

**Textile Praxis:
The Case for Malaysian Hand-Woven Songket**

Volume I

Suzanne Stankard

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Abstract.

Textile Praxis: The Case for Malaysian Hand-Woven Songket.

This research was prompted by a concern for the vulnerability of traditional pre-industrial handicrafts, namely the songket textiles of Malaysia. The songket textile has been woven for over two centuries in Southeast Asia, and its materiality represents cultural heritage, tradition, and national identity in Malaysia. Market competition from imported, less expensive and mass-produced songket textile replicas has forced local makers to instigate creative change, as a means of longevity and secure a place in the market.

Within this research theories of development and social science are used to direct the creative practice of the researcher, forming a textile praxis. The practice of the researcher, as a textile designer and weaver, will introduce alternative technology, namely yarns and weaving techniques, to the production of the textile in order to instigate change. This practice is conducted within the field in Malaysia and in the London studios of the Royal College of Art. The implementation of the practice reflects the local material, technological, and economic environments, hence, providing alternative yarns and weaving techniques which are 'appropriate' (Schumacher 1993) to the local hand-woven production infrastructure. It is the socio-cultural context of the textiles materiality which most challenges the researcher in her practice; the duality (Gell 1998) of the object, subject, and social relationship. Manifesting itself as objectivity, dualism presents an agency upon creative practice. The autonomous practice of the researcher is challenged by the autonomy of material representation.

The textiles which were produced by the researcher's practice consist of radical changes in materiality. Through acquiring local knowledge, they represent creativity, where social objectivity has been considered and also abstracted by the researcher. The textiles exist, not as a new genre of materiality, but as exposure and influence to local makers, demonstrating creativity which can be achieved by expanding upon existing technological frameworks. By experiencing the use of alternative yarns during the researcher's field practice, local makers have chosen to adopt and appropriate the use of the yarns within their practice and subsequent textile market, a use which they have sustained.

The use of exposure to influence the local makers practice has already caused changes in the textiles materiality. The future materiality of the textile depends upon the time and space in which its creative practice and society resides.

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Author's Declaration.

1. During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.
2. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Suzanne Stankard

January 2010.

Introduction.

This research was prompted by a concern for the vulnerability of traditional pre-industrial handicrafts, namely the songket textiles of Malaysia. The traditionally hand-woven textile is facing strong competition from imported Jacquard loom and machine-made replicas. Malaysian songket textile makers are addressing this challenge of competition through creativity and change within the material form of the textile. *"...the apparent differentiation of products is the only means to maintaining competitiveness"* (Morello 1995:71). Schneider (1989) argues change and creativity in textiles will encourage the longevity of the textile and its techniques. It is only when creativity ceases, and its form becomes dormant, that the textile and its techniques will become a part of history (Arthur 2000).

Songket textiles are predominantly woven by women, though there is primary and secondary evidence of men being involved in the design and marketing of the textile, there is no documentation of men weaving the textile commercially (Tengku Ismail 2006, Wan Manang 2006). Though Malaysia is multi-cultural, incorporating Malay, Chinese and Indian societies and cultures, it is Malay society who patronise the wearing and making of the textile. The textiles are used mainly¹ as tailored and untailored apparel, mostly by adult males and females in Malay society (see chapter two for uses).

Today's songket textiles are the material assimilation of many historical and cultural influences, such as politics, religion, and economics (Schneider 1989). These influences to creativity within the material form of the textile have not been inflicted upon the Malay songket textile maker; they have been 'facilitated' by an intermediary, an instigator of change (Buchanan and Margolin 1995). In this research project I use my own design and weaving practice as a maker to influence creativity in Malaysia within the material form of songket textiles.

Having been brought up and formally trained in a 'technological society' (Dant 2005 citing Ellul 1965) incorporating scientific thought processes (Biersack 1982), my creative practice focuses upon technology as a source of change; technology within the properties of yarns and weave techniques.

¹ Soft furnishings and accessories are produced, but their market is very small and in some cases considered tourist arts.

Technology within woven textile production in 'modern' (Dant 2005) societies has developed rapidly, not just in looms and machinery, but also in materials. Within materials' properties performance is just as important as aesthetic (Braddock-Clarke and O'Mahoney 2005). Textile makers are presented with a choice of materials containing active properties which can be manipulated by the maker using weaving, loom, and finishing techniques. My formal training and professional practice as a designer and weaver are driven by a questioning and challenging of these material properties and the technology of looms (Sutton 1986). I have learnt a 'solution-focusing' strategy during my training and practice, and this is how I adapt to problems and challenges during my creative practice (Cross 1995).

The aim of the research is to introduce alternative yarns and weave techniques which will produce an alternative material genre of the textile to provide exposure and influence Malaysian makers. The textile should be different from, and not financially or visually compete, with the mass-produced imported songket textile provided by the global market. The creativity of my practice will expose Malay songket textile makers to alternative materials and technology which can be used within making the textile in local technological environments. This exposure is not meant to inflict western ideals of creativity, but provide influence to Malay makers, encouraging them to question and challenge materials and weaving techniques in their practice. The yarns and weave techniques used in my practice will provide alternative woven surfaces and decoration to the textile. The textured surfaces produced will provide an aesthetic which is as 'important' as the textiles motifs, patterns, and colour (Pye 1978).

During this research I will use my practice as designer, weaver, facilitator, observer, and theorist. This complexity in the research of creativity within making songket textiles, as a combination of practices created through theories of development, material culture and society, is described as 'praxis'. This textile praxis demonstrates the challenges presented to the maker within songket textiles creativity. The choice between yarns, motifs, patterns, weave structures, and colour are not simply technical questions, but are deeply embedded in questions of materials, technology, economics, and society and culture. The practical research of the maker

develops into a question of creative textile practice and its relational contexts.

The research aims to provide an analysis of the creative appropriation of artefacts between different cultures. In particular, material creativity within the appropriation of songket textiles by Malaysian and British design and making practices. The theories utilised in this textile praxis permit the appropriation to be conducted in a socially and culturally sensitive and reflective manner. Decisions made in design and making are considered with knowledge upon local technology and production infrastructures, economic and social and cultural challenges. The completed thesis is a theoretical tool upon which designers and makers can reflect upon within their practice when appropriating from the design an artefact of a differing social and cultural genre. It will also be beneficial to designers and makers who practice in cultures different to their own, often within development projects.

The thesis commences with a review of cross-disciplinary literature in chapter one, which contextualises the creative process within songket textiles and the concerns which arise by transferring technology from one society and culture to another. Theories advocated by 'development' practitioners refer to the importance of 'intermediate' transfers in which local producers participate in technology transfer, appropriating aspects which are pertinent to their practice and environment. Development theories focus upon local knowledge, where the practice of the local and their technical, economic, and socio-cultural infrastructure are paramount in the transfer. This building of 'technological capacity' provides the local with the knowledge 'how to do' within their practice rather than inflicting 'what to do' (Dennis 1999). Theories from social science complement development literature, informing the maker of contextual influences which are associated with technology transfer. These are influences such as local technological infrastructures, local and global economics, plus socio-cultural relationships to materiality. These influences are recognised as *agencies* (Gell 1998) to be challenged or accommodated within the creative practice of the maker. Makers from different societies will accommodate or challenge these agencies in different ways, depending upon their social *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977), objectification, and experience. The textiles to be made within this project are a conceptualisation by the maker and the artefact's audience within a socio-

cultural context. Therefore the maker relies upon her knowledge of the textiles' socio-cultural representation to challenge creativity in materials and technology. Acquiring knowledge upon the socio-cultural representation of the artefact's material form will empower a maker from a different culture to incorporate informed material and technical creativity within the textile.

Fry (1995) and Borgmann (1995) argue by assessing what has gone before, the maker can gain a greater understanding and conception of current and future forms. The second chapter visually assesses the changes in songket's material form throughout the past two centuries, and the causes of this creativity. Material and technological changes are analysed, their external and internal influences, and relevance upon the current material genre of the textile. This will provide the maker with an analysis of past material and technological change, and of which original material and technological 'indexes' (Gell 1998) have remained constant and which have been abandoned. The analysis of material and technological consistencies within form identify the indexes by which Malaysian society objectifies the textile. By identifying indexes the maker "...can engage in the textiles components with more awareness" (Margolin 1995:123).

During past material and technological creativity, the socio-cultural objectification of the textile has changed. Through the textiles life-cycle till the present, differing social and cultural representation has been attributed to its form. These symbolic changes have been formed through the dual agency of the artefact and the subject; the textile's materiality has responded to changes in socio-cultural objectivity, and the subject has responded to material change instilled by the maker. By analysing the materiality of the textiles form and its socio-cultural symbolism, past and present, the agency placed upon the maker, through objectivity is assessed.

Chapter three analyses the agencies forced upon the Malay songket textile makers' practice. These are the agencies within materiality and technology which the maker automatically considers in designing and making the textiles. Within these material and technical agencies lay further agencies of economics, and society and culture. The enforced economic considerations placed upon the producers of commercial commodities have an effect upon the materiality of the textile's form, and in part, directs the creativity of the maker. Her creativity and production infrastructure revolves around the

financial exchange value of the textile she produces and capitalist issues of financial profitability.

Within socio-cultural contexts, it is the socio-cultural objectivity of the textile which forms an agency upon the maker in her choice of materiality and technology incorporated in the textile's form. Created by *habitus*, the socio-cultural objectivity of the textile's materiality is embodied within the maker and the consumers of the textile she produces. *Habitus* and objectification is embodied within the maker's training and her subsequent making practice. The questioning and challenging within the maker's practice is directed by her social and cultural environment; questions which are answered by objectivity. It is what the Malay subject 'expects' of the textiles material form which influences the creative choices of the maker.

Chapter four assesses strategies in Malaysia by which government and non-government agencies, plus individuals are aiming to aid the survival of the songket textile and its industry by means of change. Under the purveyance and administration of the Malaysian Government several agencies are responsible for the 'protection and promotion' of the songket textile industry. Past and present government incentives focusing upon training, and material and technological change have encouraged the textile to evolve into its current material genre. Government agencies are now also attempting to export the textile, creating a wider market for the textile.

Non-government agencies include charitable organisations patronised by royalty and high profile members of society. These organisations focus upon training, changes in materials and technology, and also upon the working conditions of the makers. By addressing the working conditions of makers these organisations hope to encourage more trainees into the industry. Individuals working towards the longevity of the textile include fashion designers living in Malaysia and overseas. By incorporating songket textiles woven patterning into their designs, these designers hope to encourage a wider audience for the textile.

There is a further 'development' of songket textiles which incorporates change, but it could be considered a negative development for the handicraft industry; it is the production of the textile by using jacquard looms. The competition from overseas imports of mass-produced jacquard-woven songket textile replicas, have caused a decrease in the price of the textile at

the lower end of the market. This has motivated the Malaysian government agency responsible for handicraft production to incorporate the use of jacquard looms into songket textile production. Plus, in 2005, a privately owned company commenced producing songket textiles by jacquard looms. So far this recent change in the textiles production in Malaysia has had a minimal impact upon the hand-woven songket textile industry.

In chapter five, I document my own making practice, creating songket textiles consisting of alternative yarns and weaving techniques. The knowledge gained upon local material, technical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts are put into practice. Within this making practice the complexities of creatively appropriating a textile of a differing culture are encountered. The agency of socio-cultural objectivity within materiality manifests itself upon the maker as a challenging. By making songket textiles within field and studio practice in Malaysia and England, my own *habitus* is revealed as an intrinsic agency upon the creativity I exacted upon the textiles form. The materiality of the textiles produced in this practice of challenging consists of cross-cultural informed understanding of socio-cultural objectivity. The textiles facilitate an intermediary influence upon the Malay songket textile maker, one in which the maker is provided with creative choice. This creative choice is dependent upon the dual agencies of the maker and Malay socio-cultural objectification of songket textiles. This chapter documents how Malay makers adopted and appropriated alternative yarns they experienced from the practice within this project. This provides an example of how the dynamic of society and culture permitted materiality and technology of songket textiles to change, within the space and time in which the practice was conducted.

Methodology

The research methods used in this project draw from the disciplines of development, social science, and design. They are used combined to inform making practice. Data gathered is through primary and secondary qualitative analysis, provided by theory, field research and textile practice.

Qualitative Research:

Qualitative approaches provide the 'essential character' of the thing to be investigated (Kvale 1996); in this case the making of hand-woven songket textiles by the Malay maker and the researcher. By constantly interpreting themes and situations that occur, qualitative research will provide a description and analysis of the practice involved; the how and why of the making process. Citing Glaser and Strauss (1967), Burgess argues, "*Qualitative methods...allow researchers to get close to the data...and derive their concepts from the data that are gathered*" (Burgess 1991:2). Qualitative research is 'sensitive to the human situation' (Kvale 1996) and one of its research strategies is ethnography, a methodology born of the social sciences.

Ethnography:

Ethnography focuses upon the link between human behaviours and culture. Its aim is to understand a different world view, to see a situation within its own internal cultural setting (McDaniel-Johnson 2003). Within ethnography "*...researchers attempt to understand the meaning of events for people in particular situations*". (Burgess 1991:3 citing Berger and Luckman 1967). Ethnographic methods were used by the researcher to interpret the environmental and social contexts in which the Malay songket textile maker performs her practice. This took the practice of the researcher beyond the constraints of her own world view "*...and into a new world of...diversity*" (Ireland 2003:22). Ethnography enabled the researcher to understand the practice of Malay makers from their own environmental and socio-cultural perspective. Ethnographic methods used by the researcher include field research in which the researcher was situated in Malaysia for extended periods.

Field Research:

Field research into the practices of Malay songket textile makers was conducted by the researcher over a cumulative period of fourteen months. Seven months were spent at a formal training institute in 2003, and in 2006, six months were spent at an urban commercial songket workshop, a further one month was spent with rural makers in Terengganu on the east coast of Malaysia. Intermittent short-term research in Malaysia was conducted in 2005 to attend conferences and discuss the possibility of field research opportunities within several songket textile production workshops. The selection of establishments in which to conduct field research provided the research with rich data upon the training of the songket textile maker, the practice of the trainers themselves, and rural and urban practice. Field research was carried out in 2003 at the National Handcraft Institute, and in 2006, the village of Pasar Panjang in Terengganu, and Mahkota Songket Sdn. Bhd., to visually record material, technical, and socio-cultural contexts within songket textiles. Data from this field research is documented mostly in chapters three, four, and five.

Within field research the ethnographic tools of participatory observation and unstructured interviews played a pivotal role in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data upon the practice of Malay makers. These observations and interviews also permitted the researcher to reflect upon her own practice in a comparative context.

Field research was overtly conducted, and the purpose of the research was explained immediately to participants to avoid any suspicion². By informing participants regarding the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the research, they provided 'informed consent'. Informed consent involves obtaining the voluntary participation of the subject, with his or her right to withdraw from the study at any time (Kvale 1996). Several songket textile private companies also requested that the name of their companies be provided in the final text, this has been adhered to where required throughout the thesis.

² As makers of an economic commodity, suspicion of plagiarism of designs is a concern.

Participatory Observation:

Participatory observation is a core ethnographic practice in qualitative research (Plowman 2003). Observation upon Malay songket textile makers involves 'listening to them, watching them, experiencing their lives at first hand' (Ireland 2003). The participants are the ones who are observed, they participate by interacting with the observer.

"The participant observer gathers data by participating in the daily practices of the group...He watches people he is studying to see what situations they...meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with some or all the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed" (Burgess 1991:79 citing Becker 1958).

In conducting participatory research the researcher has to be open and flexible in her approach, yet without being vague (Burgess). Flexibility then permits the researcher to collect data on social interaction, on 'situations as they occur' rather than on artificial or premeditated situations (Burgess 1991). By conducting participatory observation a detailed and interactive observation (Ireland 2003) of the makers practice was performed. Participatory observation facilitated knowledge of localised training, and design and making practices. Plus, through flexibility and observation the agencies and influences the Malay maker encounters in her making practice was observed.

In observation one watches subjects, in participatory observation the subject is brought into observations by conversation or unstructured interview techniques (Visocky-O'Grady2006).

