CHAPTER 2

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TEXTILE AND BATIK CONTEMPORARY MOTIF IN MALAYSIAN ART

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Introduction

A characteristic of all human societies, with the exception of the initial steps of human evolution, especially in the public and social environments, has been wearing clothing. Human being, considering the geographical conditions of the place they live, traditions of their community, their age and their sex, wear different closings of different textures, forms and designs. Clothing or costume can be considered as a characteristic for the civilization of a communication. As human gets more civilized than past, wears more civilized clothes. Clothes have different effects and based on these effects, they should be different in various professional, familial, educational and friendship situations. Clothes also can enhance human’s beauty and cause excitement and mirth in various ceremonies. Choosing color, textile texture and sewing style of a cloth is a right for every human who wears it and he/she can, based on his/her criteria, choose the best to wear. This means that from a point of view, design raises as an extremely important artistic issue.

Batik in the World
Considering the role and the importance of textile in human life, as mentioned before and its artistic history, one of the various kinds of textiles which have an important role in the history and culture of the world is batik. The process of color resistant designing has been emerged since 1500 years ago in middle east and Egypt, however, the current procedure for fabric designing is originated and evolved in Indonesia and has been developed to one of the most great art in Asia (Mirah's Crafts, 2008). Meilach (1973) reported some theories about batik' born. One theory was supported by evidence that it existed-and may have originated in Asia and then spread to the Malaysian area and another theory is that the batik method was domestic to the Indi and archipelago and spread from there to the Western world.

**Textile and Batik in Malaysia**

Referral to textile history of Malaysia illustrates the synchronous evolution of textile and batik history in this country and we can claim that the dawn of the formation of batik has been the birth of the textile in Malaysia and this shows the importance of this art. Batik textile is created by dying fabric using resist technique visualizing batik patterns consisting of one or a combination of motifs. From 1900, there have been Malaysian batik workers in the east region of Malaysian peninsular (Salvendy, S.G 2009). Textile of Malaysia is a living art contributing to the enrichment of the cultural development of the country, as national heritage; it depicts the diversity of the multi-cultural origin of its people.

Batik is an important art-industry in Malaysia. Many people work in designing, producing and supplying fields of this product. These fields are the main and primary job opportunities for people in some cities. It is one of the primary and popular clothes. Even authorities always recommend it to be used in public office costumes and moreover, a day of the week (Thursday) has been dedicated to the batik clothes in Malaysia. Batik is influenced by climatic conditions of this country and the history
and civilization of this land could be seen in the designs of this elegant art. From the twists and turns of its patterns, gentle spirit, inner calm and kind face of the people of this land could be realized. This product as a symbol for this country is a favorite for most of the visitors of the country and has gained the amazement and admiration of the people from other countries. Zakaria, Abdul Rahman & Yusof (2006). According to Arney(2007) Batik is one of the most functional and the oldest decorative arts. The beauty of these textile traditions is further revealed in the form and style of the clothing that is still used by the people as their traditional costumes. In Malaysia for preserving a national identity, the wearing of batiks has been encouraged by the government.

Tun Uda(2003) asserted that the motifs drawn by the Malaysian artisans include the Islamic values whereby motifs of animals are strictly prohibited. Apart from design, color too has special significance. He believed that, traditionally, the choice of color in the making of these textiles depends on the purpose and usage of the cloth. Nowadays, they have interpretations and new meanings, for instance, white remain a symbol of purity. Red still remains as the color for velour and honor. Yellow, a prerogative of royalty is confined to the courtly ceremonial occasion. Today, Malaysian Batik is combined with fashion giving batik a new life. It is common to see fashion shows where models parade beautiful batik dresses Batik is one of the important handicrafts in Malaysia and many people, especially in Terengganu and Kelantan, are working in the fields related to it and indeed it is one of the main jobs in these cities. Major market places in cities are dedicated to batik products and selling these products. As mentioned before, this art-industry has been continued in Malaysia from past to present and people know it as two traditional and contemporary styles and it incorporates different techniques and methods. In terms of designing, from past to present designs have been influenced by history, climate, culture, art and also the designs from the neighboring country, Indonesia. These designs, structurally, could be placed in two categories of geometric and non-geometric. In terms of technique and
performance it has different methods among which Stamp printing and Hand Drawn can be named (Zakaria, Adul Rahman & Yusof .2006).

