country. According to Samin (2011,2016): The beauty and specialties of local traditional textiles can be seen in their motifs and designs besides their form and functions. However, the motifs, designs, forms, and functions of traditional Pelangi cloth are still blurred and have never been shown for general knowledge as Batik cloth, Songket cloth, and Pua cloth (p. 9).

Furthermore, he also pointed out that the community is now more recognising and appreciating the tie and dye designs that have been introduced by Western societies around the world including in Malaysia since the 60s and 70s. Apart from that, he found that the local people today are still confused as they consider the tie and dye and the Pelangi cloth are the results of the same textiles directly because both types of textiles are using tying techniques in their design making. Also, the present generation even regards Batik and Pelangi cloths as the same; this is because they are less familiar with the Pelangi cloth motifs, pattern designs, and characters in the real sense. Therefore this study was conducted by tracking and identifying the traditional Pelangi cloth artifacts that are still available and stored in several museums around Peninsular Malaysia. Pelangi cloth is among the types of traditional Malay textile crafts of local heritage that have been identified as having the potential to be widely re-respected. This traditional textile is one of the three types of local Malay textiles with the resist technique which is the simplest production technique but has its own special features.

### 2.0 Literature Review

Rainbow or Pelangi is a Malay word that refers to the nature of the formation of colourful rays of light that usually arise after rain. In general, Kain Pelangi is interpreted as a type of traditional Malay textile that has the effect of dotted lines on the motifs and pattern designs on the surface of the fabric that has many colours whose beauty is likened to a rainbow after a rain.

# 2.1 Definition Of Pelangi Cloth

Pelangi cloth is a textile patterning technique that produces many dot effects and has many colours. In addition to using the ikat ponjot or bound tying technique, Pelangi cloth also uses the tritik or running stitching technique, which is the technique of resist stitching on the fabric in a basting stitch and the end of the thread is knotted. Threads that have been sewn straight onto the fabric are then pulled until they are wrinkled, tight, and dense before they are dipped into the dye.

(Robinson, 1969)

Pelangi cloth starts from a blank cloth that is folded and tied according to a predetermined pattern with fibre string to avoid being impregnated with dye. The cloth that has been tied will be dyed only once or dyed several times to produce a colourful effect. Tritik is a special technique for the finer manufacturing of Pelangi cloth found around Southeast Asia. It is a sewing technique on the surface of the cloth and then pulled tightly which will give a colourless effect on a certain small part. This tritik technique is usually used in combination with ikat and dyeing techniques on fabrics that have one colour.

(B.A.V. Peacock, 1977)

Pelangi Cloth or batik Pelangi produced through the resist ikat process is known in Indonesia and Malaysia as Pelangi referring to the colourful effect resulting from the process of tying and dyeing. In the early stages, there are some who call Pelangi cloth batik Pelangi because the effect of the binding pattern and the white dots look like a batik pattern in addition to the dyeing process that has similarities. Because the nature and character of batik fabric are more prominent through the process of using wax and is different from the production process of Pelangi cloth, this textile is then categorized under the type of textile through the process and ikat technique.

(Sarah Arney, 1987)

Pelangi cloth is the result of a running stitch technique on certain patterns that are drawn on the surface of the blank fabric and then pulled tight and tied so that the thread does not unravel. It is usually combined with sewing and ikat ponjot techniques on some of the remaining patterns to complete the design. The fabric is then soaked in dye, dried, and then all seams and ties are opened. Part of the effect of the pattern without being affected by the dye will be embellished with a brush stroke technique or colek with several colours to evoke a colourful effect.

(Mohd. Azhar Samin, 2015)

Pelangi cloth was often used as clothing accessories, palace decorations, and souvenirs among Malay Kings around the 17th century to the 18th century. This textile was once cultivated in the states of Perak and Terengganu around the 18th century and in Kelantan in the 19th century. It was also used as the clothing of the Malay community in Malaya around the beginning of the 20th century. Pelangi cloth used to be the daily clothing of part of the Malay community in the East Coast states of the Malay Peninsula where it was widely cultivated in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu from the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century.