Unstructured Interviews:

Within participatory observation are unstructured interviews; the conversations and questions generated from observations with participants. Within unstructured interviews the researcher has to be open and flexible to what may be discussed, to what is revealed by the observed, and questions which may be raised during the conversation (Burgess 1991 citing Moore 1978). The observer must learn to form open questions which may lead into complex conversations, providing data which may not have been previously thought of by the researcher. Yet the researcher should control a part of the

conversation, directing it to areas which are a part of the research focus (Burgess 1991). An unstructured interview is "*a conversation with a purpose*" (Burgess 1991:102). The interviewer employs a set of themes and topics upon which to form questions during a conversation with informants. This type of questioning gives the informants the opportunity to develop their answers outside a structured format. During participatory observation, the participant may be uncomfortable answering direct questions, the use of unstructured interviews permits the participant to be relaxed and comfortable whilst transferring data. The unstructured interview goes beyond spontaneous views in everyday life, the conversation generated becomes "*...a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge*" (Kvale 1996:6). The unstructured interview was the best way to engage in conversation and gain information with songket textile makers (Azizi 2006). A relationship of trust and empathy as makers revealed a wealth of shared knowledge which was communicated naturally.

Unstructured interviews may not happen only once with the same participant. Over a period of time many conversations may be generated upon the situations as they naturally occur (Visocky-O'Grady 2006). Many conversations and unstructured interviews with the same participants build up relationships of trust between the researcher and the participants. These relationships of trust also permit the researcher to analyse the validity of the data which she has collected.

During field research in Malaysia, unstructured and occasionally more formal interviews were conducted with songket textile makers, entrepreneurs, staff of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, museum curators, Malaysian culture specialists, and university academics. These provided an informal, yet directive, collection of data upon subjective and objective views upon the making and social contexts of the textiles; data was observed, considered, and documented.

Relationships:

As a participant observer the researcher became one of the songket textile makers, doing most things 'together', designing, weaving, travelling to work, eating, resting, shopping, singing to songs on the radio, joking,

acknowledging bureaucratic authority, even mourning was a shared experience. Relationships were formed with makers initially by showing the past practical work of the researcher as a designer and weaver. This further permitted a sharing of aspects of creative practice by both makers and the researcher as equals in the practice of making. By forming relationships, trust and respect was gained by the participant makers and the researcher. These relationships help eliminate fear and suspicion within the makers whilst being observed and provided more 'accurate' data to be accumulated (Burgess 1991).

In most instances the researcher was introduced to the participants to be observed and interviewed. This reduced the suspicions of the participants (Burgess 1991). Local songket textile makers were introduced to the researcher by songket textile specialist and academic Dr. Azizi Bahauddin, who had relatives who were rural makers. Other introductions were facilitated by the researcher's post as a visiting lecturer at the National Handicraft Institute. When the researcher was introduced by a local whom the participants trusted, this trust was passed on upon their reaction to the researcher.

Recording of Observation and Interviews:

Field notes and databases were used to record data upon visual collections and charts, to record the contexts of the research. Interviews which were more formal were able to be recorded. Conversations and unstructured interviews between makers and the researcher were not recorded. By introducing recording media, these conversations would have been unnatural and even restrained (Azizi 1999).

Analysis Indicators:

Indicators are the relationships between data collection and data analysis (Burgess 1991). The categories of indicators develop through a process of observation, analysis and interpretation. Data collected through field research is considered within theoretical contexts to form the indicators of analysis. Between data and concepts are 'plausible links' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:218). Developing indicators interpreted the meanings attached to events; they allowed data to be put into contexts and themes,

permitting an analysis. Analysis indicators were formed by 'navigational structures' (Visocky-O'Grady2006) upon the themes of making, training, historical textiles, contemporary textiles, creativity, technology, society, etc., and these indicators were further split into many further sub-indicators.

Triangulation:

Triangulation is a series of complementary methods of testing the validity of data; it is different accounts of the same scene (Burgess 1991 citing Webb 1966). Triangulation is the use of more than one methodology to acquire data. It is conducted by the researcher using differing research tools, such as observation, interaction, un-structured interviews, illustrations, plus creative practice. Observing rural weavers, urban weavers, trainee weavers and trainers, and using the researcher's own practice, provided a comparative viewpoint of the practice of songket textile making. The data collected by these methods were analysed alongside each other to determine its validity.

Investigator triangulation requires the research of more than one person to examine the same situation (Denzin 2000). By consulting different individuals such as makers, historians, academics, Malay culture and songket textile specialists upon the same situations and subjects, the researcher can gain a clearer picture of the validity of data obtained. Researchers in Malaysia who had examined the practices of Malay songket makers and songket textiles, Dr. Azizi Bahauddin, Dr. Norwani Nawawi, Dr. Ottman Yattim, Dr. Jamil, Abd. Aziz, Azah Aziz were questioned. The findings upon many categories of observation were either identical or similar within the triangulation of research (Burgess 1991). In field research entrepreneurs, makers, historians and academics are consulted regarding the same topics, which generated similar or dissimilar opinions. By conducting investigator triangulation the researcher will assimilate and analyse collective data, and reasoning for their fluctuation or accuracy. It also helps irradicate researcher distortion, caused by using only one person's investigation with informants.

Theory:

Theory reviewed in this investigation was paramount in informing the practical aspects of the research. Theory is used to direct the creative

practice and the transfer of technology. In particular, theories drawn from development, social sciences, and design are to be used. Amongst others, design studies by Pye (1978), Dormer (1997), and Buchanan and Margolin (1995) were informative upon the concept of design and making in craft studies. Development theories regarding the application of transferred technologies from culture to culture informed the practical aspect of the research in social and economic sensitivity within development practice. Literature of Schumacher (1993), Chambers (1983), and Dennis (1999) were highly informative regarding the role of 'practitioner' within technology transfer. Within the contexts of society and culture, literature reviewed includes that written by Westerners (including Americans) and that written by Malaysians in order to gain a more local understanding of socio-cultural contexts. This permits a comprehension by the researcher of the general and Malaysian specific social and cultural contexts in which the songket textile and its production resides. This knowledge of socio-cultural theory allowed the researcher to incorporate intellectual thought processes upon social and cultural relevance into her practice of making.

Within these thought processes are Gell's (1998) theories of *agency*, which are employed to ascertain the material properties of the textile which are socially representative of its form. These are material entities which are manifested through the maker in which Malaysian society identifies the textile. The form of the textile is investigated through the agency of its materials, technology and socio-cultural representation. Theories of agency permit the researcher to understand the 'force' the textile has within its material, technical and socio-cultural contexts. These contexts are further used by the researcher in her creative practice, when analysing and contextualising the alternative materiality and technology she will incorporate in making songket textiles.

Socio-cultural agency of the textiles form is also examined through objectivity. The form of the textile, its materials combined with technology which the maker produces by her practice, is objectified by society through *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). The differences between the objectification by Malaysian society and the researcher are analysed through the theories of habitus. These theories of objectification and habitus identify the differences, not only in their apprehension of the textile, but in how different makers

conduct their creative practice. By using theories of habitus the researcher is able to establish reasoning for the differences in the Malaysian songket makers and her own creative practice. Habitus and objectification play a part in the researcher's practice of making within this investigation. They permit the researcher to abstract between different forms of objectivity during making and understand why and how she conducts her practice.

Further theory examined, to a lesser extent, includes the technical processes of hand-weaving and songket textile weaving. Generic theory on the techniques used in hand-weaving is in the main quite dated but still very relevant. Within literature upon weaving techniques critical publications by Watson (1954), Black (1945), and Tovey (1965) provided a source of information for the practical contexts of alternative technology. These publications added to the existing knowledge of the researcher and provided practical instructions with which to conduct certain weaving techniques utilised in the research.

Publications upon the technique of songket textile weaving are provided by Malaysians Norwani (1989) and Selvanayagam (1990), which to date are the only publications upon the songket technique itself. These books were used by the researcher as an initial source of practical learning of the songket technique. The publication by Selvanayagam, complemented by Siti Zainol's (1997) book upon the cultural significance of Malay handicrafts, and historical texts written by British officials, whilst Malaysia was still a British colony, helped form the historical contexts of songket textiles material change and use.

Illustrations:

Illustrations and text are combined to demonstrate contextual analysis. This research is concerned with materiality, with the substance of the artefact, how it was made, and the aesthetic it provides, which is best demonstrated in a combination of visual and theoretical contexts. Using illustrations in describing complex technological operations used in the researchers practice, aids the reader to visually cognise the physical processes used. They also visually describe and aid the analysis and interpretation of the practices of making and creativity.

Illustrations are extensively used to visually depict the changes of the materiality, technology and socio-cultural objectification of the textile, through out its life cycle to date. Permission was gained to photograph and materially analyse the collections at National Museum Kuala Lumpur, State Museum Terengganu, Islamic Arts Museum Kuala Lumpur, Museum of Asian Art University of Malaya, and the private royal collection of Tengku Ismail Tengku Su.

Visual representation permits the thesis to describe the contemporary patterning and colour of the textiles which are now within the current genre of the textile. It permits the representation of the textiles forms; its motifs, patterns, compositions, and colour. Visuals of contemporary textiles were taken with the permission of the organisations and private companies concerned.

The Researcher:

As a Western maker, predominantly using hand-weaving techniques to produce textiles, the researcher has in her training and professional practice produced textiles according to varied design briefs. Her past training included a questioning and challenging of materials and techniques used within making. She has learnt to make decisions dependent upon aesthetics and the social representation and use of the textile. Her professional practice has included designing textiles for contemporary design studios in England and traditional hand-weaving industries in Nepal. She has also lectured upon design and hand-weaving in Britain, Nepal, and Malaysia.

The fact the researcher is female has aided this project. Songket textile makers are predominantly women and socio-cultural considerations upon communication between differing genders was not an issue. Being an experienced designer and weaver also facilitated the research. It permitted empathy between the researcher and the participant makers, empathy within the knowledge held and required by makers and weavers.

Researcher's Practice:

The researcher's practice is used in the research to produce 'informative' data, through "*...informance [sic] researchers can learn how the world works for others...researchers can change their attitudes and see values where they*

would not have otherwise imagined them" (McDaniel-Johnson 2003:39). The values informed by the researcher's making practice were the complex agencies and considerations within creativity, plus, the differences in material and technical influences between the creative practice of the researcher and that of the local makers. This data collected from "*Formative or exploratory research is used to gain insight into an area of study or help define a question*" (Visocky-O'Grady2006:20). The insight gained within this informative practice defined and questioned the agencies of materials, technology, economics, and society and culture within the materiality of the textile, the practice of the maker's, plus, consequently the relevance of the researcher's practice within making songket textiles.

Combining practice with participatory observation provides tacit knowledge, data that the researcher can not gain through observation and theory alone. This tacit knowledge informs the researcher of material and technical processes of the textile, information which she can extract directly and first hand without verbal questioning. This tacit knowledge upon making also aids the practical and creative decisions the researcher has to make. Decisions made were informed from a direct tacit source, as well as the contributions of others. Tacit knowledge was imperative when transferring technology within the songket textile making environment. It facilitated the researcher to make decisions upon which alternative technology could be appropriated technically, decisions upon which the local maker had little experience.

Practice was conducted by the researcher in the field at the National Handicraft Institute, and a private company, Mahkota Songket Sdn. Bhd. Plus, in her own making environment in the London studios of the Royal College of Art. Whilst conducting studio practice the researcher attended trade fairs in Milan and Paris to source alternative materials and gain aesthetic inspiration.

Chapter 1. A Weaving Practice in Context.

1.1 Introduction.

The theory outlined in this chapter is cross-disciplinary, consisting of development and social science literature, plus to a lesser extent design theory. It is reviewed according to its pertinence to creative practice, and as a vehicle of argument and persuasion within designing and making songket textiles, "*...concepts and methods [are] drawn from other disciplines to explore design*" (Buchanan and Margolin 1995:ix).

Transferring technology from one society and culture to another poses questions regarding its social and cultural appropriateness. Development theory was reviewed with reference to intermediate technology transfer, particularly within rural areas, where most of songket textile production takes place. Development theory advocates acquiring local formal and tacit knowledge within technological transfer, consisting of many contexts including technical, economic, and social. This formal and tacit knowledge will permit the external practitioner to work along side local makers and to test together the appropriateness of the technology. The maker gains the ability to make "*concrete practical connection among diverse bodies of formal and tacit knowledge*" (Buchanan and Margolin 1995:xii).

In conducting creative practice upon a social and cultural gendered textile, gaining local knowledge permits the maker to comprehend the social and cultural objectivity placed upon the textile's material form. Through theories of social science the maker can gain an insight into how transferring alternative technology not only changes the material form of the textile, but also can effect the human perception of its social representation, "*Making is the link between intension and expression, the interaction between practical and theoretic knowledge*" (Dormer 1994:10).

It is the local technical, economic, and social environments which posed questions upon the appropriateness of creativity through alternative materials and weaving techniques. Technical considerations of available materials, looms and equipment, economic concerns over the cost of implementation, and local socio-cultural perceptions and conceptions upon the materiality of the textile. These contexts proved to have interdependent relationships, hence, consideration of technological creativity and transfer

requires constant questioning and decision making by the maker during practice.

Formal knowledge is used to accomplish practical purposes. The combination of theoretical knowledge and practical action forms a field of enquiry “...*directed toward a better understanding of the ideas and methods lying behind design practice*” (Buchanan and Margolin 1995:ix). A common context within all the disciplines used is the ethical and moral consideration (upon the livelihood and material culture) of the local society and culture within creativity and technology transfer.

1.2 Development Theory.

Modern development theory is used in this project to direct the transfer of materials and technology to a society and culture different to that of the researcher. Since the conception of ‘Western technology transfer’ after the Second World War, differing theories have been used by development practitioners to transfer technology to other cultures and societies (Dennis 1999). Prior to the 1970s, development plans and theories were rooted in western ideology and industrial capitalism (Dennis 1999 citing Sachs 1992). Technology was transferred from one society and culture to another by using standardised procedures, with the focus being upon industrialisation and growth in GNP (Gross National Product) of that country (Dennis 1999). Local knowledge wasn’t considered, nor the effects of the transferred technology upon the local society or technical infrastructure (Schumacher 1993, Chambers 1983, Dennis 1999 citing Stewart 1990). This imposition of western ideals through technology caused many projects to fail in successfully transferring technology, or the local participants would revert back to genre once the project had finished and development practitioners had departed (Chambers 1983, Akrich 1993). The development practitioners lack of ‘appropriate’ knowledge of the local environment, economics, production methods, and society, rendered the technology ‘inappropriate’ (Dennis 1999).

Since the 1970s there has been a shift in the focus of technology transfer in development theories. In place of imported western technology, it was advocated that countries should foster the growth of “...*indigenous capacity building through the adaptation of technology to suit local*

conditions" (Dennis 1999 citing Stewart 1977, Fransman 1986, Leys 1996, and Kaplinsky 1990b). The 'Appropriate Technology Movement' became a growing force in these theories (Schumacher 1993) with the movement emerging more from practice than scholarly research (Eglash 2006). Appropriate technology emphasises the need to focus on the introduction of technology which considers local environments and resources. The considerations include local economics, topography, production methods, material and technical resources (Schumacher 1993, Dennis 1999 citing Stewart 1990).

The implementation of appropriate technology incorporated the use of local technology and knowledge, plus participation of local people. Dant (2005) cites Eglash's (2004) study of appropriate technology; he speaks of appropriation as 'reinterpretations, adaptations, and reinventions by users'. From this interaction an 'intermediate' technology strategy was devised. Intermediate technology, or alternative technology as it is sometimes termed, is seen as 'appropriate technology' which makes use of local resources (Schumacher 1993). Within intermediate technology projects, building the capacity of the knowledge and skills of local users were seen as an important part of the transfer (Dennis 1999 citing Fransman 1986). Stewart (1977), Saeed (1994), and Forbes (1995) are cited by Dennis when she discloses "*technology is not only products and processes. Technology is embedded in people; it is a human capability*" (Dennis 1999:35).