**Traditional Batik in Malaysia**

Malaysian Batik is very colorful with attractive designs that began approximately in the middle of the 19th century, when folklore started to develop. Traditional values, characteristic of the culture stemmed from the experiences and history of the communities. The belief and spirit of each community also encouraged the development of the traditional art. The designs created on the fabric plays an important role in making the fabric more beautiful and more fashionable. It reflects the craftsmanship as well as the customs or culture of the wearer. It varies from small geometrical patterns to pictured designs. Batik worker uses a traditional method to decorate art to plain cloth into a colorful and beautiful design. Harozila provided an explanation about the symbolic meaning of the traditional batik that people use it on different social situations. She also mentioned to some common motives that are used in Malaysian Batik such as bamboo shoots, flowers, Cempaka, love and tears, and animal motifs like scorpion, butterfly, birds and poultry motif (Suhardi Abdullah, 2004). Based on the interviews and observations, the researcher conceives that in Malaysia, Batik is often used for clothing. Sarong is considered as a common wearing, especially in rural areas or villages. Men or women especially in the east coast wear it. It is not uncommon for men in Kelantan and Terengganu to wear sarongs or even sometimes those fishermen put it on their head.

**Batik Contemporary in Malaysia**

Many years ago Malaysian Batik has acquired a new identity. Arney (2007) formally recognized contemporary Malaysian artists are searching for their national identity. She noted that batik being produced in Malaysia today is an interesting combination
of old and new. Many artists are examining traditional art forms and motifs in their creative expression. The new designs incorporate a traditional aesthetic in modern mode. The modern batik artists have discovered techniques that enable them to sustain their roles as textile designers and artisans, which under the circumstances of contemporary society is a considerable accomplishment. The contemporary batik artists have discovered techniques, which enable them to sustain their roles as textile designers under the circumstances of contemporary society. Those techniques and products differ slightly in various places on the peninsula. Contemporary batik continues to be a traditional art, which will be passed to subsequent generations.

**Pattern and Batik Motif in Malaysian Art**

Ellsworth (2010) suggested that the ancient and most primitive arts were inspired by nature and were developed through the natural resources of the countries and the primitive tools and materials. Dehghan and Tafgavi (2010) described motif as an element or a combination of visual elements which is repeated in a composition and is prominent and particular in artist’s expression. Motif is used in painting, visual and performing arts and the most important characteristic it has in these arts is its repeatability and inspiring feature. In the literature, more or less the same features in literary elements form the variety of motif. Given the diversity of the elements that can be functioned as motif (including location, event, belief, picture, personality, distinctive feature of a character, recurrent theme, etc) these motifs which have been created from singular rhythmic movements, do not queue consecutively and with no interaction like that movements. Patterns, from past to the present, have been used in decorating buildings, margins of clothes, textiles, ornaments, dishes and etc. Today, studies related to motifs, as effective elements in review and analysis of artistic works, possess an important place in the field. Meilach (1973) concurred that the designs and patterns of batik fabrics have been influenced by many cultures. Plants are portrayed repeatedly in Malay art because they are believed to have the power of healing those
who own the art pieces. He described batik as the space that must contain related shapes then draw repeated in different size and directions.

Artist is applied three elements of design; shape, space and line. Placing element is important in the fabric to create a rhythm. Rhythm in an all over pattern is the result of a repetition of the shapes; often different-size shapes make a pattern more interesting than shapes of all one size. Another element to consider is texture. The fabric already has texture, but visual texture may be portrayed by a buildup of tiny lines, or dots, suggesting smooth and rough surfaces. Baharuddin (2002) indicated the process of reshaping cultural values through assimilation with the Islamic and Hindu-Buddhist cultural influences combined with the animist traditions. However, the concepts of ‘growth,’ ‘human spirituality 'and sense of unity,’ will remain a part of the Malay cultural identity portrayed in the batik motifs.