A. Wright, (1908) and L.Wray, (1909) socio-cultural and artistic researchers of the local community in the early 20th century stated that Pelangi cloth is one of the popular textiles as daily wear among the Malay community in several states in the Malay Peninsula at that time. Azah Aziz (2006) stated that the Pelangi cloth was originally used as a sarong cloth. Apart from that, the textile is also used as a scarf. Mohd. Azhar Samin (2016) the design and function of the traditional local Pelangi cloth in the past were designed based on the daily life needs of the Malay community where it has similarities with the design of other traditional Malay clothing. This textile is usually used as sarong cloth, scarf, waist bend, or head covering cloth.

# 3.0 Methodology

The field research was conducted through observation at selected museums around Malaysia Peninsular. At the same time, interviews with curators and textile experts at the national craft institute were conducted. The purpose was to gather the data and information through visual documentation of Pelangi cloth, for analysis purposes. The identification approach showed the recognition of motifs and patterns design was developed according to the Pelangi cloth traditional characteristics base on textile structure, motifs shape, pattern design arrangement, colour, technique, and product processes. The result of the visual documentation study of the traditional Pelangi cloth has been studied by making a comparative analysis based on the appropriate justification. The features of each traditional Pelangi cloth and Songket cloth was tabulated in term of the types, name, and forms of motifs that were produced also shown in the table.

Over fifty pieces of traditional Pelangi cloths with various designs were observed viewed and documented. However, only thirty local traditional Pelangi clothes are suitable to be used for this study. The documentation of Pelangi cloths was then identified, recorded, and arranged into tables, structured form, and analysed.

The study of identifying the design of the motifs of Pelangi cloth was made based on numerous sources of traditional textile design and related literature from previous studies. The essential references are from Malay Motif Ornamen Melayu (1993), Motif-Motif Etnik Malaysia (1985), Songket Malaysia (2002)Nawawi, Corak dan Ragi Tenun Melayu Riau (2003), Teks Lengkap Pendidikan Seni Visual Tingkatan 4 & 5 (2004) Samah, Motif Alam Dalam Batik Dan Songket Melayu (2006) Hussin, and Rupa Dan Gaya: Busana Melayu

(2006) Aziz. Later, to verify the traditional Pelangi cloth and Songket cloth motifs documentation table, the researcher held an interview and discussion session with curators and textile experts, artisans, and practitioners of weaving and batik crafts that were familiar with Songket motifs and local traditional textile motifs at the National Craft Institute.

### 4.0 Results

In the field study and visual documentation method, various traditional Pelangi cloth artifacts have been recorded by researchers as a visual documentation study. The study of the Pelangi cloth artifacts was then documented and arranged in the form of tables to identify the design characteristics of the textile through the design analysis method.





Figure 1: Selected Traditional Pelangi Cloth Artefacts of the National Textile Museum (Source: Researcher Personal Photo Collection)

The results of the research through the design analysis method on the local traditional Pelangi cloth artifacts as Visual Documentary Of Traditional Pelangi Cloth Design Documentation shows that this textile has some specific design character. The design characteristics identified in the artifacts are (a) Pelangi Cloth Fabric Structure,(b) Pelangi

cloth motifs, (c) Pelangi cloth design layout, (d) Pelangi cloth colour, (e) Pelangi cloth technique, and (f) Pelangi cloth product. The discussion of this study is explained below.

In this study, 32 pieces of local traditional Pelangi cloth from the visual documentation were extracted, placed, arrange, and then analysed to identify the characteristics types of motifs and pattern designs that can be found in these textiles.

The studies on the identification of the types of traditional Pelangi cloth motifs have been made based on various sources of reference books on Malay traditional designs and artworks. Among the books that have been referred to are Malay Motifs and Ornaments by Tengku Luckman Sinar, SH, (1993), Malaysian Ethnic Motifs by Kraftangan Malaysia, (1982), Songket Malaysia by Norwani Mohd. Nawawi, (2002) Patterns of Malay Malay Riau by H.Abdul Malik and colleagues, (2003), Complete Visual Art Education by Zailani Yaacob and Azimah A. Samah, (2004), Motif Alam dalam Batik and Malay Songket by Haziah Hussin, (2006) and Appearance of the Malay Fashion by Azah Aziz, (2006).