Development projects utilising intermediate technology strategies are individually designed to suit each environment (Dennis 1999), and focus upon small-scale rural production units, including craft and cottage industries. Schumacher (1993) advises it is important to maintain employment where the people live in the rural areas, rather than creating centralised employment in urban areas, where relocation causes over population. Dennis (1999) argues development of craft and cottage industries should not be judged upon economic efficiency and viability, but on their capacity to generate labour absorption and income provision. She further argues, craft and non-farm activities have "*...an important role to play both within the rural economy and within the economy as a whole and thus should be actively supported*" (Dennis 1999:39 citing Hart 1992).

Chambers (1983) argues the development practitioner has to gain knowledge of the local society and its environments, including the economic and production environments, permitting an understanding of the appropriateness of technology to be transferred. Chambers (1983) and Dant (2005) emphasise the importance of 'local knowledge' within development projects. Madu (1990) cited by Dennis (1999) articulates by gaining local knowledge the development practitioner can understand the social, cultural and environmental conditions of the technology users.

The intermediate technology introduced in this research project will utilise local technology and knowledge, permit interpretation and adaptation by local users, and present the local makers' experience of alternative creativity within practice. Technology introduced will include yarns and weave techniques which are appropriate to the local songket textile production environment. The vast majority of songket textile makers' work from home around family responsibilities, they are spatially dispersed within rural areas and use locally made hand-loom. The introduction of alternative yarns and weaving techniques which this project brings will work within local technology frameworks, permitting the local maker to adapt and modify the intermediate technology within their environment.

1.2.1 Local Appropriation and Adoption.

Dennis argues for intermediate or alternative technology to be successful it has to be 'adopted' by the local society it was developed for. She explains, "*For adoption to take place it was argued that technology needed to be made known to the users, accepted by them and integrated into existing production systems*" (Dennis 1999:53 citing Dudley 1993 and Barnett 1995). By exposing local makers to alternative yarns and weaving techniques 'appropriate' to local technological environments, the makers themselves will have the choice to adapt the technology to the textile "...*with socio-cultural criteria in mind*" (Dennis 1999:30).

Chambers (1983) stresses the importance of 'participation' by local users during a transfer of technology. By participation the local user is able to consider the rationality of the transfer, whether it is suitable for the existing resources, and whether it is ethically acceptable in a social and cultural context. Dennis (1999) argues unless users understand the material,

technical, or intellectual resources being transferred, problems would occur in the adoption and diffusion process. Dennis (1999) citing Dudley (1993) explains,

"For a new idea to be adopted it...must be clear what aspect of the idea is new within the context of existing knowledge and it must fit into the understood social fabric of responsibilities...Before anyone can evaluate and adopt an idea he or she has to know what it is...People only adopt ideas which they consider proper to people in their circumstances" (Dennis 1999:55).

Within the transfer of technology Chamber's (1983) advises the development practitioner should take the role of a 'provider of choice' to the local user and not a teacher or service provider who inflicts his/her ideals. Pratt and Loizos are also of this thought, they advise

"Shift the leadership of the project, and as much of the research work as possible from the non-local visitor to local makers themselves. In this way power to initiate and implement should shift away from the visitor towards the local maker" (Pratt and Loizos 1992:76).

Therefore, the role of the textile practitioner transferring technology should be that of a facilitator of creative change. The actual adoption of change should be instigated by the local maker. By gaining knowledge of and observing the adoption process, the external maker will experience the challenges and appropriateness of the technology transfer.

1.3 Local Infrastructures.

The technological transfer in this project will consider the local infrastructures within hand-woven songket textile production in Malaysia. Using alternative materials and techniques, the transfer will expand upon existing technology, demonstrating that the local technology is capable of much more than is currently utilised (Pye 1978). Stewart (1977), cited by Dennis (1999) argues *"The question of whether or not an 'efficient' alternative technology exists...can only be assessed within the context of a particular strategy"* (Stewart 1977:109). The strategy in this project is the 'resistance' (Eglash 2006) to alternative creative intervention within songket textiles technological, economic, and social environments. The traditional technology used in the production of songket textiles can be expanded

through the transfer of 'appropriate intermediate technology'. However, the appropriateness of this technology can only be assessed through the consideration by the maker of 'interconnected causal processes' (Dant 1995 citing Hughes 1983, 1987) impacting together as a system; the system that is songket textiles.

1.3.1 The 'System' of Songket Textiles.

The making of songket textiles is a 'system' in which yarns, technology, economics, socio-culture, and the maker are interdependent in a matrix of 'forces' (Ingold 2000). Pye (1978) argues, as makers "*We ought to remind ourselves that we are concerned with a whole system even if we are only able to effect [sic] the design of one component*" (Pye 1978:17). Referring to Cresswell (1993), Eglash (2006) notes "*...interrelated forces create 'resistance' to certain design trajectories*". He continues "*...change in one parameter then creates greater limitations in the variation possible in other parameters - and thus less room for accommodation*" (Eglash 2006:334). The contextual forces of yarns, technology, economics, and socio-culture form boundaries or challenges to creativity within the making of the textile, 'forcing' the maker to appropriate 'solutions' (Cross 1995) or reevaluate her practice. Creativity within making songket textiles is part of a system of questioning within contexts. Questioning the relevance of each yarn, weave technique, motif, pattern, and colour used, within its material, technical, economic and socio-cultural contexts. This questioning and answering becomes a dialogue of solutions; a causal 'force' in the mechanism of making songket textiles.

1.3.2 Agency.

Gell (1998) names this 'force' of the object or artefact, *agency*. Though he is predominantly analysing the agency of the object upon the subject, the term *agency* can also be used in the analysis of creativity in songket textiles upon the maker. Gell explains "*...objects are not 'self-sufficient' agents, but only secondary agents in conjunction with certain specific (human) associates*" (Gell 1998:17). Thomas (1998) agrees with Gell and argues, there are "*...multiple implications of agency in objects, 'an inseparable' transmission between them and actual human agents*" (Thomas 1998:ix).

Gell (1998) analyses the object as an agent in itself, the control and power it has over itself and its subject. According to Gell (1998) agency is *causation*, the agent *causes* the 'effect' to happen, whether that cause is by human or non-human agent. This process of causation brought about by agency effects a counterpart, this counterpart is termed *patient* by Gell (1998); the agent causes an effect upon the patient. However, he explains this agent and patient relationship is not static, the agent can become the patient and the patient can become the agent, dependent upon the cause and the effect. Gell argues "*The concept of agency I employ is relational and context-dependant, not classificatory and context free*" (Gell 1998:22).

Creativity within the making of songket textiles incorporates agent and patient relationships. Causes and effects are bound in interdependent relationships between the maker and the forces upon the form she is making. Objects and subjects have physical being in the world; it is only when they come together as agent - patient, or patient - agent, that they become active (Gell 1998). In this instance, the maker, as agent herself, has some control over the designing and weaving of the textile. However, she becomes the patient when constraints of the material *agencies* of her yarns, the technological *agency* of her equipment and weaving technique, plus economic considerations and the society for which she is making, come to the fore. Thomas draws upon Marilyn Strathern (1991) in arguing

"...actions and their effects are...not discrete expressions of individual will, but rather the outcomes of mediated practices in which agents and patients are implicated in complex ways" (Thomas:1998:iv).

The ways in which materials, technology, economics, and socio-culture are implicated within making songket textiles cannot be seen as individual agencies. They are all interconnected as agent and patient within different mechanisms of the system.

1.4 Materials, Technology, and Agency.

Materials and technology are 'self-determining systems' (Pye 1978), they are designed within the human mind as preconceived, intellectual solutions to particular problems (Ingold 2000). Yarns, looms and weaving techniques used by the maker are 'autonomous' in their capabilities and possibilities, projecting an agency upon the maker in her creative practice, as

such "*...the intentional actions of human beings are constrained to operate within whatever technological systems prevails*" (Dant 2005:40).

The autonomy of materials and technology arises as alternative yarns and weaving techniques are attempted upon the existing technological infrastructure of songket textile making. The current materials and technology are part of a 'tailored' framework where the yarns, loom, and the weaving technique used are interdependent. They are all aspects of the same system, and changes upon one aspect will affect the other (Eglash 2006). Within creativity, the interdependent relationships between materials and technology, are symptoms of 'cause and effect' (Gell 1998) upon the form of the textile and have an agency upon the maker.

These agencies consist of the 'compatibilities' between yarn densities and reeds, heddles, and the patterning technique, plus, the number of shafts available on the songket loom and weaving techniques. The long established songket loom and ancillary equipment create resistance within the density of alternative yarns and differing techniques to be introduced into making the textile. The definition, width and depth of each patterning motif created are determined by the density of its yarns. The autonomous agency of the songket loom causes 'constraints and challenges' (Pye 1978) to the maker, "*...choice and creativity are curtailed*" by existing technological systems (Dant 2005:40). The agency of songket technology causes the maker to become the patient in this relationship of cause and effect within creative practice (Gell 1998).

Initially technology appears to have autonomy over the maker, it is only when the maker uses his or her own autonomy in practice that a shift between agent and patient occurs. Dant (2005) citing Latour (1992) explains "*...humans and non-humans are intertwined in a set of relations that amount to a network in which it is difficult to identify precisely where the agency for actions lies*" (Dant 2005:80). Both technology and the maker have agency at different times; the maker as agent using the technology, technology as agent producing challenges and constraints.

This autonomous agency of technology upon the maker can be reversed, permitting the maker to become the agent, and technology the patient within creativity. In considering and accommodating local technology, the maker can overcome the technological resistance to alternative yarns and

techniques (Eglash 2006). Through the maker's skill and knowledge of cause and effect within materials and technology, the maker can manipulate the existing technological system. Between the maker, yarns and technology a 'dialogue' exists of 'consideration and decision making' (Borgmann 1995). By sampling and testing of yarns and techniques, the maker adapts to challenges "...through an active exploration of the possibilities afforded by the environment, in the choice of materials and structural supports" (Ingold 2000:67). Compatible yarn densities and techniques are appropriated by the maker by a process of conscious thought and deliberation, the idea of the maker is impressed upon the material (Ingold 2000). Through the role of the maker as agent and technology the patient, the makers 'freedom of choice' (Pye 1978) within creativity is only temporally curtailed. The technical appropriateness of transferred materials and technology is determined by the maker's ability to incorporate them into the local technological infrastructure (Dennis 1999).

1.5 Economics and Transferred Technology

Within the agency of local infrastructures is economics. To be economically appropriate, any transfer of technology has to be considered at the local economic level (Dennis 1999). This agency of economics upon the maker's creative practice refers to the financial cost of the transferred technology within the related contexts of materials, technology, production methods, and market spheres.

1.5.1 Commercial Commodities.

Even as luxury items songket textiles are commodities of commercial concern. As a commercial commodity³ the textiles have become "...*material representations of the capitalist mode of production*" (Appadurai 1986:7). When commodities are produced under capitalism they become endowed with an economic *agency* independent of their makers (Fry, 2005, Keane 2006). Profitability to the maker, entrepreneur or capitalist producer becomes an agency within the textiles production (Maznah 1996).

³ Appadurai (1986) explains that a commodity can also be a service supplied for monetary exchange.

1.5.2 Considerations of Economics in Market Spheres.

The different market spheres for songket textiles in Malaysia are reflected through the economic cost of production and financial cost to the consumer. Though all production is capitalistic in nature, the different markets are competing within different economies. Since the import of less-expensive songket textile replicas from India, Pakistan, and China within the past decade, the low-cost songket textile is now competing within a global as well as a local economy. The cost of the low-quality textiles are 'shadow priced' with imported ones (Dennis 1999 citing Morawetz 1974).

This economic competition is forced upon the low cost songket textile through the speed of jacquard production in these other countries which are producing the replicas. The low-cost hand-woven songket textile market is trying to compete with the speed of industrialised production. This is reflected within the Malay makers' creative practice within this low-cost textile, where speed and economics are paramount agencies within their designs. Creativity is dependent upon the 'cheapest way of doing things' (Pye 1978). A low cost textile is represented by the 'minimum conditions' in quality of materials, technical skill and decoration, which are more economical to produce (Pye 1978). The context of quality is overridden by quantity, using values that are tangible and measurable (Dennis 1999 citing Carmen 1996). In trying to compete with imported textiles, by lowering production and retail costs Maznah argues "*These products have been made more affordable with the down grading of their quality*" (Maznah 1996:173).

Challenging the speed of jacquard looms could be facilitated by Malaysian industrialisation of the textile, something which is being conducted on a small scale (see chapter four). However, this requires much financial investment (Dennis 1999) and drastic changes to production infrastructure, bearing in mind makers are spatially and rurally dispersed (Maznah 1996). A further consideration of industrialisation is the scale of the songket textile market. As a luxury commodity the textiles' consumption is much less than that of mass-produced commodities manufactured by industrialisation (Appadurai 1986).

Currently, the high-cost songket textile market is only competing within a local economy (apart from costs of imported yarns, which both markets have to consider). The production of the textile is still capitalistic in nature,

where speed of production and financial profit is a focus. However, skilled craftsmanship and high quality materials and decoration, plus the 'social value' of the textile, are paramount within its production. Creativity by the maker has to consider the economics of time, labour, materials and technology to compete within the local economy. However, the creativity within this high cost textile reflects local competition, which is based around agencies of high quality workmanship and skill.

1.5.3 Comparative Advantage.

The 'comparative advantage' of the high-cost and high-quality songket market is it does not compete with the low-cost, high speed production of industrialisation. It has the ability to utilise local labour, high quality materials and technical skill, without the competition from industrial manufacturing which produce lesser quality textiles. Use of local resources in the high-cost market contributes to labour absorption and the rural economy (Dennis 1999). Maznah argues "*...there is a need to preserve the aesthetic, hand-made, and cultural values of the products in order to up-lift their comparative advantage in the local...market*" (Maznah 1996:301).

It is this comparative advantage over low-cost production which leads to the reasoning for the implementation of 'intermediate and appropriate technology' to the high-cost and high-quality market. Technology transferred within this project will emphasise the use of human labour rather than the introduction of technology which requires *the sophisticated, "...highly capital-intensive technology of modern industry"* (Dennis 1999 citing Stewart 1979:83).

1.5.4 Economic Cost of Technology Transfer.

As the production of high-cost songket textiles incorporates a high volume of local human resources in labour, any costs within technology are kept to a minimum. Schumacher (1993) argues, the transfer of technology has to be economically efficient, requiring little financial outlay. The cost of alternative yarns and the conducting of alternative weaving techniques has to consider financial cost in their use and training (Dennis 1999 citing Stewart 1979). The alternative yarns and weaving techniques should be able to be

used without incurring excessive extra costs which are not 'appropriate' to the economic cost of production and consumption (Dennis 1999 citing Harroway 1996).

1.6 Theoretical Approaches to Society.

Dennis (1999) advocates technology transfers within other cultures is about providing a choice for the local society; a choice that is offered and may be appropriated. If and how that transfer is appropriated depends upon greater questions of society and culture.

To examine the social and cultural agencies upon the maker, theories upon the relationships between subjects and objects are drawn from social science. There are pluralistic and dualistic approaches to the discourse on subjects and objects. German idealist philosopher, Immanuel Kant, can be classed among the pluralists, claiming metaphysical reality was a part of the plural nature of subject and object. Kant's philosophical enquiry into the 'Possibility of Objects', written into his 'Critique of Pure Reason' in 1781, provides a metaphysical approach to the object by means of an analysis of representation. The meaning of representation for Kant is an element of cognition, it is "*...anything subjective that can play a role in composing a judgement or knowledge*" Gardner (1999:29). Kant took the pluralist approach that objects were independent from the subject; they were representations of reality, and the only way in which our mind could form a relationship with reality (Gardner 1999). Kant also argued 'experiential history and cognitive capabilities of subjects' actively allowed subjects to 'know' objects, yet this "*...has nothing to do, essentially [to do with] what it is to be an object*" (Gardner 1999:38). Kant theorises an object is "*...independent of any epistemological conditions*" and "*...is simply an individual that has being and a constitution*" (Gardner 1999:38).

