

Beyond Songket: Transforming Traditional Malaysian Handwoven Songket into Contemporary Songket for Broader Usage

PhD Research Supervisor:
Associate Professor Dr. Mohamed Najib Ahmad Dawa
Dean
School of Arts
Science University of Malaysia
Email: mnajib@usm.my

By:
June Ngo Siok Kheng
PhD Research Candidate
School of Arts
Science University of Malaysia
Email: junengo@pd.jaring.my

PhD Research Abstract

Songket is a magnificent traditional Malay fabric beautifully woven in silk or cotton yarns, using gold or coloured metallic threads to form traditional or contemporary songket motifs. In Malaysia, most of the experienced songket weavers inherited their skills from their ancestors and the majority of them are based in the States of Terengganu, Kelantan, Pahang, and a handful in Sarawak. Today, songket is mainly used as traditional Malay ceremonial costumes for special and formal occasions. It has also been turned into fashion accessories such as handbags, as well as home products such as place mats, cushions, table runners and gift items. It is a pity that such a beautiful and unique fabric is not popularised as fashion wear. Therefore, this research focuses on the potential of creating marketable elegant fashion wear.

This paper gives an insight into an on-going PhD research to create more interesting textural effects on the Malaysian handwoven songket while retaining the usage of the simple traditional songket *kek* (handloom) and the traditional Malay motifs. The aim of this research is to teach basic textile science to songket weavers and produce a range of contemporary songket with good draping qualities which is light and comfortable, suitable for fashion wear, with the intention of capturing a broader apparel market. This research is an ideal project to support and promote

throughout Malaysia as it provides the opportunity to kampong women to earn extra income in producing contemporary handwoven songket marketable both locally and internationally. Thus, songket weaving can continue to exist as a home-based industry for the kampong folks.

Current Phase of Research

So far, this songket research had managed to gain the support and sponsorship from various local and international companies. Pn. Habibah, the owner of Habibah Songket Enterprise had kindly allowed the researcher to work with a few of her weavers to produce a few pieces of songket. Most of the silk and cotton yarns used for the research were sponsored by Jim Thompson Thai Silk of Thailand and some metallic yarns were sponsored by the Lurex Company Limited of the United Kingdom, Yantai Xinguang Textile Co.,Ltd. of China and Toh Chuan Bee Sdn. Bhd. of Malaysia.

Contemporary Handwoven Light-weight Songket

The contemporary handwoven light-weight songket produced using the traditional 2-shaft *kek* is further innovated and improved in terms of texture, dimension and handling of the fabric. Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 illustrate samples of the contemporary songket that have been successfully produced with collaboration from Habibah Songket Enterprise Sdn. Bhd. of Kuala Terengganu.



Fig.1 Contemporary light-weight Songket designed by © June Ngo, 2005.



Fig. 2. Contemporary light-weight organza Songket designed by © June Ngo, 2005.



Fig. 3. Contemporary light-weight mouldable Songket designed by © June Ngo, 2005.



Fig. 4. Contemporary light-weight Songket designed by © June Ngo, 2005.



Fig. 5. Contemporary light-weight Songket designed by © June Ngo, 2005.

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