

## Mengkuang and Pandan Plaiting: The Implicit Meaning Behind The Inspired Motifs

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### Abstract

Plaiting is one of the art and crafts that are unique that use mengkuang and pandan plaiting. This plaiting is used in our daily life as a place to sit and for home decorations. The researchers found that most plaiting have a variety of design on her surface that stand is made not only for daily life using only but have a meaning behind the design. The problem of this research found that plaiting decorated with fauna, flora, geometric, abstract and cosmos motifs. The question is why the plaiting is favored to be the frosting on the design of mat plaiting? To answer this question, qualitative methods are used to obtain accurate and complete field of research. The results of the research found that motifs were inspired by the environment of the matters. It consists of different types of motifs that have an implicit meaning. Each of these types of motifs describes the life of the people at that time that can serve as a reminder and a guidance. In this research, hopefully can give knowledge and exposure on the uniqueness of the mat's plaiting motifs to future generations.

**Keywords:** Mengkuang, Pandan Plaiting, Motifs, Design, Implicit Meaning

### Introduction

The art of plaiting is one of the traditional Malay Handicraft which is operated by most women and single mother. In the past, plaiting was used as household items for daily use and as their past time activity. According to Haron & Mutalib (2013), the Malay in the past were known to perform activities related to entrepreneurship in the production of commercial craft. That means it is not only carried out for daily use and leisure only, but it is one of the activities undertaken by commercial enterprise until now. The history of plaiting is also believed to have started during the Neolithic age in parallel with the development of art pottery that was popular during that time.

The purpose of plaiting is to produce a mat product by applying cross media production. Plaiting process is one activity which is time consuming, and some plaiting is complicated to prepare. The process also requires determination and patience, which is highly necessary in the production of a type of plaiting. Without persistence, perseverance plaiting activity cannot be done because it depends on each medium used in the process and surrounding area. Plaiting activities also require high expertise because the workers need to have convergence and accuracy in the production of any equipment or products based on the type of plaiting to be produced. Any plaiting designed with unique and creative will help society maintain the original Malay culture.

Behind the good and uniqueness of product design, the plaiting is inspiring to weaver to create plaiting that have implicit meaning behind the motifs and pattern creations is gained through the appreciation given on natural resources also from various man-made objects available all around us. What is easily available in our surroundings indirectly gives us various great ideas until it attracts the attention of the designers to simplify the stylization of a form capable of being made into a motifs. Nonetheless, the designers will also rotate and alter the motifs according to their preferences, in terms of various elements of art like the use of line, color, value, texture, shape and form. Next, it will place a good and attractive design creation. It is the outcome of the processes of using and arranging the motifs in various forms and arrangements like diagonally, in square or diamond emerging from the 'all over pattern'. Max Wertheimer, a gestalt psychologist from Germany has conducted a study on how observers have examined the form, pattern and shape as the design that exists in terms of interrelated groups referring to types of personalities and individualities (Ocvirk et al, 2009). Sometimes, it embodies various influencing factors which are also interrelated with the positions nearby, either in terms of size or looks. When the unit arrangement proposed consists of the parts found on the pattern or shape, the person who sees it will say that it is the missing gap full in and look at the incomplete patterns by uniting them.

### **Research Objective**

The objective of this research is to describe the shape of motifs in mengkuang weaving. The second objective is to analyze the motifs design in mengkuang weaving, and the third is finding out what the motifs design in mengkuang weaving means.

### **Literature Review**

Plaiting is something that cannot be detached from the traditional ways of life in Nusantara communities. The plaiting can be seen everywhere from the mat to home and office decorations. This is not surprising because many tropical plants are made of a material suitable for planting. Overall, the basic skill in the art of plaiting is not much different, just depending on the type of plants used for plaiting material. This is because raw materials for plaiting activities do not only consist of mengkuang and pandan but are divided into several materials that can be used such as bamboo, rattan, stick, pohon benbam, daun sal and kercut. The young generation nowadays should be given guidance as well as exposure to the art of plaiting ranging from plaiting and handicrafts. This is for the purpose of upholding this art for years to come as in view of modern times, more high-tech machine plait faster than traditional plaiting.