Heidegger in his work 'Poetry, Language, Thought' (1975), also takes a pluralist and metaphysical approach to the subject and object debate. He draws from Kant and treats objects and subjects as individual entities, claiming an object is a 'thing-in-itself', meaning an object exists independently of any relation to a knowing subject, and 'thing-for-us', meaning the same object knowable by us (Heidegger 1975). To Heidegger

an object is a representation which *"...runs its course in the self consciousness of the human ego"* (Heidegger 1975:174-5).

It is dualist approaches which are more popularly used in modern social theories, bridging the gap *"...between the culture of things and modernity's human subject"* (Brown 2001:13 citing Simmel 1909). Dualism defines the entities of the subject and object as separate, two definitive entities, yet they are intrinsically bound by a relationship which is social.

A social relationship between an object and subject is represented by the subject's inclination to relate to objects as things. For an object to become a thing there has to be a *"...projection of an idea...an idea of an encounter"* (Brown 2001:4 citing Ponge 1972, Derrida 1978, and Nabokov 1972). It is the ideas and perceptions of subjects upon engaging with objects which render the object a thing. The 'thingness' of a thing is excessive to its material form and use, it is *"Temporalized as the before and after of the object"* (Brown 2001:5). As a 'thing', the object cannot be treated as an individual and independent entity; as a thing, it now embodies a social relationship (Brown 2001).

Dualist Gell (1998) suggests, though separate, the subject has traditionally ascribed a determining role. He treats subjects and objects as separate and equals in agency, yet argues, *"... it is only in social engagement that the agency arises"* (Miller 2005:11 citing Gell 1998). Miller (2005) speaks of transcending dualism, referring to the subject and object relationship as the subject, object, and social relationship. Tilley argues *"...objects...objectify the self, they are extensions of the self, yet they are separate and can never be fully encompassed by the self"* (Tilley 2006:64). Dualism emphasises the relationship between the non-material and the material, the *"...a priori apposition of subject and object"* (Keane 2006:199). It is a dualist approach which is emphasised within this project, analysing the agency within yarns and techniques, which form the materiality of the textile, and their socio-cultural relationships.

1.6.1 Social and Cultural Agency

The way in which Malay society perceives and values the material context of songket textiles has an agency upon the maker. The textiles yarns, motifs, compositions, colour, weave structures and techniques, are

more than material, technical, economic, and aesthetic considerations (Buchanan and Margolin 1995); they are embedded in questions of cultural and social value. Dant argues “...*the material world is not distinct from the social world and nor can material entities be treated as in any simple way distinct from human ones*” (Dant 2005:82). Social and cultural contexts have an agency upon the materiality⁴ of the textile, and hence, upon the maker.

During making practice the relational dialogues between songket textiles materiality and Malay society switch between agent and patient. The maker takes part in these relational dialogues between the social and the material, through a questioning of the agency within the physical properties of the textile and the social properties of representation. This dialogue of questioning and answering has a bearing upon creativity within the textile, and it is through this dialogue that decisions upon material creativity are made. Upon the importance of social representation Ireland argues “*Few designers today have the luxury of creating their own vision with no input from others. If they desire to attract and delight...audiences for their work, they need to understand the...[society] for whom they design*” (Ireland 2003:22).

1.6.2 Material Representation

The social agent and patient relationships encountered by the maker in creative practice are the material representations of the textile. These are the yarns, surfaces, patterns, and colours of the textile; its visual and tactile properties (Tilley 2006). Creativity within the textile is more than “...*mere decoration or embellishment*” (Buchanan and Margolin 1995:x), creativity incorporates the material properties, which have become visually recognised representations of the textile, “...*representations of and for subjects*” (Keane 2006:198). Gell (1998) articulates, the objects agency is transmitted upon the subject by material ‘indexes’⁵ (sic) of recognition “...*understood simply as material entities which motivate inferences, responses or interpretations*” (Pinney and Thomas 2001:4 citing Gell).

⁴ The materiality of songket textiles refers to tangible and physical elements which can be seen and touched; surfaces and patterns which are formed through yarns and technology. Materiality refers to “...*the fleshy, corporeal and physical, as opposed to spiritual, ideal and value-laden aspects of human existence*” (Tilley 2006:3).

⁵ Gell (1998) refers to multiple index as indexes.

'Indexes of recognition' are causes of agent and patient relationships within the making of songket textiles. Just as any artefact indexes its origins in the activity of a maker, "*...it also indexes its reception by a public, the public it was primarily made for*" (Gell 1998:24). Miller explains convention "*...orients us towards some things and some resemblances and not others, constraining and inviting possible ways of acting*" (Miller 2005:31). Keane adds "*Resemblance, however, can only be with respect to certain features...Determining what features count towards resemblance commonly involves larger questions of social values and authority.*" (Keane 2005:190). Keane explains it is through 'expectation and acceptance' brought about by the past, which determines interpretation (Miller 2005).

Selecting alternative yarns and weaving techniques for the songket textile, effecting the indexes of recognition, poses dialogues of 'cause and effect' (Gell 1998) upon the maker. Though the maker is "*...immediately causally responsible for the existence and characteristics of index*" (Thomas 1998:ix), determining which elements of the textile's materiality will be created upon, is suggested by questioning between agent and patient. How much agency does the maker have over the recognisable material indexes, and how much agency do the recognisable material indexes have over the maker? Citing Elaine Scarry (1985), Attfield (2000) remarks on this questioning, "*...the object is only a fulcrum or lever across which the force of creation moves back onto the human site and remakes the makers*" (Attfield 2000:17).

It is a consideration for the maker and Malay society to make judgement upon which material properties have to be present, and in what form they are present, to materially represent the textile. Gell explains the thing made should resemble that thing 'enough' to be recognisable as a 'depiction or model of it'. Gell argues

"It is true that some 'representations' are very schematic, but only very few visual features of the entity being depicted need to be present in order to motivate abduction from the index as to the appearance (in a much more completely specified form) of the entity depicted" (Gell 1998:25).

Changes in surface and decoration, through alternative yarns and weaving techniques, challenges the socio-cultural indexes of recognition within the materiality of the textile.

1.6.3 Objectification

Societies recognise material indexes through objectivity; the result of a dialectical relationship between the materiality of the object and the perception of the subject (Tilley 2006:61). Objectification can be considered as the personal, social and cultural values, people and society place upon a material object. Keane (2006) argues,

"The very concept of objectification, in dialectical analysis in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition is one in which the outcomes of active processes congeal as so many static entities, appearing as mere givens within the experienced world" (Keane 2006:197).

It is the dialectics of objectification between subject and object which is represented by the materiality of the textile (Miller 2005). Objectification is not consciously debated, it is an automatic response as part of our being, as a part of our social and cultural life and experiences (Tilley 2006). The social subject *"is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning. Because his actions and works are the product of a 'modus operandi'⁶ of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery"* (Bourdieu 1977:79).

To understand the process of objectification as the subject's way of 'acting' towards objects in the practice of their daily lives, we turn to Bourdieu (1977) and 'habitus'. It is habitus which Bourdieu claims is the *"...precondition for all objectification"* (Bourdieu 1977:86). How an object is objectified is considered dependent upon the habitus of the subject, which is culturally and socially dependent. Bourdieu (1977), in his work titled 'Outline of a Theory of Practice' argues social practices are conducted in a series of structures which the subject has learnt automatically within the society and culture of which they are a part. He calls these structures *habitus*, which are 'regulated and regular, without obedience to any conscious rules' (Bourdieu 1977). The structures of habitus are not calculated by the subject, they are unconsciously adapted and *"...collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor."* (Bourdieu 1977:72).

The 'second nature' of Habitus, Bourdieu argues, is the unconscious histories the subject has forgotten, the practices which are determined by *"...past conditions which have produced the principle of their production."*

⁶ Modus operandi is 'a way of unconscious and automatic acting'.

(Bourdieu 1977:72). It is these past conditions, in all their collectiveness, which form the habitus. He considers habitus as subjective, but not individual, systems of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same social group (Bourdieu 1977). The structures of *habitus* are second nature and accepted, only being challenged when the *habitus* of an individual or group encounters a differing experience (Bourdieu 1977). It is the differing experience, caused by the incorporation of alternative materiality (through alternative yarns and weaving techniques) to the textile, which will challenge conceptions and perceptions within the textiles objectivity by Malay society.

1.6.4 Differences in Cultures and Societies

Objectification, developed through habitus and experience, may differ from society to society and culture to culture, "*A habitus and way of objectification of one group can differ from another*" (Bourdieu 1977:95). Songket textiles material indexes of recognition are recognised by a collective Malay society through objectification. As a member of a differing society and culture, the external maker instigating creativity may objectify songket textiles materiality differently to Malay society. Only by gaining knowledge upon this Malay objectivity can the maker challenge it, making informed decisions upon creativity and its effects. Thomas (1991) cited by Tilley argues "*...things to which local people attach no particular importance can be regarded as resonant of local distinctiveness or badges of identity by outsiders.*" (Tilley 2006:70).

It is through socio-cultural habitus and objectivity that differences appear in the makers' approach to creativity. Makers from differing societies and cultures have different perceptions and conceptions upon material and technical creativity. Within creativity, "*The perception of things for an individual from one society...will be the perception of things inhabited and animated; for an individual from another society things will be inert instruments, objects of possession*" (Brown 2001, citing Castoriadis 1975:334-5). It is the perception of the songket textile as an 'inhabited and animated' object which causes agency upon creativity within its material form. These are the 'signifying' properties within materiality, not only its

indexes of recognition, but also the 'socio-cultural symbolism which objectivity resonates' (Tilley 2006).

1.6.5 Symbolism.

An object 'speaks' silently of personal, social, or cultural values to the subject. These are values of objectification which are realised through social interaction with material 'things', "*Personal, social and cultural identity is embodied in our persons and objectified in our things.*" (Tilley 2006:61). The object, as a social thing, can materialise social and cosmological structures, provide memories and attachment, sensory feelings and concepts (Keane 2006:201). They accumulate spiritual significance through "...*association with ancestors and mythical events*" and connect "...*humans with the world of spirits and divinities...Given as gifts, objects compel reciprocity because the spirit of the giver is embodied in them, adding moral weight*" (Schneider 2006:204 citing Mauss 1923-4). Translating knowledge of an ancestral past, the object is "...*powerful and active in relation to persons in the present*" (Tilley 2006:66 citing Morphy 1991). An artefact⁷ may also objectify the place where it was made or acquired: "*The artefact can thus be a place, a landscape, a story or an event.*" (Tilley 2006:70). Schneider (2006) argues textiles in particular provide sensory desire, rituals, sexuality, gender, status, prestige, a sense of worthiness or empowerment, exchange, identity, politics, religion, consumerism, the future (by means of a wedding trousseau). She concludes, textiles "...*encode biographies, memories, and histories of past owners*" and constitute "...*a tangible sense of social reality*" (Schneider 2006:204-6).

Songket textiles surfaces, motifs and patterns created through materials, technology and the maker, symbolise social and cultural meanings to Malay society. Just as the songket textile names itself as a material thing, it also provides 'a name for the emotions and symbolism it signs' (Brown 2001). The objectification of songket textiles has an agency upon the subject, by mediating perceptions and experiences (Keane 2006). Its agency manifests itself by signifying the *sign*, the *symbolism* of the object. The object "...*make[s] manifest what otherwise might be hidden or obscure.*" (Miller 2005:28). Songket textiles are a material and tangible representation

⁷ Object made or altered by human hand.

of semiotic symbolism; the materiality of the textile 'organises and clarifies' abstract signs and concepts to Malay society (Keane 2006).

It is the conceptions, emotions, and symbolism which Malay society experiences in the objectification of the textile which concerns the maker in creative practice. It is through objectified things, that societies express values, ideas and distinctions (Tilley 2006). The subjective symbolism of songket textiles materiality may challenge the maker in the transfer of materials and technology and creativity within the textile. The symbolism of the textile is an agency upon the maker. What the textile 'does' socially and culturally causes dialogues between 'agent and patient' in her creative practice (Gell 1998).

1.6.6 Space and Time.

Through time and space an object's social representation can change from society to society and from culture to culture. Historical objects and artefacts indicate the social and cultural societies in time and space. Citing Bourdieu, Tilley argues

"...socio-cultural practices do not take place in space and in time but create the space-time in which they go on. Space-time is thus action objectified in relation to a system of value." (Tilley 2006:69 citing Bourdieu 1986).

The objectification of an object or artefact is present at the stage of production, but whether that objectification remains the same throughout the object's life-cycle is dependent upon the 'dynamics' of culture and society (Azizi 1999). The symbolism which songket textiles materiality represents has a temporal durability (Keane 2006), *"The category to which a thing belongs, the emotion and judgement it prompts, and narrative it recalls, are all historically refigured"* (Brown 2001:9). Objectification of the textile has changed throughout its life-cycle, along with its materiality and technology. Though the maker may consider objectification as agency upon creativity, the maker may have agency over objectification by instigating change in the textiles material representation. Tilley argues

"Things change their meaning through their life-cycles and according to the way they are used and appropriated and in the manner in which

individuals or groups identify themselves with them." (Tilley 2006:71 citing Miller 1987).

The materiality of songket textiles embody a narrative, disclosing a history of Malaysian society and culture, of politics and economics, of materials and technology, and the textile in its current material and social context. We can look through the materiality of the textile to see what its material form represents to Malay society. The creation of form transforms 'self-consciousness into consciousness', "*We cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in the material mirror, which is the historical world created by those who lived before us*" (Miller 2005:8-9). The textiles current materiality and social representation is an assimilation of past dynamic (Borgmann 1995). By looking through the textiles materiality, technology, and social representation throughout its life-cycle so far, the maker can make more informed decisions upon creativity (Brown 2001).

1.7 Summary.

Using practices advocated through development theories, the external maker defines the transfer of technology upon the local technical, economic, and social environments. The transfer of technology is more likely to be adopted if local users of the technology are involved in the implementation process. Acquiring local knowledge upon these contexts will provide the maker with further insight as to whether the technology transfer will be 'appropriate' to the local environment and users. Interconnected causal processes within the system of making songket textiles, have an agency within its resistance to technical creativity. The maker has to counteract this agency by challenging through questioning and informed decision making in practice.

The songket loom and its related equipment are part of a tailored system which has an agency upon the use of alternative yarns. The agency of economics within the transfer of alternative technology includes the financial considerations of materials, technology, production methods, and market spheres. Technology introduced in this project will focus upon the local market and economy, where quality in materials and skill is the main competition. The agency of society and culture upon the maker's creative practice is analysed through theories of social science. It is a dual context

which is used to define the social relationships between the subject and object. Contexts such as material recognition, objectification, and representation are reviewed to assess their impact upon the making of songket textiles. Through varied social and political events and scientific inventions, the materiality of the textile, its socio-cultural representation, and agency upon the local makers practice has changed. The current material form of the textile is a combination of old and new making practices. The next chapter will identify these changes to analyse the concept of past and current creativity within songket textiles.

Chapter 2. Traditional and Contemporary Songket.

2.1 Introduction.

The materiality, technology, and socio-cultural context of songket textiles have changed over many generations, due to politics, economics, and science. This chapter visually and theoretically analyses material, technical, and socio-cultural changes and influences, from the textile's origin to the present date. By assessing what has gone before, one can gain a greater understanding of current and future forms (Fry 1995, Borgmann 1995). As Gell (1998) cited by Gosden argues, "*...the forms things have taken constrain and direct the creation of new forms.*" (Gosden 2006:430)

The material changes which have taken place have been gradual, technically adaptable and socially accepted. Yet, there has also been great continuity within properties of the textiles materiality. Through their constant material presence these properties are identified as the textiles 'material indexes of social recognition' (Gell 1998). Gosden argues,

"...people exist in a world made up of forms which are spatially and temporally complex. Material culture changes through time at rates slower than the replacement of human generations, but also exists in a field of complicated links of form and decoration" (Gosden 2006:436).