**Effect of Motif in Hand-Drawn Batik**

Today, studies related to motifs, as effective elements in the review and analysis of artistic works, possess an important place in the field. Arney (1978) reported that batik motifs mean the word Bunga (flower) in Malaysia. Bunga is the colloquial word for "motif" the villagers generally use the more familiar term. "Motif" has been named in the language by academics. (Arney1978). Kerlogue (1997) concluded that three motif elements express the world around; traditional culture, natural environment, and modern technology.

Mohamed (2005) described the natural forms of flowers as manifestations of the essence of God, oneness. The various shapes and colors of flowers, in particular, emanate from the God. The human experience of the natural world cannot be separated from that world since both are manifestations of the oneness of God. Lukman, Hariad and Haldani asserted that in Malaysia, fauna motifs are not so well-known because of the religion reasons; meanwhile, artists use two fauna motifs; butterfly and fish. Another fauna motif is bird that due to its flight means that can
connect between heaven and earth is considered as a popular motif. They concurred that motif batik has a certain symbolic meaning, then each object, which become batik ornamentations, have mythological meanings. Batik motif itself evolves according to their place and time, such as India (patola and jlamprang), China (bright color, floral, phoenix, lions and dragons), keratin (solo, yogya, majapahit), Islam (anti-anthromorphic, arabesque, flat forms), and even Dutch influenced Indonesia.

Batik art in Malaysia incorporates motifs with high varieties and it can be said that this variety is because of the influence of art, civilization, history, and particularly the nature of this country. Due to the beautiful and diverse nature of Malaysia, the role of plants and vegetation in designing of batik motifs of this country is apparent. Smiley (2004) maintained that foliage, floral bouquets and arabesque motifs are inspired from the tropical climate Malaysia. He separated the motifs into organic and geometric groups and presents some combinatorial motifs with their structure and also a short description for each one. Indeed he has hardly tried to define the motifs but what has been resulted in a number of disorderly cluttered combinations. In other words, traditional and contemporary motifs and geometric and non-geometric motifs have not been arranged properly and do not complement each other. Azizi(2002) peer reviewed the Songket motifs and classify them into some categories. According to Ruslan (2006), 60 to 70 percent of the motifs are influenced by nature and also culture and religion have the main role in design of motifs.

As it mentioned, Malaysian batik motifs can be categorized into some groups. One categorization is conceptual that divides into traditional and contemporary groups; Zakaria, Abdul Rahman & Yusof (2006) divided motifs in two groups traditional and contemporary. Meilach (1973) asserted that each group is also classified into geometric and non-geometric sections. Most of these motifs have remained from the past to the present without any changes. Sometimes we see these different types of motifs together. For instance, sometimes, interference of geometrical and non-
geometrical motifs could be seen in an artwork or traditional and contemporary motifs complementing each other. Of course such changes should be under more consideration because as the time goes forward and demand direction changes, batik art should also have variety to be up-to-date and can answer the varying demand. This makes it necessary to have harder efforts and stronger wills in designing batik motifs.

A great number of artists in many centers and universities are trying to create more attractive types of motifs. In Craft Negara Center in Kelantan, Shakira SJ Halim and her colleagues and students attempt to create a variety of designs and even have tried to get help from technology to gain more accurate designs. They have used hemp clothes in designing, which its texture made the designs more appealing. Master Wan, a remarkable artist, has a workshop in Kajang, an area close to Kuala Lumpur, in where many batik workers, work on creating designs matching with current taste of the market. He consults with his customers in the design of his works and their designs and performance are under the customer’s consideration. As Master Wan says, most of the desired designs are inspired and influenced by nature and he has tried to enter geometrical patterns to the works too which has been somewhat successful in this way.

A group of artists from Kraft Negara institute have collected several motifs used in handicraft works in Malaysia, which are revealed in book Motif-Motif Ethnic Malaysia. A part of it refers to batik motifs which has collected the traditional motifs and presents a short definition about their concept and structure. The definitions are synopsis and are just a short presentation. (Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan .1991. There are so many artists in Kraft Negara Institute trying on creating more attractiveness in batiks and are training new generations of designers. Mr. Mohd Sharizan Tarmizi, in addition to training his students in this art, uses his creativity to create more attractive motifs and his main effort is on designing geometric motifs and presents his designs in fashion shows.