This art is considered a heritage craft that needs to be supported not just for its esthetical value but also for its substantial contribution to the socioeconomic development of the industry. It first started as a cottage industry and these traditional art skills used a lot of forest

materials which could be developed into a bigger industry. The art of traditional skills has grown into one of the art communities to help the village improve family economic resources. Art is also identified as the unique culture of Malay society. It also reflects the village community of creative thinkers in the production of design patterns using natural colors (Ariff, 2010). In Art and Craft, it proves to be challenging to find skilled artisans in each of the respective arts to teach their skills to the younger generation to preserve the plaiting heritage. Without the efforts of reviving the Malaysian traditional craft it would exist before it could be in heritage by future generations (Haron, 2013).

Therefore, the love for art and craft should be inculcated among the young generation to gain interest in the craft and art traditional. Strong strategies and programs should be implemented to ensure the continued preservation of craft and traditional art. This is because in the technology era, the mat plaited in Malaysia will lose their perseverance traits and skills as a plaiting mat of plastic is more readily available than plait mats and hats, they had been since they were young. They also learned the fundamental process of preparation of plaiting before producing any type of plaiting. The plaiting process also requires patience and persistence of high and relatively trivial. This is one of the reasons many young people nowadays are not interested and refuse to learn how to plait mengkuang and pandan plaiting (Haron, 2013).

### **Definition of Motifs**

Malay art would not be intact without the adornment of motifs and designs that are appealing and unique on the surface of the mengkuang and pandan leaves paintings. The traditional Malay motifs is divided into two parts, namely the decorative motifs and the ending motifs which functions as the decoration for an object. The production of a motifs also has everything to do with the influence, also the customs inherited from various groups and generations of Malay in specific (Nasir, 1986). Without this motifs, society will not know about the identity of a race and ethnicity. The race will get to be known through the uniqueness and the differences of motifs which show the value of mastery and expertise in producing fascinating and admirable art forms.

The decorations of motifs are also able to distinguish the forms of art available in every place, district, and state in Malaysia, other than being made as a trademark on an object and on the type of plaiting that is to be marketed. The older generations' sense of creativity and meticulous nature is also evident in the creation of various motifs noted on the plait items. Through the production of the motifs, it can raise the Malay art of plaiting to a higher level, and it can be appreciated as the process of materializing the type of plaiting is more complicated than one would have thought. Without having to endure all the labor and hardship in producing the plaiting motifs from the easiest to the most difficult, we might not have the motifs that can stand tall as the epitome of our country's identity. The creation of this motifs also contributes to the attractiveness of the plaiting when artful elements found in the design are combined.

The existence of motifs is shaped from the image repetitions and noted from small designs. The shape is arranged structurally, where it follows the sequence that has been decided until it forms a pattern (Ibrahim, 2007). The production of this motifs is also linked to the arrangement aspect of an object, whereby it involves arranging both organic and geometric shapes. This motifs arrangement which has been done in repetitions would naturally involve other elements available in the design elements like line, look, shape, value, and color (Hussin,

2006). The repetition will also produce a new design called all over pattern. Here, the motifs cannot be separated from the presence of a design.

The plaiting technique that has been developed will turn into various types of plaiting which produce motifs and this plaiting comes in many colors. This is because the differences of colors used in the process of producing plaiting can show various types of motifs with assorted colors to be produced and shown to consumers (Garha, 1987). Matanggui (2007), pattern means motifs where the decoration will show the surface design which includes the motifs itself. The motifs arrangement will create a design formation involving the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic forms which are responsible as a symbol for the fundamental expressions which brainstorm ideas for the motifs production. The production of motifs also acts as the self-related manifestation, also involving the identity that is wished to be displayed.