It is these indexes of materiality which signify the socio-cultural objectivity of the textile. Yet objectivity is temporal and the social and cultural values embedded within the textiles materiality have changed with time. Politics and economics within Malaysia since its independence in 1957 have elevated the socio-cultural 'value' (Buchanan and Margolin 1995) of the cloth. The semiotic properties which the textiles materiality signs are an essential consideration within the maker's creative practice.

Within the appraisal of the textiles technology and socio-cultural objectification, contexts are uncovered which form an *agency* upon the songket textile maker: an *agency* which affects her creativity upon the textiles materiality. It is these agencies which have provided past and present material form to songket textiles

2.2. Songket Origins.

Songket textiles have been woven by Malay women⁸ throughout the Southeast Asian archipelago for many centuries (Sheppard 1986). The textiles are still woven today in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Thailand, with regional variations in patterning and technique. Malaysia's current geographical boundaries have only been present since independence from Britain in 1957 (Windstedt 1981). Therefore, in assessing songket textiles' origin it is necessary to consider the textile history of songket textiles in the archipelago as a whole, see figure 2.1.

Songket textiles influences were introduced to Southeast Asia through trade routes in the region between India and China (Maxwell 1990). Local weaving in the Malay Archipelago was particularly stimulated by this trade during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Azizi 1999, Selvanayagam 1990, Sheppard 1949 and 1972). Songket textiles origins lie in the influences of the Indian double ikat patola cloths which were imported and traded in the region for use by Malay royalty and aristocracy, see figure 2.2 (Maxwell 1990, Gittinger 1985, Norwani 1989, Azizi 1999). As well as Indian patterns, the trade cloths, as they became known, would also depict Southeast Asian motifs and designs (Maxwell 1990). Citing Bühler (1959), Maxwell articulates,

'While most attention has been focused on the obvious and important impact that trade cloth designs had on Southeast Asian textiles, there is a strong indication that Southeast Asian motifs and designs, including those of indigenous textiles, were reproduced on certain Indian trade cloths intended for the Southeast Asian market' (1990:210).

Azizi (1999) argues the date when songket weaving actually started in what is now Malaysia is still in dispute. The initial songket weaving centres are known to have been in Palembang and Jambi now in Indonesia and Patani in southern Thailand (Gittinger 2005, Windstedt 1925). Through intermarriage and migration, weaving centres were later set up in Terengganu and Kelantan, which are now a part of northeast coast Malaysia,

"People in Terengganu say songket technology came to them from India via Palembang and Jambi, whereas those in Kelantan point to Cambodia and

⁸ It is documented that men made looms and equipment and sometimes designed patterns, but not that men ever wove songket textiles.

Thailand by way of Patani in southern Thailand as their source." (Gittinger 2005:26).

Palace weaving centres, patronised by Malay royalty, were set up at coastal ports along the Southeast Asian Archipelago, including Terengganu and Kelantan in Malaysia, see figure 2.3 (Maxwell 1990). Gittinger (2005) claims weaving in Kelantan can be traced back to 1610, and in Terengganu from the early eighteenth century. Textiles woven at these centres, included weft ikat patterned cloths, known in Malaysia as kain limar or kain limau, and songket cloths which were fully covered with intricate, gold thread supplementary weft designs⁹, see figures 2.4 and 2.5. A combination of kain limar and songket was also produced, named songket limar, which had an all over weft ikat design embellished with scattered gold thread designs on the surface, or, a central ikat design with intricate gold thread designs at both ends of the cloth, see figure 2.6. Imported Indian hand spun silk¹⁰ and pure gold yarns were used at these centres, plus natural dyes from the local region. The technical skills were influenced by Indian immigrants (Selvanayagam 1990 citing Buhler 1959). As gold¹¹ has always been a symbol of wealth in Southeast Asia (Maxwell 1990) songket and songket limar textiles were seen as another prestige fabric, in addition to the Indian trade cloths. The textiles were used mainly as apparel by Malay royalty to symbolise rank and wealth, and would be given as gifts to court members (Gittinger 2005).

There is no history or evidence documented to substantiate that songket textiles were ever sacred cloths. Maxwell in her exhaustive study of historic Southeast Asian textiles documents a lack of ceremonial activity and *"...perceived physical and spiritual dangers"* (Maxwell 1990:144) surrounding the making of these textiles or in the preparation of their dyestuffs, unlike

⁹ Prior to the import of Indian textiles and the silk yarns, the earliest weaving decoration within Southeast Asia was warp orientated, including warp stripes, warp ikat and supplementary warp weaving, woven on back-strap tension looms. Weft patterning did exist, but it was the time of Indic influence in the region, which saw a majority change to weft patterning within woven cloth (Maxwell 1990:154-8).

¹⁰ Silk, though originating in China, was introduced to Southeast Asia by Indian traders Chinese traders also brought silk and cotton textiles, and their raw fibres and yarns, to the region. However, their textiles did not influence the Southeast Asian weaving, and Chinese silk yarns were not used by the weavers until much later (Maxwell 1990:162-3).

¹¹ Gold as a symbol of significant economic and social status throughout ancient civilisation was first documented in 4000BC (Mehta 1997, Green 2001).

the sacred textiles produced in that region. Though the textiles were used in rituals and ceremonies, Maxwell (1990) argues their use was not for any spiritual reason, the textiles were simply revered for their aesthetic beauty and the financial prosperity which they portrayed of the wearer.

2.3 Songket Uses.

Originally Songket textiles were worn only by royalty and court members¹². They would be used as formal apparel at life rite ceremonies such as marriage, circumcision, a baby's first hair cutting. They would also be used at the installation of important leaders and religious celebrations, see figure 2.7 (Maxwell 1990). Commoners were not allowed to own the textiles unless they had been given as gifts by royalty, and then they were only allowed to wear them in the palace or its grounds, see figure 2.8 (Maxwell 1990, Selvanayagam 1990, Norwani 1989). These rules eventually relaxed, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century commoners were allowed to wear songket apparel for one day only, their wedding day (Maxwell 1990, Selvanayagam 1990). Now all of society can wear songket textiles, usually reserved for adult use due to their expense, they are used for formal occasions, as well as life rite and religious celebrations. However, there is still protocol as to how many songket textiles a commoner can wear in the presence of royalty and aristocracy (Tengku Ismail 2006). The textiles are also used to a lesser extent as furnishings, such as bed covers and cushions covers, see figure 2.9. Songket as clothing was originally worn as wrapped garments, secured by knots and belts, see figure 2.10. However, with the issues of 'modesty in dress' within Islam¹³, the nineteenth and twentieth century saw garments, such as tunics, unbuttoned jackets and trousers being made, see figure 2.11 (Winstedt 1981). See table 2.1 for details of songket textiles uses.

As table 2.1 indicates several of the historical uses of songket textiles have remained to this day, along with many other uses introduced in the twentieth century. Songket apparel which has remained in use for women

¹² Whilst the nobility wore the locally woven ikat and imported Indian cloth, common people in coastal regions wore locally made simple cotton cloth.

¹³ Islam began to be spread throughout the Malay Peninsula in the 13th to 16th centuries by traders from India, Persia and the Middle-East).

consists of the baju kurung, kebaya leboh, sarong, and to a lesser extent, the selandang. For men the baju melayu, samping, seluar panjang, bengkong, and tengkolok have remained in use. However, full formal attires such as these would only be used by the bride and groom for their wedding, see figure 2.11 (Selvanayagam 1990). For other formal and religious ceremonies a woman would normally wear a plain fabric baju kurung or kebaya leboh, worn with songket sarong, along with a selandang. Men would wear plain fabric baju melayu and matching loose trousers with a songket samping. However, it is still protocol for royalty to wear full songket apparel when in attendance at palace ceremonies or functions (Selvanayagam 1990, Tengku Ismail 2006). Though many of the uses of songket textiles for furnishings have ceased to be used, new uses have been developed with less formal connotations, such as wall hangings and personal accessories, such as handbags and shoes, see figure 2.12.

2.3.1 Gender and Use.

When wearing songket samping a male always wears the kapala (highly decorative vertical band), the most revered part of the textile to the rear, see figure 2.13, however, when females wear the songket sarong, there are several suppositions on where she should place the kapala. Azah Aziz (2006) advised that the position of the kepala on the sarong is concerned with a woman's marital status. Azah claims an unmarried woman should wear the kapala at the front to protect her honour, whilst a married woman would wear the kapala at the back. However, this protocol is no longer followed; most women wear the kapala at the front, see figure 2.13, as it is normally the most highly decorated section of the songket sarong (Hill 1949, Azah Aziz 2006).

In modern Malaysia, it is men who wear songket textiles more than women. At formal functions, were a man will traditionally wear a samping, he will wear a songket samping rather than an undecorated one. A woman however has more choice, she can choose from a baju kurung and sarong made from songket textiles, patterned batik or some other luxurious fabric. Men's songket samping can be highly decorated, with floral patterns and pastel colours, see figure 2.14. Flugel (1930) cited by Carter (2003) claims in

traditional societies man's attire is highly decorated and eye-catching as a means of exhibiting man's narcissism.

2.4 Materiality.

The materiality of songket textiles includes the material form of the textile and the materials used which produce this form. Within this materiality lie the indexes of recognition, which identify this textile as songket. Compositions, patterns, motifs, and colour, alongside the properties of the textiles yarns, have produced an aesthetic which has changed quite dramatically over the past two centuries. Yet the recognisable indexes remain those material characteristics which Malay society recognises as being crucial to the textiles materiality. Reasoning for material changes have been political, economic, and socio-cultural, as Malay society becomes more influenced by consumerism and external forces (Williamson 2007). Today, songket textiles materiality consists of an amalgamation of historic traditional compositions and motifs combined with contemporary creative influences within patterning, colour, and yarns.

2.4.1 Composition.

In the songket textiles that are produced today, many of the historical patterning compositions have continued to be used (Selvanayagam 1990). These are evident in the sarong, sampang, and selandang, see figure 2.15 for composition structures (Selvanayagam 1990). Songket textiles which do not have specific structural compositions are usually tailored or stitched together and made from lengths of patterned songket cloth. Though songket textiles today are not deemed sacred cloths by Malay society (Norwani 1989, Maxwell 1990), there are oral accounts of past historical cosmological reasoning within the compositional structures. Azizi (1999) and Othman (2005) claim the compositions relate to the Malay spiritual belief systems which were assimilated over two thousand years of Animist, Hindu-Buddhist, and finally, Islamic ideologies (Azizi 1999). Azizi explains the composition of the sarong and sampang, include cosmological reasoning of 'mans place in the universe and mans relationship with God', see appendix 2.1. It is cosmic relationships within designs that Marcia Ascher (1991) claims design elements from the past are maintained within an objects patterning.

Azizi argues there is a hierarchy within the compositional divisions of a songket sarong, samping and selendang: the kapala being the most important part of the sarong or samping design, followed by the badan, tepi kain, and pengapit kapala. Within the selendang the hierarchy consists of punca, followed by badan, tepi kain, and pengapit badan, see figure 2.15 (Azizi 1999). Songket historian Azah Aziz (2006) and researcher Azizi Bahauddin (1999) both acknowledge that even though these structures are recognised by songket textile consumers, many weavers and wearers of songket textiles are unaware of their past symbolic meanings.

Whilst the compositions have remained constant within songket textiles, sizes of the individual structures and borders have changed through out the years. This is most notable in the size of the tepi kain of the samping, which has increased in depth from approximately 10cm to 25cm, due apparently to consumer taste (Azah Aziz 2006). The width of the kapala of the samping and sarong, has decreased from 90cm to 50cm (Selvanayagam 1990), due possibly to consumer taste or less work for the weaver of this intricately patterned part of the structure. The greatest change in the past five years is to the composition of the samping. Though most samping continue to be produced using the traditional structure, a few exclusive producers, such as Wan Manang Songket Sdn. Bhd. and Ateequah Songket Sdn. Bhd. are providing songket samping which have the badan split into two width ways. The two halves are then patterned differently, allowing the samping to be worn two different ways, which gives the impression that the owner has two different sampings, see figure 2.16.

The longevity of compositional structures, their continued use even with slight changes in scale, identifies them as indexes by which Malay society recognises the textiles material form. This was confirmed by interviews in Malaysia between myself and songket makers, craft specialists, and academics (Izan 2006, Noriah 2006, Azah 2006, Norwani 2006, Zuraidah 2006). All interviewed advised a textile produced without the structural compositions of sarong, samping or selendang would not be accepted by Malay consumers. Within such items of apparel "...they [compositional structures] *have to be there*" (Izan 2006).

2.4.2 Pattern Design.

Though compositions have remained, their patterning has changed through out the centuries. Until the late twentieth century songket textiles patterns consisted only of motifs woven geometrically within its compositional structures. These geometric patterns are still used today. There are four types of geometric patterning used within songket design, symmetrical reflection and rotation, scaling, and translation or sliding (Siti Zainol 1997, Eglash 1999).

Symmetrical reflection is present in the ever constant 'mirror images' of the compositions on the sarong, sampang, and selandang. On these songket textiles the patterns are symmetrically reflected once the weaver has completed half way across the cloth, see figure 2.17. Within the badan and kapala of the sampang and sarong composition, as with other songket textiles, motif forms are symmetrically rotated by varying degrees to build the pattern within the composition, see Figure 2.18. Scaling of the motifs, whereby motifs are increased or decreased in size is performed to compose motifs within the structure, see figure 2.19. The translation of motifs, whereby motifs are rotated, reflected, and repeatedly woven across the body of the cloth, is the main component of songket's geometric patterning, see figure 2.20.

Malay culture and songket textile authority, Siti Zanol Ismail, explains it is the "*linear nature of hand-weaving that lends itself to songkets past and present geometric patterning*", and not the arabesque influence of Islam (Siti Zainol 1997:18-22). She claims geometric patterning was in existence in Southeast Asia long before the coming of Islam, and it was the Dong-son culture of the Bronze Age which predominantly influenced geometric patterning in Southeast Asia (Siti Zainol 1997, Azizi 1999, Othman 2006). Islamic geometric patterning differs visually and philosophically, from the symmetrical geometric patterns of songket textiles (Siti Zainol 1997). Islamic geometric art is derived from the circular form, and is a reflection of the belief systems of the solar cycle (Critchlow 1976).

The earliest historical songket sarongs and sampangs which have remained have compositions fully decorated with geometric patterning, named *kain benang mas*, see figure 2.21. Hill argues the *kain benang mas* are the "*Most brilliant and gorgeous of all the k. songket*" (Hill 1949:83).

Sevanayagam (1990) and Azizah (2006) also agree these are the most superior of songket textiles; they required much more skilled workmanship and creativity than less patterned songket textiles. In kain benang mas, the three main structures of the sarong and samping, the kepala, badan, and tepi kain would have differing geometric patterns and motifs. The kepala would be the most intricately patterned of the three structures, and would always consist of the pucuk rebung or lawi ayam motifs (see motif section of this chapter), which resemble isosceles triangles, as well as further smaller motifs. The patterns of the badan were composed in single or half drop repeats within continuous diagonal rhomboid (diamond shape) patterning, see figure 2.22. The tepi kain would consist of continuous, narrow vertical patterns. Later songket textile pieces, still depict these three separate patterning structures fully covered with decoration, and motifs in the badan are also composed in horizontal and vertical stripes, checker board, chevron, and scattered patterns, see figure 2.23 (Selvanayagam 1990).

More recently there have been several notable changes to the patterning of the badan of the songket sarong and samping. In the 1980s songket designer Norwani Nawawi, then working for the Malaysian Government funded National Handicraft Corporation, designed a songket sarong with a badan decorated with a sole floral motif which extended across the whole of the badan structures, see figure 2.24. This design was taken up commercially by Master Craftswoman Hjh. Habibah bt. Hj. Zikri and is now incorporated into the designs of many high quality songket retailers (Norwani 2006). The introduction of this large floral design in the 1980's influenced songket designers to produce more experimental patterning structures in the badan and kepala of the sarong and samping. There are no rules as to which patterns belong to which gender. Both men and women will wear a songket sarong or samping, which is full or sparsely decorated with pattern. Only the shorter length of the samping will denote if it is for male or female use.