To obtain the confirmation and validation of the data, the researcher conducted an interview session and discussions with a few traditional textile experts, curators, and craftsman teachers of Weaving and Batik crafts at the National Craft Institute, Kuala Lumpur. who are familiar with the local traditional textile motifs especially the Songket motifs.

## (a) Pelangi Cloth Fabric Structure

Traditional Pelangi cloth is one of the traditional textiles for the Malay community. Most local traditional Pelangi Cloth outcomes are produced in the form of sarongs. In general, the sarongs of the Malay usually have a certain fabric structure. The fabric of the Malay sarongs is composed of certain parts, comprise of the Kepala Kain (fabric head -A2), Pengapit Kepala Kain (cloth head clamp A3), Tali Air (cloth channel A4) Badan Kain or Tanah Kain (cloth body or cloth ground A1), and Kaki Kain with Gigi Kain (cloth leg A5 with cloth teeth A6). The same structure can also be found in any other traditional Malay sarongs such as Limar cloth, Songket cloth, Batik cloth, and the Royal Pahang weaving cloth.

# (b) Pelangi Cloth Motif

The motifs found in traditional Pelangi cloth are made up of several specific shapes. The creation of the traditional Pelangi cloth motifs is a process of idea development that inspired by a wide variety of natural objects and man-made objects found in the environment where the textile is produced. Among the motifs that are identified in traditional Pelangi cloth are Flora designs which are inspired by the appearance of flowers, leaves, fruits, and parts of plants. Apart from that there is also a Fauna design inspired by the appearance of live creatures in the air and in the water. Next, is Cosmic design inspired by the appearance of the sun and the stars. Apart from that, they are also designed for Natural Phenomenon which is inspired by the appearance of mountains, clouds, and sea waves. Next is a form of Food inspired by the appearance of Malay

cakes, sweets, and dried fruits. There are also designs of Artificial Objects which are inspired by the form and decoration of the palace.

# (c) Pelangi Cloth Design Layout

Each local traditional textile usually has a design layout. The specific design layout is also found in the traditional Pelangi cloth which is usually made of a sarong, loose cloth, headband, and scarf. According to Mohd. Azhar Samin, (2011), the local Pelangi cloth design arrangement usually has a similarity with the design layout of Songket and Limar cloth. Among the design layout that is often used in traditional local Pelangi cloth is the design arrangement of scattered flower, chain pattern design arrangement, and alternating design arrangement. In addition, there are also chessboard design arrangements, full or partial drop design arrangements, and vertical or horizontal stripe design arrangements.

# (d) The Pelangi Cloth Colour

The colours found on the local Pelangi cloth are generally characterized as the "rainbow" state of the colours. Generally, most traditional textile researchers associate the meaning of the word Pelangi cloth with referring to the rainbow colours that are often seen after the rain. The effect of the colour on the Pelangi cloth motifs is usually the result of a running stitches technique that will give the white dots around the motif. On top of that, the bound tie technique of the motifs will give a colourless effect which is sometimes that the colourless part is occasionally coloured using the paintbrush technique to obtain multicolour results. According to Pauziah Abdullah, through Koo Kay Kim (1983), At the beginning of the Pelangi cloth industry, these textiles were coloured using natural colours or dyes that were produced from plants. The production process is quite traditional where the usual colours are blue and black tones with limited patterns. After the introduction of various types of synthetic dyes from Europe to the Malay Peninsula in 1926, the plant's colours were then no longer used. The synthetic colours used in traditional local Pelangi cloth consist of Indogosol or Antrasol and Napthol.

# (e) The Pelangi Cloth Technique

Traditional local Pelangi cloth techniques are produced from a combination of tailor-made or puncture-tailoring techniques, bumps and finishes are partly decorated with brush brushing or coating techniques. According to Mohd. Azhar Samin, (2016), the production of local Pelangi cloths usually uses the technique and process of am pinch with bubbling and then binding on the surface of a piece of white cloth. After that, the cloth needs to soak in dye and let it dry and untied which is then colour painted on the colourless part. From the result of the bound tie technique, textile production has then expanded to a wide range of techniques until it became more complex, subtle, and complicated with the running stitches technique for the production of Pelangi cloth.