As mentioned, easier, the motifs created in repetition will create a new design where it is known as all over pattern where the observer gets to see all the patterns clearly and the design easily understood. Meanwhile, the all over pattern is easily detected by looking at it as a whole on the design that has been created. Here, we would see the overall pattern, not like the motifs where we only refer to one form. However, through the all over design the motifs design can be seen in its entirety. As an example, something that is small and repeated continuously is called the motifs, while the part seen as a whole is called 'all over' in a design (Ocvirk et al., 2009).

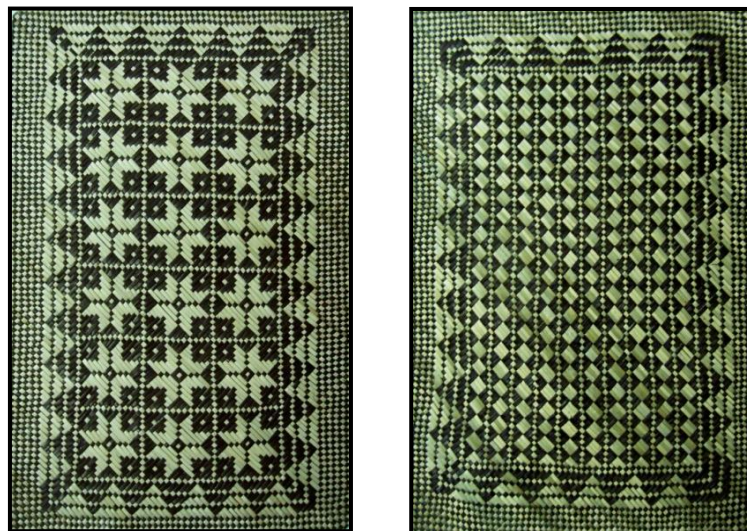


Figure 1: The example of mat plaiting is called "all over design"

The inspiration behind the motifs and pattern creations is gained through the appreciation given to natural resources and from various man-made objects available all around us. What is easily available in our surroundings indirectly would give us various great ideas which attract the attention of the designers to simplify the stylization of form into a motifs. Nonetheless, the designers will also rotate and alter the motifs according to their preferences, in terms of various elements of art like the use of line, color, value, texture, shape and form. Next, it will place a good and attractive design creation. It is the outcome from the process of using and arranging the motifs in various forms and arrangements like diagonally, in square or diamond emerging from the 'all over pattern'. According to Ocvirk et al (2009), Max Wertheimer, a gestalt psychologist from Germany has conducted a study on how observers have examined the form, pattern and shape and the existence of this design is very much interrelated to types



of personalities and individualities. Sometimes, it embodies various influencing factors which are also interrelated with the positions nearby, either in terms of size or look. When the unit arrangement proposed consists of the parts found on the pattern or shape, the person who sees it will say 'full in' gap and look at the incomplete patterns by uniting them.

### **Definition of Pattern**

Motifs and patterns are not similar through the angle of craft art and textile variations even though they come almost at the same time, where the formation process is concerned. The pattern created in craft arts and textiles based on repeatedly printed motifs adheres to aspects such as lines, form spaces and colors. Patterns can also be widely seen in our surroundings, either on living beings or man-made objects like on the walls, items of use or simply any other things existing on this planet. Other than the natural patterns, most of us can also appreciate looking at wonderfully arranged patterns on the beach sands, leaves scattering around on the ground and the cosmic stars shining in the pitch-black sky. It consistently changes in various sizes and shades of colors as well as potentially delivering some hidden meanings, ready for us to decipher. Most patterns are responsible for adornment and decorative aspects which are both eye-pleasing and can bond the relationship between religion and culture. Patterns can be obtained out of the repetition process, which it can be seen from the activity of arranging a design done in bulk or full, which will all together form a complete design. The repetition of motifs that will produce a complete design of the 'all over pattern' is possible, only by looking at the whole design, as explained previously. Patterns and motifs are composed from the decorative items' elements from complicated shapes to much easier ones, referring to the relationship between the use of line, value, texture, or color. It is introduced and also proposed from natural objects and altered by man for the simplification of the design in question. From the production of the design, observers will see the elements in the design such as the shape and pattern even those that function as the arrangement of important objects, simply to produce interesting-looking designs. Patterns and motifs are composed of an arrangement that starts from a simple sign, to become a close relationship between one another like the more complex line, shape, value, texture, and color. This is because the motifs and pattern do not work independently but are closely working with other surrounding elements (Ocvirk et al., 2009).