Early selandangs were also composed of fully decorated geometric patterns within its three main compositional structures of punca, badan and tepi kain, see figure 2.25. Like its counterparts the sarong and samping, later pieces in the early twentieth century began to include horizontal stripes, chevron and scattered patterns. Selvanayagam (1990) claims the punca of the modern selandang is much less decorated than in previous years, see

figure 2.26. She argues “*There is [now] total freedom in the creation of patterns*” (selvanayagam 1990:57). The patterns within the telongkok, bengkong and kain lapek structures have changed little. When they are woven, which is very infrequently these days, they are either fully decorated with geometric patterns or isolated scattered designs.

A visible change to songket textiles patterning was during World War II when there was a shortage of yarns and time for songket makers to weave¹⁴. Due to these weaving conditions, the patterning within the composition structure of the sarong, sampung and selendang became sparser and simpler, with some parts of the composition being empty of patterning, see figure 2.27. These less decorated or scattered patterned songket textiles are still woven today, alongside textiles full of pattern.

Pattern structures which have recently evolved for badan designs include curved trellises of continuous floral motifs and abstract positioning of motifs, see figure 2.28. A very recent development of patterning the badan of the sampung and sarong is by Myriam Atelier Sdn. Bhd. The designer of this company produces songket textiles which have woven floral motifs, which are then painted upon with freehand drawings, see figure 2.29.

2.4.3 Motif Design.

The motifs used within the supplementary weft of traditional songket textiles can be found on other Malay hand-made crafts such as wood carving, batik, and pottery (Azizi 1999). The historical motifs used within these crafts are influenced by Dong-son culture which existed in the Southeast Asian archipelago around 300 century BC (Siti Zainol 1997, Azizi 1998, Mohamad Najib 1997, Othman 2005). This is substantiated by the discovery of four bronze circular drums from the Dong-son era found in peninsula Malaysia between 1944 and 1965, see figure 2.30 (Siti Zainol 1997, Sheppard 1986, Maxwell 1990). The drums depict designs of rhomboid and triangles and the influences of these shapes can be seen in today’s motifs, see figure 2.31. (Selvanayagam 1990).

¹⁴ During the Japanese occupation of Malaysia in World War II it was dangerous for women to be alone weaving outside their home (Abd Aziz Rashid 2006, Selvanayagam 1990).

Academic Azizi Bahauddin (1999) argues traditional songket motifs depict the assimilation of Animist, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic ideologies, generated by the early communities which settled in the archipelago. Maxwell (1990) also accredits Hindu-Buddhist influences to motifs found on textiles, including songket, within the Southeast Asian archipelago.

"...the beliefs of the Malay people interacted with several religious beliefs before coming to Islamic belief. Myths and superstitious beliefs starting in the animist and Hindu-Buddhist periods became intertwined with the Islamic religious beliefs" (Azizi 2003:10).

Though this symbolism of traditional songket motifs is well known by academics, most Malays, including younger weavers, are not aware of the symbolic concepts which are attributed to the motifs (Azah Aziz 2006, Azizi 1999, Norwani 1989, Selvanayagam 1990, Siti Zainol 1997).

As songket textiles motifs are considered cultural property (Siti Zainol 1997), and there are no copyrights in place (Norwani 2006), many designers and weavers copy from traditional songket pieces. Designer Tengku Ismail of The House of Tengku Ismail, has regularly reused motifs and designs taken from his private collection of antique songket textiles. Many motifs such as Pucuk Rebung (bamboo shoot), Teluk Berantai (Chain of Bays), Lawi Ayam (cockerel's tail feathers), and Tempuk Manggis (Mangosteen), can be seen again and again on songket textiles, see figure 2.32. Traditional motifs are still popular, woven along side newly created motifs.

2.4.3.1 Motifs and Creative Influences.

Norwani (1989) states there are over one hundred songket motifs in existence and new motifs are continually introduced by designers. All songket textile motifs are derived from the local and natural environment (Siti Zainol 1997, Azah Aziz 2006, Selvanayagam 1990, Norwani 1989, Halimatun 2003). Othman explains

"The close relationship between the Malay society and its surrounding[s] has existed for a long time where numerous discoveries in knowledge, understanding and beliefs have been made" (Othman 2005:10).

Songket motifs, traditional and modern, can be divided into the following seven categories: flora; fauna; plants; fruits; objects; food; animals, see figure 2.33 (Azizi 1999, Othman 2005). Though Islam rejects

the portrayal of human beings and animals within art as this could be depicted as worship of the object¹⁵, animal motif forms are abstracted, as are objects and foods, see figure 2.34 (Azizi 1999, Siti Zainol 1997, Selvanayagam 1990). There are also calligraphic motifs which are used to depict religious Islamic texts, which would not be used for songket apparel, but woven as wall hangings (Azah Aziz 2006).

Floral motifs are particularly dominant in songket textiles, past and present (Siti Zainol 1997). Both men and women will wear songket textiles decorated with floral motifs (Noriah 2006, Azah Aziz 2006, Azizah 2006). In his research of the songket motifs, Azizi (1999) defined oral histories which identify particular motifs with a gender status. However, he does not specify that these motifs should only be used for a particular gender of wearer. On songket motifs Azizi argues,

"The songket motifs are both the 'material' and 'non-material' of a Malay culture manifestation...They embody the thoughts and ideas of the Malay culture represented in the richness of oral traditions. Moreover, the motifs symbolise the etiquette of the Malay portrayed in the pattering of the motifs, highlighting and urging the unity of the people" (Azizi 1999:56).

2.4.3.2 Motif Composition.

Selvanayagam (1990) argues certain motifs can only appear in particular structures of the sarong, sampang, and selandang, and should not appear elsewhere in the composition. These include the pucuk rebung (bamboo shoot) and lawi ayam (cockerel's tail feathers), which are normally found only in the kapala of the sarong and sampang, and the punca of the selandang, see figure 2.32. Motifs within the kapala of the songket sarong and sampang, along with the punca of the selandang, are traditionally the most decorated sections of the textile (Selvanayagam 1990). Therefore this is normally reserved for the most prestigious motifs. For Malay people, the pucuk rebung, shaped similar to an isosceles triangle, is the most highly regarded of all the songket motifs (Norwani 1989, Siti Zainol 1997, Azizi 1999, Othman 2005). Oral histories and historical Malay texts indicate the importance of the bamboo plant within Malay life, and the growth of the plant

¹⁵ The two rules of Islamic ideologies are written in the Qur'an and the Al-Hadis, the lifestyle of the Prophet Mohamad (Azizi 1999).

is associated with human development (Azizi 1999). These are not the only two motifs found in the kapala of the sarong and samping. Motifs which also exist in the rest of the composition structures may be used, such as rhomboid shapes, narrow or broad diagonal stripes, chevrons, and linked geometric repeats, see figure 2.35 (Selvanayagam 1990).

2.4.3.3 Motif Scale.

Traditional songket textiles motifs were of varied scales from 2cm to 10cm, often joined together to make a continuous pattern within the compositional structures. When the textiles patterning became simpler during and post the Second World War, the scale of the individual motifs also changed (Abd. Aziz 2006, Tengku Ismail 2006). To compensate for the lack of patterning in the textiles, motifs woven were of a large scale, measuring up to 20 cm in height or width, see figure 2.36. Though this scale of patterning was only popular for a decade or so, it paved the way for motif scales to change in the future. The scale of motifs is dependant upon the type of songket textile to be woven. In sarong, samping and selandang motif size is restricted to the formal sizes of their compositional structures. In these pieces motif sizes can range from 0.5 to over 30 centimetres in width and height. Different scales of motifs may be used alongside each other within the same composition, see figure 2.37 (Selvanayagam 1990). The traditional pucuk rebung motif measures 15-18 cm in height and the lawi ayam measures 15-20 cm in height, both motifs are 7-8 cm in width at base. The measurements of these two motifs have become shorter than their traditional counterparts, and can now measure as little as 8 centimetres in height, see figure 2.38 (Selvanayagam 1990). In the contemporary motifs used since the 1980s, a motif can stretch across the whole badan of the cloth, see figure 2.28. If the songket textile is to be woven as a wall hanging and is large in size, then the only limitation is the width of the loom and the imagination of the designer. When motifs are copied by designers and weavers, they are generally duplicated in scale.

2.4.4 Materials.

Malaysia has mostly relied upon imported yarns for its songket textile production. In the past gold was mined in the Southeast Asian region, and a

small amount of gold gimp yarns (a yarn with a central core around which another yarn is wrapped) were produced for local use in songket weaving (Maxwell 1990). An attempt was made to cultivate cotton and sericulture between 1890 and 1900s but was abandoned with no documented reason (Maznah 1996). Sericulture was then re-attempted in the 1920s but failed due to a shortage of labour (Maznah 1996). In 1972 the Department of Agriculture directed a sericulture production unit to be developed in Tersat (37 kilometres from Terengganu) where soil conditions were adequate for mulberry production. It was 1980 before the unit, Ajil Agricultural Station, was producing significant amounts (150 metric tons per year) of silk yarn. The Federal government had financially invested nine million Malaysian Ringgit into the unit and the aim of the project was to produce plain silk cloth, woven by machine looms at another government center in Chendering, near to Terengganu. This plain cloth would then be exported to Japan, Korea, Italy, and other western markets that were experiencing labour shortage (Maznah 1996). There was never any mention in the project of an intention to supply local songket textile makers with the silk yarn produced at the unit. The sericulture unit is now closed, a local songket retailer explains "*...the silk cocoons produced in Malaysia did not render as much silk as those produced in China, therefore the project was not economically feasible*" (Nik 2006). There have been no further attempts of sericulture in Malaysia by government agencies or in a private capacity.

The various yarns which have been used in songket textile weaving throughout the centuries are evident in the historic and modern pieces owned by private collectors and museums in Malaysia. The yarns used can be divided into ground cloth yarns and supplementary weft¹⁶ yarns.

2.4.4.1 Ground Cloth Yarns.

All ground cloth yarns which have been used, past and present, provide the textile with a smooth surface, enhancing its formal appearance, a material index which is representational of songket textiles (Azaah Aziz 2006). Visual evidence depicts three types of ground cloth yarns have been used in songket textiles over the past two centuries, (earlier songket textiles

¹⁶ Supplementary weft is a weaving technique in which ornamental weft threads are woven in between two regular weft threads to create designs and motifs.

do not exist in Malaysia). It is documented that hand-spun single ply silk was the first yarn to be used in weaving the textile, see figure 2.39 (Maxwell 1990, Sheppard 1949, Selvanayagam 1990, Norwani 1989). Maxwell (1990) claims hand-spun silk yarns were brought into the Southeast Asian archipelago by Indian sea traders after the first century AD (Maxwell 1990). Documentation of silk yarns brought into the archipelago is provided by Sheppard, who claims silk to be used in Malaysian textiles was brought into the Southeast Asian regions from China, via Indian sea traders, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Sheppard 1949). Evidence of an Indian influence is in the name for silk in Malay, *sutera*, derived from the Sanskrit word for silk, 'sutra' (Maxwell 1990).

Silk was the sole ground cloth yarn to be used in songket textiles for many centuries, and is still used today in high quality songket textiles. The silk used in songket textiles since the early twentieth century till the present date, is of a machine twisted form. It has an even density and is much finer than the previous hand-spun silk yarns. The silk yarns used currently are two ply silk yarn in counts (internationally recognised yarn sizes) 2/120¹⁷ and 2/140, see figure 2.40.

According to Maznah (1990) cotton yarn was used for the ground cloth of songket textiles early in the twentieth century and it is documented by Maxwell (1990) that cotton yarn cotton was imported into the Southeast Asian region for centuries. However, there is no visual evidence in private and museum collections of cotton yarn being used in songket textiles. Further lack of evidence of cotton yarns being used in the textile is endorsed by Skeat (1902) who in his research of the songket industry of 1902, reported that although cotton yarn was available, it was not utilised by songket weavers.

Since the 1980s Chinese polyester yarn (Siti Halimah 2006), which is much less expensive than silk has also been used in songket textiles, see figure 2.41. The two-ply polyester yarn is of a similar density to the current silk yarns used. Though it has allowed songket textiles to become less expensive and more economically available to the Malaysian population, it

¹⁷ The recent introduction of the 2/120 count silk is due to its slightly less expensive cost, rather than any aesthetic consideration (TCB Batik and Songket Sdn. Bhd., 2006))

has caused degeneration in the finished quality of the cloth (Azah Aziz 2006). Polyester songket textiles are woven more dense and heavier than silk textiles and don't drape as well.

2.4.4.2 Supplementary Weft Yarns.

Gold has always been a symbol of wealth in Southeast Asia and was first documented in 4000BC as a symbol of significant economic and social status throughout ancient civilisation (Mehta 1997). Real gold supplementary weft yarns were the first yarns to be used in songket textiles patterning (Maxwell 1990, Selvanayagam 1990, Norwani 1990). Silver was soon added alongside gold as a supplementary weft yarn. The gold and silver yarns were the yarns used for Malaysian¹⁸ songket textiles supplementary weft patterning for centuries, see figure 2.42. Flattened real gold or silver strips tightly wrapped around a core yarn of cotton, were brought into the archipelago by Indian traders (Maxwell 1990, Siti Zainol 1997). The density of these hand spun yarns varied, from less than one millimetre to two millimetres, see figure 2.43. A problem with these hand-spun gimp yarns was their tendency to be damaged during wearing. The gold strips wrapping the cotton core would weaken and split, revealing the yellow cotton underneath, see figure 2.44. During the late 19th century machine-spun gold and silver yarns were introduced to songket textiles production. The machine-spun yarns were half the density of the hand-spun yarns, see figure 2.45, and two ply's of the yarn were used to replace a single ply of the hand-spun yarn.

Synthetic gold and silver metallic yarns, imported from India, were introduced to songket weaving in the early twentieth century (Maznah 1996). These less expensive synthetic yarns gradually replaced the real gold and silver yarns. These were machine spun gimp yarns, similar to the original gold and silver yarns, but smoother and with an even density, see figure 2.46 (Fisk 1959). Fisk notes in his research of 1959 that eleven distinct brands of synthetic metallic yarns of varying qualities are used within the songket industry. Complaints of the 'new' yarns by weavers and middlemen at the time included *"...some types lose their lustre very quickly, and most tarnish, some very much more so than others"* (Fisk 1959:59). In order to

¹⁸ In other regions, now Thailand and Indonesia, coloured silk yarns were used for supplementary weft.

introduce a metallic yarn which did not tarnish or lose its lustre, Fisk (1959) details the introduction of a flat metallic yarn to the industry. The local term for this yarn is 'kalingkan' (tinsel), it was inexpensive and used by young weavers who were just beginning to learn songket weaving, see figure 2.47 (Selvanayagam 1990, Azah Aziz 2006, Azizah 2006). Though the introduction of this yarn was described in Fisk's report as a 'success' (he does not explain his definition of success), he also details that the yarn is more difficult to weave than the round (gimp) yarns and *"...for that reason is by no means perfect answer to the needs of the industry"* (Fisk 1959:59-60). Fisk continues *"...the search for other non-tarnishable metallic threads continues"* (Fisk 1959:60). Historic songket textiles utilising 'kalingkan' metallic yarn are not commonly found and it would appear that it was the gold and silver gimp yarns that continued to be used in songket textile weaving. The synthetic metallic yarns used today are imported from Japan and China and do not appear to tarnish.

Continuing use of gold and silver coloured metallic yarns, even though synthetic, retain the cloth's symbolism as a cloth of expense and wealth. The more metallic yarns within a songket textile, the more esteemed and valuable the cloth is perceived (Maxwell 1990). According to songket textile specialists and producers, a songket textile must contain metallic yarns, even a minimal amount, to be discerned a songket textile (Hassan 2006, Izan 2006, Azizah 2006, Azah Aziz 2006). The metallic supplementary weft yarns are a further material index of the textiles representation to Malay society. Without metallic yarn patterning, the textile is not representational of songket. All supplementary weft yarns now used by songket producers and weavers are a synthetic metallic. The exception is songket textiles woven at the House of Tengku Ismail. Though it is now a commercial concern, it is the only remaining songket production still patronised by royalty. This songket producer uses nine carat gold and sterling silver yarns, imported from Lyon in France, for supplementary weft patterning.