# (f) Pelangi Cloth Product Design

In general, the design of the local Pelangi cloth products is almost identical to the product design of other local traditional textiles. Local Pelangi cloth is produced in the manner and style of the local Malay garment. The garment usually consists of a sarong, waist cloth, scarf or shoulder cloth, headband for men, and shawl for women. According to Raja Chulan, (1967) based on the note in the Malay Cronicial, there is a description of the Pelangi cloth being used as one of the Royal attires or clothes in the state of Perak. This textile was used or worn as a waist cloth and headgear or Dastar. During the reign of Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain Sultan of Perak who ruled between 1752 and 1765, the King was wearing a King's attire made of Pelangi cloth. All of these statements clearly prove that the Pelangi cloth is not only beautiful but its textiles are also special as attire in ceremonies and customs as well as the cultural use of Malay style and manner, especially among the Malay rulers.

Next, to find out about the types of motifs that are usually found on this local traditional Pelangi cloth, a study was carried out to identify the types of motifs that can be found in the textiles. Referring to Mohd Azhar Samin (2012) states that, the inspiration for various types of motifs on local traditional Pelangi cloth comes from the observation and research of ancient Malay textile designers on nature and the elements of the objects in their own lives. This shows that the Malay identity of the textile community has been very close to nature and their daily activities.

The similarity of types of motifs between local traditional Pelangi cloths with local traditional songket cloth are pucuk rebung (bamboo shoot), tampuk manggis (mangosteen guts), bunga cengkih (clove), and buah cermai (cider fruit), tampuk kesemak (persimmon guts), bunga tanjung (mimusops elengi flower), bunga tiga dara (fuchia flower), bunga mahkota raja (king's crown flower), bunga kertas (bougainvillea), bunga cina (gardenia), bunga kemuncup (love grass), bunga pisang (heliconia), bunga ketola (luffa flower), bunga seri pagi (morning glory), bunga ati-ati (patchouli flower), bunga pecah empat (four patels flower), bunga melur (jasmine), putik setangkai, (a flower balp), bunga semangat (spirit flower), tampuk berembang (sonneratia caseolaris guts), bunga cabit (filling flower), bunga bebaling or lambaian angin (blades flower), daun setangkai (a leave), daun inai (henna leave), bintang pecah lapan (eight pointed star), bintang beralih (moving star) tapak sulaiman (star fish), awan larat or kerawang (clowd bend or foliegh), matahari or sinar matahari (sun or sun shine), gigi yu (shark theeth) pergunungan or siku keluang (mountain range or bad elbow), ombak-ombak (waves), pagar istana (palace fance), awan larat berjuang or air mulih (facing cloud bend or spinning water), potong wajik (sweet rice cake cutting), tepung talam (malay puding), potong putu (rice biscuit cut), madu manis, motif biji tamar (dates seed), motif buah setangkai (a flower), motif unduk-unduk laut (sea horse) motif biji peria (bitter gourd seed), motif bunga cendawan (mushroom flower), motif tapak catur (checked chessboard)

#### 5.0 Discussion

There are various types of motifs inspired by the appearance of flowers, leaves, fruits, and parts of the plants that are often used in both local traditional cloths. Among the motifs are the motif of Pucuk Rebung (Bamboo Shoot), Tampuk Manggis (Mangosteen Guts), Bunga Cengkih (Clove Flower or Clove) Tampuk Kesemak (Persimmon Guts), Bunga Tanjung (Mimusops Elengi Flower), Bunga Tiga Dara (Fuchia Flower), Bunga Mahkota Raja (King's Crown Flower), Bunga Setangkai (A Stalk Flower), Bunga Kertas (Bougainvillea), Bunga Cina (Gardenia), Bunga Kemuncup (Love Grass), Bunga Pisang (Heliconia), Bunga Ketola (Luffa Flower), Bunga Seri Pagi (Morning Glory), Bunga Ati-Ati (Patchouli Flower), Bunga Pecah Empat (Four Patels Flower) Bunga Melur (Jasmine), Putik Setangkai (A Stalk Balp), Bunga Semangat (Spirit Flower), Tampuk Beremban (Sonneratia Caseolaris Guts), Bunga Cabit (Small Flower), Bunga Bebaling or Lambaian Angin (Blades Flower), Daun Setangkai (A Stalk Leave) and Daun Inai (Henna Leave).