### **Data Collection And Methodology**

The methodology is based on the qualitative method in order to develop a comprehensive, detailed, and complete study in order to gather and use all relevant information.

### **Research Design**

The qualitative methods are applied, and all information gathered is collected and acknowledged in accordance with the research objectives. These strategies are used to gather and apply accurate information. As a result, the researcher will describe the varied patterns present in traditional and modern designs. The stages of research methodologies to achieve the recognized objective in terms of the aesthetic of design product in terms of affects the pattern and products. Exploration for each component is required to generate a comprehensive study that can be used as a reference for all ages and specializations. The methodology is based on a qualitative approach to develop a comprehensive, detailed, and complete study so that all relevant information may be acquired and used.

### ***Experience Narrative***

It focuses on an individual, a group of individuals, or a culture's living setting (Miller & Salkind, 1991). The experience tale that has transmitted both personal and social experiences reported about mengkuang plaiting. Several plaiter characteristics are fix various studies to constitute the data. The stories provided can be data gathered through interviews or informal conversations. The data obtained can be recognized depending on the information shared by plaiter. During the data collection process, the researcher will work with participants to verify the story and negotiate the interpretation of the findings. Aside from that, documentation such as photographs, social artifacts, and so on will be documented as proof.

### ***Observation***

This method was referring to an observation research, which is an empiric investigation that can impose procedures whose effect is to be discovered. The sample groups are working hard to ensure that all necessary information is acquired. The observations are carried out in any technique that allows for as fair an attest as possible given the limitation method. The observation is one of designing that encompasses as many valid points of view as feasible in terms of the situation under consideration (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1992). The observation is critical for researchers to learn about traditional and modern patterns in Mengkuang plaiting from Malaysia.

### ***Interviews***

Based on the interviews, the prospective responders are people who are directly or indirectly involved in Mengkuang plaiting. Every piece of information obtained from the research is collected and utilised in the method of research chosen. Aside from that, all information about the weavers is gathered through interviews. Based on this interview, the prospective respondents are people who are directly or indirectly involved in Mengkuang plaiting.

### ***Finding and Discussion***

The expected results of this research may be very valuable to Kedah plaiter, Craft Centre, and community in particular. The findings of this study will be utilized as references to learn about the traditional and most recent patterns in Kedah plaiting. Some of our ancestors' traditional patterns are no longer used. This knowledge is very significant to many individuals, including international tourists who arrive and undoubtedly want to learn more about a type of plaiting manufactured by them. As a result, all parties should play a larger role in expanding and reintroducing to the community the various varieties of plaiting that have not yet been produced, in order to appreciate plaiting as one of the heritage traditions. Plaiting is divided into two or three dimensions, with the two dimensions serving as matting. Large living room and kitchen spread, as well as sleeping mats and mats for paddy drying. The 0.9 by 1.8 meter prayer mats are the smallest. In contrast, 4 X 40 meters is often designed for the living room. While three-dimensional products such as baskets, sacks, food covers, clothes containers, and race storage containers are available, as are other plaiting boxes (Ahmad & Zakaria, 1992). There are not many passionate plaiters who are easily bored with manufacturing plaiting products such as mats, baskets, bags, and hot water bottles for daily usage. A huge volume of raw material is required for this purpose. Some people also utilize the plaiting product for religious ceremonies with distinctive designs. According to community custom, skill plaiters make their own daily use items (Ahmad & Zakaria, 1992).

Types of motifs are divided into three basic and generally known types: organic, geometric, and abstract motifs. However, there are still some other types of motifs that can be seen in the Malay community's weaving variation of decorations which are the contemporary, cosmology and motifs which refers to a person's name which normally is taken after the name of the designer herself or himself. The abstract motifs is a motifs that does not have anything to do with the original form obtained, either from organic or geometric material (Hussin, 2006).