The synthetic metallic supplementary weft yarns used in songket textile production today consist of gimp and supported yarns in a wide range of colours. The polyester supported metallic yarns are a very recent introduction to Malaysian songket weaving. They were initially imported from England and introduced by the researcher whilst working as a visiting

lecturer at the Malaysian National Handicraft Institute in 2003 (see chapter five), see figure 2.48. Since this introduction the yarns are now imported from China and for sale by the private Malaysian company Mahkota Songket Sdn. Bhd. These supported yarns are softer than the gimp yarns currently used, and being more expensive, only used on high quality silk songket textiles. Using the supported yarns provides the motifs with a more subtle metallic sheen compared to the gimp yarns, and are available in a wide range of metallic and coordinating polyester colours, see figure 2.48. The densities of the supported metallic yarns vary; this variation is compensated by weavers, who incorporate two strands of the yarn to replace one strand of gimp yarn.

2.4.5 Colour.

The colour of songket textiles is formed through a coordination of ground cloth and supplementary weft yarn colours. The introduction of synthetic dyes in the early twentieth century and coloured metallic yarns in the 1980s brought new colour combinations to the textiles. The colour yellow within songket textiles is documented to be reserved for royal use only, and no one, even sultans and sultanas, should wear yellow songket apparel in the presence of the king or queen of Malaysia (Selvanayagam 1990, Norwani 2006, Tengku Ismail 2006).

2.4.5.1 Ground Cloth Colours.

The colour of songket textiles ground cloth has varied over the centuries; the earliest textiles were of a single dark red or maroon colour, see figure 2.49. Both Bühler (1941) and Maxwell (1990) claim the natural dye used to create this colour was *morinda citrifolia* which was native to Southeast Asia. However, other colours of natural dye were available at that time, as songket limar textiles consisted of colours such as light green, yellow, indigo blue, black, and orange, see figure 2.50 (Skeat 1902). Songket textiles dating back to the late nineteenth century include coloured striped and checked patterning, with dark red still being the dominant colour, see figure 2.51. In Hill's (1949) report of the hand-weaving industry in Terengganu he claims 'common' colours used within weaving are: mauves (including crimson); blues; greens (including turquoise); yellow (including

lemon yellow and royal yellow); browns (including orange and chocolate brown); reds (including scarlet, blood red and maroon). Hill explains patterns were produced using pale pastel shades of greys, pinks and white in simple check patterns "*...the weaver follows the pattern on the warp in two or more identical or harmonising colours*" (Hill,1949:82).

It was the introduction of synthetic dyes in the early twentieth century which really changed the colours of songket textiles. Ground cloths began to consist of bright colours, which were colourfast to sun light and easier to prepare, see figure 2.52 (Selvanayagam 1991). As well as single colours, songket textiles were produced in differing coloured checks and stripes¹⁹. The introduction of pre-dyed polyester yarns in the 1990s allowed designers and weavers to experiment with further colour ranges (Siti Halimah 2006). The colour combinations of contemporary songket textiles of silk or polyester ground cloth can be strikingly bright, fuchsia pink, turquoise, purple, and lime green, see figure 2.53, in contrast to the traditional dark indigo and deep maroon. Van Wijk (1959) cited by Young hypothesises "*...societies near the equator focus more on brightness in their lexicon, whereas those from higher latitudes he claimed, are more interested in hue*" (Young 2006:176). Yet songket textiles produced in black or white are still popular in the current markets.

There are no 'rules' as to which colours are suitable for each gender. Both men and women will wear songket apparel of pastel or bright hues. However black is usually reserved for men (Azah 2006). Colour, argues Young (2006), is an 'encultured' construct. What is significant by colour in one culture is not necessarily the same significance for another, as Young claims "*A conventional Western sense of colour is highly biased and based on ideas of aesthetics*" (Young 2006:174). According to Malay cultural specialist Siti Zainol Ismail (1997) colour is symbolically representative to Malays. She gives the example of white representing 'purity and light'. In Malaysia, shades of colours are named after plants and nature (Azah Aziz 2006, Norwani 1989, Selvanayagam 1990). For example, 'the red of the blood of the fish', 'the green of the banana shoot', 'the green of the head of the duck', 'the yellow of the skin of the langsats fruit', 'the yellow of the ripe areca nut',

¹⁹ During World War II ground cloths reverted back to single colours to save time (Abd Aziz 2006).

'the yellow of the crab's fat', and so on (Selvanayagam 1990). During my field practice with Malay songket textile makers, I noticed further cultural colour definitions in the terms used for light and dark colours. The textile makers defined a light colour as 'soft' or 'slow', and a dark colour 'strong', for example 'soft blue' or 'strong green' (Izan 2006). This adds to Young's statement, "...there is no universal linguistic term for what we understand by colour" (Young 2006:176).

2.4.5.2 Supplementary Weft Colours.

Up until the 1980s the colours of supplementary gimp weft yarns, whether natural or synthetic, were gold and silver. Though mentioned as having "...possible scope for introduction" in Fisk's evaluation of the industry in 1959, a wider range of colours of synthetic metallic yarns were not introduced to songket textile making until the 1980s (Fisk 1959:59). Different colours of metallic gimp yarns were introduced by designer Norwani Nawawi, then working as a songket textile designer for the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (Norwani 2006). The coloured metallic yarns popularity increased due to their use by Master Craftswoman songket textile maker Hjh. Habibah bt. Hj. Zikri. These coloured gimp yarns are still used today, along with the coloured polyester supported metallic yarns introduced by the researcher in 2003, see figure 2.53. Metallic yarns in current songket production include the traditional gold and silver, but the coloured yarns are most popular, with a single textile containing up to eight different colours of metallic yarns, see figure 2.54 (Noriah 2006). However, coloured metallic yarns have been met with some resistance from traditionalists who feel the coloured yarns degenerate the textile, preferring only the gold and silver coloured metallic yarns to be woven as songket motifs, claiming that that the textiles are "*more beautiful*" (Azah Aziz 2006).

The coloured metallic gimp yarns, though used for almost thirty years are still known as 'contemporary' in the songket textile industry (Azah Aziz 2006, Izan 2006). Is this because they differentiate the textile from the 'traditional' gold and silver supplementary patterning? It begs the question of the importance of space and time within 'contemporary' and how 'old' a material, such as these gimp yarns can be, yet still remain contemporary.

2.5 Technology.

The technology used in songket weaving, such as the loom, ancillary equipment, and dyes have changed over the past two hundred years, by the introduction of metal reeds, nylon heddles and synthetic dyes. Yet the technique of supplementary weft patterning, the most time consuming part of the textiles production has remained, see appendix 2.2. Changes within technology have not been radical and the processes of songket production are almost as time-consuming as they always were. Reasoning as to why these technologies have not been rapidly developed is that songket weaving, and any employment deemed 'women's' work, were not included in Malaysia's development plans until the 1980s (Maznah 1996). In fact Maznah (1996) claims 'women per se', were not included in government development plans until the 1980s. In his report of the songket industry of 1959, Fisk explains the lack of technical development within the traditional songket loom is because of a lack of local knowledge, "*The only experts available-to-date have been skilled Malayan weavers, who have no knowledge or experience beyond that gained on the local looms already in use*" (Fisk 1959:61). However, it may be this continuity in traditional technology which has allowed the songket technique to endure. As Malaysian songket textile makers still use imperial measurements, a legacy of British colonisation, these will be used where necessary in the following text.

2.5.1 Songket Hand-loom and Ancillary Equipment.

The origin of the songket frame-loom used to hand produce songket textiles is not certain. It is thought to have migrated from India or China to Southeast Asia, particularly to Patani in then Siam (Thailand), and then migrated to Malaya (Malaysia) (Selvanayagam 1990). The songket loom currently used resembles images of the loom from the early twentieth century; in fact many looms from the early twentieth century are still used in songket textile production, see figure 2.55. The traditional songket loom in Malaysia is locally made by craftsmen (Halimaton 2003) and consists of a large wooden framed structure, which measures approximately 2 metres in length, 1.2 metres in height, and 1.5 metres in width, see figure 2.56 (Hill 1949). A later introduction, a narrower loom measuring 60 centimetres in width was thought to be used for trainee weavers. It is the width of the loom

which denotes the width of the cloth produced. The loom contains no screws, and its structure is kept taught by the insertion of wooden pegs. Though easy to reassemble, once constructed the looms are rarely dismantled and remain in the same positioning for years, either at the side or underneath the raised stilted houses (Selvanayagam 1990). The hard-wood loom consists of a single flat warp board, guides and tension beam, cloth beam, two heddle frames, two treadles, reed, and finally, a bench for the weaver see figure 2.56.

The flat warping board positioned at the back of the loom has not changed in dimension or shape at all and can hold up to 60 metres of warp yarn, enough for 24 sarongs (Selvanayagam 1990). It is the reed and the heddles which have changed, and then only since around the 1980's (Norwani 1989, Selvanayagam 1990, Halimatun 2003). Traditional reeds were made of a bamboo structure, with dents made with langkap (*Arenga Obtusifolia*) wood shavings, see figure 2.57 (Hill 1949, Fisk 1959). These reeds still exist, but are gradually being replaced by stronger steel reeds imported from Thailand, see figure 2.58. The number of dents per inch has not been changed however, and 40 dents to the inch are standard throughout the industry (Halimatun 2003).

Due to the size 40 reed, 80 heddles to the inch are standard within songket production (Norwani 1989, Selvanayagam 1990). Heddles on the songket loom are hand-made and were originally made of cotton yarn (Norwani 2006). In the 1980's they began to be replaced by a strong twisted nylon cord (count 210D/6), which due to its tensile strength is now preferred to hand-made heddles, see figure 2.59. The looms heddles are flexible, and carry much agency within the songket patterning technique. It is this flexibility which permits the lifting of individual, and groups of warp ends, where supplementary weft insertion is required for patterning.

2.5.2 Hand-weaving Technique.

The continuity of technique, though an oral account, is thought to date back to the beginnings of songket weaving well over two centuries ago (Fisk 1957, Norwani 2006, Selvanayagam 1990). Changes to the songket techniques are minimal, with the exception of pattern drafting, designs which were once only carried in the mind of the maker are now documented on

paper or computer. Songket textile weaving techniques include weaving a plain ground cloth incorporating previously drawn or drafted, leash controlled supplementary weft patterning.

2.5.2.1 Plain Weave structure.

The ground cloth of early songket textiles and those of high quality which are hand-woven today are of a 'square set' plain weave, having the same number of warp yarns per inch as weft yarns, see figure 2.60 (Halimaton 2005). A woven square set creates a strong weave structure with equal strengths in both warp and weft (Tidball, 1961).

A square set weave is rarely seen in the lower quality polyester songket textiles today, as the majority of hand-weavers try to speed up the weaving process, and will use two threads in each weft pick, see figure 2.61. When a songket weaver incorporates the two weft picks in this way, she beats down each pick very firmly in order to slide the two yarns between the warp threads. This renders the finished cloth denser and stiffer than the cloths woven with single weft picks. This utilisation of two threads in each weft pick to save time was first conducted in Malaysian silk songket textiles, which were woven during and just after World War II (Abd Aziz 2006, Tengku Ismail 2006).

2.5.2.2 Pattern Drafting.

A songket textile design normally contains patterns which negate careful compositional planning. Due to the technique involved in weaving the patterns, this planning has to be conducted prior to commencing weaving²⁰. In the past, the supplementary weft patterns of songket textiles were woven from memory or by copying from a previously woven cloth²¹ (Azah Aziz 2006, Hill 1948, Gullick 1952). Planning of patterns today is conducted by drawing the motifs and compositions using squared graph paper and pencil, see figure 2.62. Only the part of the design which requires supplementary weft thread is drafted on the chart, negative space is omitted.

²⁰ Hill in his report of 1949 documents that the patterning of a songket textile is "set out during the arrangement of the warp" (Hill 1949:81).

²¹ In 1957 Fisk documents that 95 per cent of weavers in Terengganu were illiterate (Fisk 1959:36).

A more recent development in the drafting of designs is the use of computers. This computerised pattern drafting is very rudimentary and quite an ingenious use of simple software. It consists of using the 'paint' function of 'Microsoft Windows' software. Using the software to produce design charts allows the designer to produce a motif composition much quicker, due to the speed of the 'copy' and 'paste' functions. The designer can copy motifs to create repeat patterns, and quickly rotate and invert images to form geometric compositions, see figure 2.63. Unlike computer aided design (CAD) utilised in textile design in western practice (Braddock-Clarke and O'Mahoney 2005), using the software has not influenced the form of the motifs or compositions currently designed.

2.5.2.3 Patterning Technique.

The patterning technique requires skill and accuracy in numerical calculations of warp yarns. Each lift of a set of warp threads for the insertion of a supplementary weft thread has to be set into groups of leashes prior to weaving, see figure 2.64. Setting of the leashes is time consuming and must be extremely accurate, as it is these leashes which will form the motif patterns whilst weaving (Gullick 1952, Fisk 1959). Using a previously drafted chart, each set of warp yarns for a single leash has to be manually counted across the width of the warp by the designer or weaver until every horizontal line of the chart has been completed, see appendix 2.2.

In the weaving of Malaysian songket motifs the metallic supplementary weft thread passes over either three (tekat tiga) or five (tekat lima) warp threads on the uppermost side of the cloth. This is then 'fixed' into the base of the cloth by a single warp thread. The repetition of yarns floating over three or five warp ends provide the 'form' of the textiles motifs and patterns, and defines east coast Malaysian songket from other Southeast Asian songket textiles, whose floats can contain up to nine warp ends, see figure 2.65 (Selvanayagam 1990, Azah Azizi 2006 , Siti Halimah 2003). The tekat tiga and lima technique is a recognised material index of Malay songket textiles²² and can be seen in the most ancient of Malaysian songket textiles.

²² Some historic songket textiles have been woven in Malaysia, yet contain motifs where the supplementary weft has floated over more than five warp ends. These

Today's songket textiles still contain these ratios, using three warp ends for silk textiles and five warp ends for polyester textiles. Supplementary weft patterns which float over three warp ends are said to produce the highest quality motifs as more intricate and delicate forms within motifs can be formed, see figure 2.66 (Azah Aziz 2006, Halimatun 2003). This is only conducted in silk songket textiles as they can command a higher price for the completed cloth²³. A Malaysian songket textile would not normally contain supplementary weft patterning which would float over a combination of three and five warp ends within the same cloth.

2.5.3 Cloth Finishes.

When the weaving of a songket textile is complete and removed from the loom, it is not cut unless it is to be made into tailored apparel or furnishings. The two selvage²⁴ of the songket textile are not hemmed or cut, and will remain visible in most part when worn. A songket textile is never washed; it is only aired to remove stale odours. In the past this was probably due to the unknown dye-fast properties which the yarns contained, plus, the use of gold yarns. Even now the dye-fastness of the yarns is not known, nor is the washable properties of the synthetic metallic yarns.

In the past a technique known as 'gerus', was used on songket textiles. Its aim was to provide a smooth shiny surface to the woven fibres of the textile, see figure 2.67 (Wan Yahaya 2004). The technique incorporated applying a small amount of wax to the ground cloth surface and then rubbing the wax with a cowry shell. Care needed to be taken not to rub the gold or silver metallic yarns, as this would rub away the precious metal, and in many instances the ground cloth yarns were weakened by over vigorous rubbing (Azah Aziz 2006). The 'gerus' technique has not been in use since the early twentieth century).

were probably woven by immigrants from Patani (Thailand) or Palembang (Indonesia) (Selvanayagam 1990)).

²³ During the second World War, supplementary weft yarns floated over five warp ends on silk textiles, as this was quicker to produce and there were less yarns available (Hill 1948 Abd. Aziz 2006, Tengku Ismail 2006).

²⁴ When weaving the weaver must ensure that the selvages are neat and straight. This is aided by the use of a 'kayu sumbi' (tension rod) when weaving (Selvanayagam 1990).