There are also a kind of inspired motifs of the appearance of life in the air and in the water. Among these motifs are the Siku Keluang (Bat Elbow) and Tapak Sulaiman (Star Fish) There is also a kind of inspired motifs of the appearance of the sun and the stars such as the Sinar Matahari (Sun Shine) and Bintang Pecah Lapan (Eight Pointed Star) In addition, there are also types of motifs inspired by the appearance of mountains, clouds, and oceans. Among these motifs are Pergunungan (Mountain Range), Awan Larat (Clowd bend), and Ombak-Ombak (Waves).

On top of that, there are also types of motifs used in the pattern design of local traditional Pelangi cloth inspired by the appearance of cakes, sweets, and dried fruits. Among the motifs are the Potong Wajik (sweet rice cake cut), Madu Manis (sweet honey), and Biji Tamar (dates seed). Then there are also types of motifs inspired by the appearance of the decoration and items found in the palace. Among these motifs are the Pagar Istana (Palace Fance) and Tapak catur (Chessboard).

Based on the Traditional Pelangi cloth Visual Design Documentation shows that the traditional design of this textile design lies in its fabric structure design as it highlights the design structure of the sarong fabric. In terms of its motif design, this textile is decorated with the fabrication of various objects that are easily found in the environment where the textile artisan lived.

Next in terms of the design of the motif arrangement, it shows the various forms of creative pattern designs among which are the arrangement of scattered flower design arrangements, chain pattern design patterns, and alternating pattern design arrangements. In addition, there are also chessboard layout arrangements, full or partial pattern designs, and stand or strip pattern designs.

Similarly, in terms of colour design, the Pelangi cloth has its distinctive colour beauty, like the rainbow colours. Although initially these traditional textiles use natural dyes and then changed to the use of synthetic frames, however, the beauty of the textile colour design remains intact. The effect of the colour design on their motifs has been further enhanced by the design of its production techniques by tacking techniques, braid joint techniques, and rubbing or coating techniques. The design of this technique has

highlighted the distinctive or distinctive identity of the textiles and is different from the design of techniques found in other local traditional textiles. In addition, in terms of its design, the traditional Pelangi cloth was initially designed according to the style and needs of dressing the local Malays especially to be fashionable for the nobility.

Based on a comparison between traditional Songket clothes clearly indicates that the type of motif available in the Pelangi cloth and the traditional Songket cloth have a similarity in terms of the name and source of the motif design. According to Puan Halimaton Abd. Shukor (2011) via Mohd. Azhar Samin (2015), has stated, in ancient times local traditional Rainbow fabrics are said to be usually produced by the songket weavers. They usually use blank remnant yarns from the weaving that are then woven into white cloth and afterward are stitched, tied, and dyed into Pelangi cloth.

#### 6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has shown precisely how exactly is the local Malay Pelangi cloth motifs characteristic. This exposition is supported by the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Company and the Group for the financial year ended 31 December 2002, p. 46) with the title Kain Pelangi, where the patterns on this cloth comprise geometric shapes of animals, circles, and triangles and also renditions of plants and fretwork (Mohd Azhar Samin, 2015).

This study showed that since ancient times the local Malay community has had creative and artistic thinking. They are very sensitive to art and know how to appreciate and appreciate the environment in the life of Allah SWT. The study has succeeded in giving a real picture of the Pelangi cloth characteristics, motif, and pattern design that are often misinterpreted by some parties. It is also important for reference and guidance to practitioners, especially entrepreneurs, designers, lecturers, and students of textile designers who are interested in reproducing local traditional Pelangi cloth. Through the findings of this study, it is also evident that these local traditional cloths are distinct from the design features and motifs found in Batik as well as "tie and dye" textiles introduced by Western societies around the world. The findings of this study are very important and useful to be documented in the form of scientific books or references that can be utilized by all levels of society, especially practitioners, researchers, educators, and students in the textile and/or fashion industry.

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# **Article Contribution to Related Field of Study**

This study is very significant and useful to be documented in the form of books or references that has contributed to the related field of study, especially in the Textile Design Field and generally in the art and crafts and art and design study. It is also important to be used by all levels of society, especially practitioners, researchers, educators, and students in the textile and fashion field, local and international.

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