### ***Fauna Motifs***

The fauna motifs is taken from the animals, this motifs adopts the names and influences of insects as the name of the motifs itself. The Malays had deliberately used types of insects or other animals as something that can be learned from God's making of the Universe, which by nature are complementary. The animal motifs adopted consists of big, strong, fierce, and wild animals feared in the animal chain which influences the way of life of the Malays. Meanwhile, the types of insects concentrate more on the types that work hard, are tolerable and have the fighting spirit to be made examples in real life. The types of admirable animals so commonly used in motifs creations are the elephant, tiger, anchovy, and duck. Other than animals, insects like bees and flies are used widely in the production of various types of motifs.

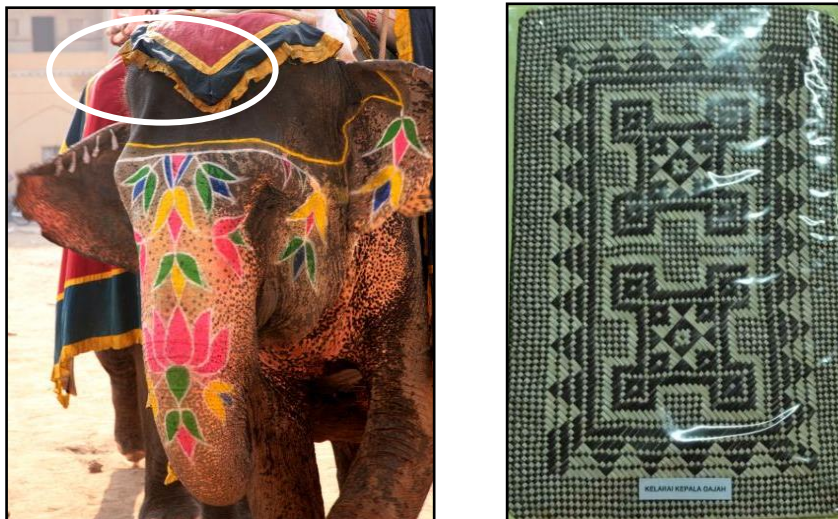


Figure 2: Elephant head motifs showing the cloth on her head that simplified and transfer into weaving motifs.

In most places in the world, the elephant is categorized as a wild animal with many exclusive properties, other than the fact that it is feared and intimidating to other animals. The greatness of animals like this one has been raised to the highest degree to be named God by the Hindus in India. Therefore, the elephant is often used in various activities related to some religious ceremonies by adorning it with some accessories to beautify it, as a symbol of respect to their God. The elephants will be full of various Indian traditional patterns which mostly use the Lotus motifs. Other than decorated with patterns on the body, the elephant's headcover is also made to cover the top of its head with a square-shaped cloth. When inspected, the square cloth will be placed in a slanting position to become the triangle.

### **Flora Motifs**

Flora motifs are the types of motifs derived from natural sources from a variety of trees' names typically associated with life and the environment surrounding the Malay community, such as the cape flowers. The use of flowers is also associated with the customs and culture of a nation from the days of our ancestors until today. Cape used in decorative flowers is sometimes placed at the head on the top bun due to the fact that the strong and durable scent is filled with attraction. Besides this flower is also used in *flower baths* where the cape flowers are mixed with other flowers, which then produces a very fragrant smell that attracts the people around the user of the flowers.

The Malay community which is no doubt a Muslim community is a religion that uses the motifs of plants as the most preferred choice in their handicraft activities (Malek & Ayob, 1995). Apart from the cape, there are various types of flowers and floral motifs which are used in the production of woven mats as the main object. The diversity of beautiful flowers with different colors and scents has attracted woven designers to produce a variety of flower motifs. However, not all types of flowers are used in the production of woven patterns, but it depends on the type of situations and circumstances that interest the woven designer itself in producing the preferred type of motifs.



Figure 3: *Bunga Tanjung's* Motifs

Traditional motifs can be seen in abundance in patterns of weaving and traditional crafts of various types of overseas such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Brunei. Similarities and differences in the patterns one use are not very significant as the country is one of the countries in the Malay Archipelago located close to the country. Thus, if there are any influences that affect the arts and culture, to some extent it also influences our culture located in the archipelago. At first, during the reign of Malay, the country was also involved in commercial activities other than Malay land, colonial activities were carried out in several areas in the archipelago during the reign of *Parameswara*, and the exchange of knowledge and culture happened.



### **Geometric Motifs**

The geometric motifs on the other hand are often associated with abstract-shaped motifs, casual and hard. This type of motifs is bound by the formulas of a mathematical result of an angular shape, and sometimes it is in its own styling. According to Husin (2006), this pattern is associated with organizing methods such as organic style and according to the type of geometric arrangement produced. The production of the patterns is the geometric interpretation of the patterns which uses a very high imagination, so it becomes a complex thing to identify.

These geometric patterns have been identified to exist since prehistoric times and continue to grow to this day as one of the ever-popular motifs because their shape is different from other motifs. More geometric appearance refers to the forms that have pointed or angular character lines and a border. Geometric forms, also known as the binding motifs, are not organic forms that are free to produce the pattern. Normally the geometric shape will be arranged in rows and sometimes it will be merged with other forms (Nasir, 1986). Geometric appearance can also be identified by looking at its pattern that uses basic elements that can be seen inside through the variety of designs such as horizontal lines, oblique and straight quite often. Examples of geometric patterns can be seen in the market such as woven checkers and the lattice which is still more beautiful and unique even if only with the elements of a straight line. Production of 'checkers' or chess patterns which uses color contrast and are woven alternately aims to produce various types of cloths decorated with attractive colors (Eman, 2008).

The greatness of the world's use of geometric motifs began developing in the famous Egyptian production of one of the most important motifs in their art other than the motifs of leaves and plants that are used in various art activities. Next is the widespread geometric motifs that can be seen everywhere and around the patterns of the Islamic world because a lot of the influence is used in either the pattern wall decoration of mosques throughout the Arab countries, carpets, prayer mats, or in the Al-Quran. Geometric patterns from the basic shape are to be produced to the forms which are too complex to acknowledge the greatness of Western society itself in this motifs. There is no doubt that the result of geometric motifs' influences in shaping the diversity of mathematical geometric motifs can result in a very elegant pattern (Ludin & Noor, 1995).



Figure 4: *Bontot Siput's* motifs has been simplified from a circular shape on the

upper part of the snail's body.

The *Bontok Snail* pattern inspired by the snails also known by the scientific name of *Achatina Fulica* is one of the known animals that move very slowly. These animals also have no backbone, but they are decorated with a very beautiful shell that protects them from predators. Snails are often used as the main object in the production of cartoon stories that show useful lessons to children as well as being used as a word in the language of Malay proverbs such as "slow as a snail." This is in tandem with the nature of the animal itself which moves slowly from one place to another. This motifs is used with the possibility of its existence as a result of which can be seen by many in the habitat in the area that is moist, fresh and also in rice cultivation areas. In the past, a lot of village people were involved in agricultural activities such as rice farming where the paddy fields serve as a major habitat for snails. Next, motifs inspired by these animals were obtained as a result of shells found on the body. The form of a spinning shell also known as the *Bontok* of the snail was taken as a name in the weaving patterns. The form also produced motifs woven in circles as the original form that looks rotating from a small rotation and thus becomes a greater rotation.

### **Abstract Motifs**

Abstract motifs are derived from the form of a design made based on the interpretation that is often associated with the original form of the object produced. It is commonplace to observe the form in which it can be seen as a result of recent treatment patterns where they are no longer visible from the original form of these animals. In addition, it is obtained as a result of the use of one's own thinking mind much more than an image that is free and visible until they are able to make up patterns or motifs that seem to be more unique and exciting. The motifs of this type is something that is easily available as a result of which is considered an abstract interpretation that is more to the imagination and may not be identifiable (Lauer, 2001). Abstract motifs are categorized from *arabes* features that can be seen extensively in the Islamic motifs (Ludin & Noor, 1995). These *arabes* features are not to be inferred from the repetition of motifs or known also as the module structure that is deemed to be abstract. Sometimes animal and human motifs are also used in everyday life, although the motifs are altered to be in the forms of plants and will not appear again as the motifs of human or animal. Revenue from the use of these abstract motifs, can help and prevent Muslim authors to create an animal motifs orientation.



Figure 5: Kelarai *Beras Patah* Motifs taken from rice names and their shape.

Broken rice is one of the types of abstract motifs which results from using rice as a subject matter or even being inspired by normal woven designers who are exposed to rice cultivation in the village at that time. Each name that produced a design had its own history and meaning that rendered the patterns unique to the generation of today. The new generation is also currently acting as the inheritor of traditional handicraft arts of the Malay heritage ages. Heritage has raised the Malay name for a nation full of careful handwork and full of Islamic values at the international level. Earlier woven designers who have passed away were very expert in adapting all the things found in nature which is God's creation into the hands of workers. Next, all the creativity and ideas available were translated into various types of high-quality woven motifs. Any form that does not change the shape of an object is copied. It can be seen in the *kelarai* broken rice that looks like the form of the letter 'V' and is accompanied by a background that can add a real picture of the distribution of rice (Panel Penulis PCT, 1986). It can be seen in the actual distribution of rice how its position is to be revealed to the woven designer.

A woven design with high imagination and creativity will produce a kind of motifs that can be woven or the kind that depicts something that we want to be implied to the community. An implicit motifs served to create a society that is always thinking and looking forward to facing the ever-changing life. The nature of Malays themselves is well-spoken and gentle in their lives a little bit related to something that appears implicitly in the webbing so that the community can relate to it.

### ***Cosmos Motifs***

Cosmological motifs cover all the things found in nature as a source of inspiration to designers in creating a motifs on the craft and art that are usually referring to the space motifs characterized as the moon and stars (Hussin, 2006). Nothing to see here people generally use this motifs in various crafts such as weaving products, designing batik patterns and so on. Use of the cosmos because of the motifs forms in space such as the moon, the stars, and the sun for extended all creative ideas. This is because God is the creator of all either the true nature of what is on earth or in heaven is something that cannot be spoken of again. All creation will

give us the idea to translate all the great inventions of the one simplified into different shapes such as crafts that can be used, appreciated, and owned. It will also develop the designer's idea of creating something new which could produce something so perfect and high-value creation resulting from the appreciation of the Almighty.

### **Conclusion**

Most of the motifs produced from the previous age are still being used in today's weaving. However, there are also motifs on screw-pine and pandanus leaves weavings that are further extended to other weaving products. The result of using weaving motifs on various things could expand and bring today's community closer to knowing more about the name of the motifs and weaving patterns. At the same time, knowledge about weaving techniques also needs to be disseminated so that people of the current generation could distinguish between motifs, patterns, and types of weaving. This is because there is a motifs that could be found in weaving whereas in the other weaving, none is available. Most of the motifs are of plant origin since Islam forbids the use of the animal motifs. However, most of the animal motifs only use parts of the animal's body such as the eyes, head, leg et cetera. These motifs have been styled and modified to obtain newer ones that are in accordance with Islam.

The findings of this study will have a positive impact on the textile process research in our community. In the future, new motifs or a combination of traditional patterns and contemporary motifs can be developed to assure their continued market presence. On the basis of the study's findings, it can be suggested that training be provided to enhance the knowledge and skills of weavers, particularly with regard to the application, techniques, and functions of the motifs used in weaving designs. The motif's name is extremely distinctive and must be preserved for the sake of authenticity. As this motif is undergoing change, it is anticipated that additional researchers will investigate the emergence of new motifs in local traditional mengkuang weaving.

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