2.5.4 Dyeing.

Natural dyes were still being used to dye yarns for songket textile weaving up to the early twentieth century (Maxwell 1990). Silk yarns were dyed, utilising alum and salt as mordant (Skeat 1902). The natural dyes were obtained from many of the plants, trees and fruits available within the local environment. Trees such as sepang (brazil wood) and mangrove, plants including indigo and bunga telang, and the belimbing masam fruit were used within the preparation of the dyes (Skeat 1902).

In the early twentieth century the first synthetic aniline dyes were imported from the British owned Imperial Chemical Industries. These synthetic dyes quickly replaced natural dyes. Yarn dyeing was (and still is) in the main, conducted in centralised workshops, which was considered more efficient and economical than if conducted by individuals (Fisk 1959). The dyed yarns were then sold on to weaving centres and individual makers. Hill reports

“Much skill is shown in the blending of the dyes in varying proportions to give minute but definite differences in shades of colour, which the local experts can identify from experience. A general distinction is made between light or medium shades...and rich dark shades” (Hill 1949:76).

However, Hill explains no records were kept of dye mixing and preparation and definite shades could not be accurately reproduced (Hill 1949). This was also compounded by Gullick who observed, *“Nothing is recorded on paper”* (Gullick 1952:138). Fisk also reports that very little documentation was recorded,

“Many of the middlemen and master weavers keep very little in the way of records, and those that do keep records are usually reluctant to disclose the secrets of their business” (Fisk 1959:22).

Dyeing today is limited to silk yarn, and therefore the high quality songket producers. Lower quality songket textiles are woven using pre-dyed polyester yarns, and therefore no dyeing is required. Dyes for silk yarns are easily obtainable by weavers in Terengganu, for sale at the outlets which sell un-dyed silk yarns. Colour and shade repetition is obtainable, but its complete accuracy cannot be determined. Though dye stuffs are measured or weighed and records now kept, weighing equipment in the songket handicraft industry is not as sophisticated as in a modern textile manufacturing

industry, which would have accurate digital equipment. The lack of 'modern' equipment available within the handicraft industry also limits the environmental waste considerations within textile dyeing. Most dye waste goes into the land.

2.5.4.1 Decorative Dyeing Techniques.

Utilising dye techniques to decorate songket textiles is not a recent concept. Historic songket limar textiles can be seen in museums and private collections which are over two hundred years old. The combination of limar with a songket textile provides a cloth which has ikat and metallic supplementary weft patterning, see figure 2.68. Taking months to produce, these textiles became far too expensive to weave commercially. There is now only one Master Craftswoman, Hajja Zainab Bt. Mamat, who continues this process, financially supplemented by the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation.

Current songket makers use decorative dye techniques to create alternative materiality. One young songket textile maker, based near Kuala Lumpur, advised "*Anyone can dye yarn a single colour, the skill is being able to produce something different*" (Izan 2006). The decorative dye techniques used today are more simple and speedier to produce than the ikat patterning of the past. These include random tie-dye of yarns, either by tying groups of threads or by tying a hank of un-dyed silk yarn into a knot, prior to dyeing. The dyed yarns once dried and wound onto bobbins can then be used for the warp or weft threads. The results once woven produce ikat style bands of two colour thread, see figure 2.69. A practice made popular by students and tutors at the National Handicraft Institute is painting dye upon the warp prior to weaving. Several colours maybe painted upon a single warp, however the consistency of the dye used is very fluid and colours often 'bleed' into one another, causing painted motifs to be distorted, see figure 2.70.

2.6 Socio-cultural Representation.

On the social value of objects, Geismar argues "*Close examination of material forms and the social relations within which they are embedded soon reveals that things have the capability to effect the way people think*" (Geismar 2004:43).

Socio-cultural relationships which exist between songket textiles and Malay society have changed over generations. Citing Thomas (1991), Brown explains, "*The category to which a thing belongs, the emotion and judgement it prompts, and narrative it recalls, are all historically refigured*" (Brown 2001:9). Past political events, such as war and independence, have projected change within the textiles socio-cultural relationships as well as its materiality, though not always at the same time. The semiotic properties which the textiles now *sign* are a part of socio-cultural objectification within space and time. The personal, social and cultural identity endowed within the songket textile is immateriality expressed as materiality. The textiles material indexes provide recognition and representation for the Malay subject of non-material abstract social values.

2.6.1 Original Social Role of Songket Textiles.

Though recent oral histories claim that songket textiles patterning has cosmological and spiritual symbolism, see appendix 2.1, there is no evidence to support that this symbolism was a part of the textile's social or cultural role (Maxwell 1990, Azizi 1999). Instead, Malay songket and cultural specialists, such as Azah Aziz (2006), Azizi Bahauddin (2006), Norwani Nawawi (2006), and Siti Zainol Ismail (1997), articulate only on the wealth and social status which the textiles represented. It could be reasoned that even though the patterning may have once represented spiritual beliefs, these were not the essential part of its social representation. It could also be argued with the introduction of Islam between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, which forbids the practice of spirit worship, cosmic and spiritual symbolism was abandoned (Windstedt 1981). With only oral histories as evidence, this aspect of songket textiles semiotic remains contentious.

What is documented of songket textiles past socio-cultural representation is its use by royalty and aristocracy to signify their social rank and the financial prosperity of the royal court, see figure 2.71. The gold, silver, and silk yarns of the textile, and the amount of human labour in its exquisite patterning, meant that the financial value of each textile was high (Maxwell 1990, Siti Zainol 1997, Azah Aziz 2006, Azizi 2006, Norwani 2006). As songket textiles began to be worn by more of Malay society, financial affluence became its main social function. Though the textile's gold and silver

yarns were replaced with synthetic metallic yarns, the textile retained its symbol of wealth. The textile still represents the economic affluence of its wearer, as it is the more financially affluent of society who own the best quality and intricately decorated textile. Due to the amount of human labour the textile is still an expensive cloth in relation to other textiles used for formal attire such as batik. Even the songket textiles hand-woven with synthetic polyester yarns are labour intensive, expensive, and financially revered by many Malays. The textiles' symbolism of financial prosperity is not the only social relationship which exists, there are many more.

2.6.2 Socio-cultural Agency.

The following are some of the socio-cultural relationships which exist between songket textiles and Malay society. Worn at life rite and social ceremonies they identify the wearer as a part of a collective Malay society. The textiles bind the subject to the past, to ancestral roots within Southeast Asia, "*...powerful and active in relation to persons in the present*" (Tilley 2006:66). Given as gifts, the textiles embody the spirit of the giver, a 'moral weight' which compels reciprocity (Schneider 2006 citing Mauss 1954). By the way the textiles are worn they communicate gender and marriage status, its patterning provides prestige and sensory desire, the textiles materials present financial affluence, even the future is amplified, by means of a wedding trousseau (Schneider 2006). Songket textiles also objectify to the subject, the place where they were made (Tilley 2006). The knowledge and skill of the Terengganu and Kelantan songket makers is associated with the social representation of the textile. Wearing a Malaysian produced songket textile provides Malay society with pride and self-esteem. During my field research, a young Malay man was horrified when he discovered the songket textile he was wearing was not hand-woven in Terengganu or Kelantan as he thought, but was actually a Jacquard woven textile from Pakistan or India, see figure 2.72. A Jacquard produced songket textile, imported from Pakistan, India, or China, is considered by Malay society to be unauthentic, inferior, and of little economic and cultural value.

2.6.2.1 National Identity.

Since independence from the British Commonwealth in 1957, Malaysia and its people have sought to present a cultural and national identity to themselves and the rest of the world, an identity distinct from its colonial influence. Post colonial Malaysia has embraced songket textiles and its motifs as a part of its material heritage prior to colonialism (Azizi 1999). As songket textiles are representative of material heritage within Malay society, they and their motifs have been politically promoted as a part of its material national identity. Citing Cleere (2003), Leach argues,

"...the role of cultural heritage in the establishment of cultural identity in emergent nations is a fundamental one, since it constitutes tangible and monumental proof of distinct nationhood" (Leach, 2003:135).

The promotion of songket textiles and motifs as nationalistic symbols can be seen in the political promotion of the textiles as 'national costume'. Members of parliament wear the textile when in office, and Malay men and women will now wear it to formal functions irrelevant of the occasion. Men as civil servants are encouraged to wear songket sampung on holy day, Friday. However, they would not wear the textile to mosque, as Islam does not permit high decoration or the wearing of silk when praying (Windstedt 1981). The motifs are used upon architecture, the uniform of the national airline, and university gowns, even upon commercial cardboard tissue boxes, see figure 2.73. Reasoning for this 'adoption' of songket textiles and motifs as a symbol of national identity, is explained by Azizi (1999). He explains, the motifs used in songket textiles *"...strongly evoke the essence of Malay traditions and beliefs"*. He continues, *"...they are a symbol of Malay power and control of the land"* (Azizi, 1996:88). To understand why a national and cultural identity is so important to Malaysia and Malay society, one needs an understanding of recent history and cultural divide within the country.

Malaysia has a plural society, 62 per cent Malay and Bumiputra²⁵, 30 per cent Chinese and 8 per cent Indian (UNDP 2004). Chinese and Indian peoples were invited to Malaysia during British Colonial rule to provide an additional labour force to work in the tin mines, and rubber and tea plantations (Azizi

²⁵ Bumiputra translates to 'sons of the soil', which includes all peoples originating from the land known as present day Malaysia. This includes the aborigine and ethnic tribes, and excludes those of Chinese or Indian origin (Azizi and Abdullah, 2003:ii).

1999). The result today, is a collective population of twenty four million Malaysians (UNDP 2004). Though Malays' are dominant in number, they feel marginalized against the dominance of Chinese representation in Malaysia's economic sector. This insecurity was one of the causes of the 1969 'urban unrest' and 'race riots' in Kuala Lumpur²⁶ where violence between Malays and Chinese left hundreds dead. This resulted in the Malaysian government program, the New Economic Policy (NEP), implemented between 1971 and 1990. The NEP designated that Malays and Bumiputra have "*privileges of political, economic and social stature*" within the country (Azizi and Abdullah, 2003:ii). The NEP has continued in modified form as the National Development Policy (NDP) (Azizi 1999).

After many centuries of feudalistic and colonial rule, the NDP encourages patriotism and nationalism within Malay society. Muhammad Haji Muhd (1996) explains "*For a long time Malays have been uncertain as to their identity: who are the Malays? Who are the Malays as defined in the country's constitution...Who are the Malays on the international stage?*" (Muhammad Haji Muhd 1996:4). The importance of a socio-cultural identity is articulated within the United Nations Development Program, "*A sense of identity and belonging to a group with shared values and other bonds of culture are important to all individuals*" (UNDP, 2004:3).

The creation of a material symbol of Malaysian nationalism is a political manoeuvre, one that is necessary if the country and its people are to be empowered within their independence. The use of textiles as socio-cultural and political agents is not unusual as O'Connor, citing Schneider claims,

"...the way cloth and clothing materialize social and political statuses, convey and consolidate identity, mediate social relations and not only reflect social change but also create it, acting as Schneider (1994) shows as an agent of history by giving cultural form to innovative dynamic moments". (O'Connor 2005:41-2).

Hobsbawm (1992) claims 'symbols by which independent countries proclaim identity command immediate respect'. This is particularly true of songket textiles and their motifs, especially within Malay society. The

²⁶ Caused by "...political unrest and economic imbalances" (Azizi 1999:48).

wearing of songket textiles essentially symbolises the wearer as a 'collective member of Malay society' in a multicultural nation (Azizi 1999).

It is the socio-cultural relationships between Malay society and songket textiles which reflect upon the textiles propensity to material change. As a material artefact it represents social and national pride and significance. Any suggested creative changes to the materiality of the textile are met by both hesitance and desire by Malay society. Divisions of opinion are provided by traditionalists and modernists, young and old, rural and urban, rich and poor. Some traditionalists still object to the material changes which have already taken place, such as the inclusion of multi coloured metallic yarns, claiming that it dilutes the social agency of the textile (Azah Aziz 2006). Upon the issue of creativity within songket textiles materiality and my practice, one Malay museum curator advised "*Please be careful, this is my heritage*" (Abd Aziz 2006).

2.7 Summary.

Since the introduction of the songket textile influence, the Indian patola cloth, Malay songket makers have developed their own creative practice within the making of the textile. In the face of social, political and economic diversity, they have introduced new uses for songket textiles in order to sustain their practice. Material entities which have remained consistent within the maker's creativity include compositional structures, supplementary weft patterning technique, metallic yarns, and formal appearance. These are the material indexes of social recognition which have remained within the textile and which the maker has to consider in her creative practice. The maker also has to consider the material and technical agencies within the textile, the relationships of cause and effect between the material and technical. Songket technology, its loom, equipment and technique, have an agency upon the material aesthetic of the cloth and therefore upon the creativity of the maker.

The creativity of the maker is also under the strain of the socio-cultural objectivity of the textile. It is society that determines which changes are acceptable and which are not. The relevance of the textile as cultural heritage and tradition, and the recent agency of nationalism, mean any creativity is socially and culturally constrained. How society values the

creativity imposed upon songket textiles can change its socio-cultural representation. The social and cultural significance of the textile within Malay society means any creativity which radically changes its material objectivity is viewed with scepticism and concern that the textiles socio-cultural values may be diluted and the textile lose its relevance within Malay society.

Chapter 3. A Malaysian Textile Practice.

3.1 Introduction.

Primarily, Malaysian songket textile makers are motivated to create songket textiles in order to provide economic subsistence for themselves and their families. Woven predominately in rural communities, the making of songket textiles provides an income which otherwise would be difficult to acquire for women with family commitments. How the makers approach their creative practices is determined through the economics of production; the financial considerations of producing textiles for a commercial market.

In order to try and compete in a local and global market influenced by imported textiles, songket manufacturers are creating alternative songket textile designs and products. Consciously influencing the songket textile maker's practice are the economic concerns within production of a commercial commodity. It is the financial exchange value of commodities in consumer societies (Appadurai 1986) which have caused fierce competition in the songket textile market spheres. For the songket textile maker, working independently or in group workshops, her production infrastructure revolves around capitalist issues of financial profitability.

Economics is only a part of the songket textile makers practice. In her training and subsequent creative practice the songket textile maker is subconsciously directed by her experience and knowledge, inculcated within her cultural and social environment; her *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). Her creative practice is determined by her tutors, her peers, and external experiences she encounters. Within the maker's initial training is instilled her future questioning within her creative practice. Her creativity is subconsciously guided by training and socio-cultural experiences.

A songket textile maker's creativity is not only curtailed by her own training and *habitus*, but also by the perceptions and conceptions of the Malaysian songket textile consumers. These consumers are the ones which inflict socio-cultural objectivity upon the textiles. This socio-cultural objectivity of songket textiles greatly influences the makers practice. Formed through social and cultural *habitus*, objectification is present in the textiles material *agency* (Gell 1998) which determines its creative form. Though creative ideas may be generated by the songket textile maker within the

material form of the textile, my experience has shown that she may revert to the 'expected' form present within socio-cultural objectification. Gosden citing Gell (1998) argues,

"Decisions taken when making objects may occur without deliberate reflection on meaning, but never without some overall cognisance [sic] of the prevailing social context of material forms" (Gosden 2006:437).

In order to define the different influences upon the creative practice of the songket textile maker, this chapter will be divided between two sections; Section A will analyse economic values within songket textile creativity, and Section B will determine the socio-cultural influences upon the makers' creativity.

Section A. Economic Analysis of Creativity within Songket Textiles.

3.2 The Economics of Production.

Songket textile production was once one of the largest local industries in the state of Terengganu. In a report written in 1959, Hill claims there were in total 4270 songket weavers within Kuala Terengganu and Kelantan (Maznah 1996:277). By 2005 the number had diminished to 327 weavers, the majority residing in Kuala Terengganu (Rafidah 2003). Though this documentation cites 'weavers', this term is used to denote any worker involved in the making process. Terengganu and Kelantan are two of the most underdeveloped states on the peninsula and still produce the majority of the songket cloth woven in the country²⁷. Both of these states are quite isolated and only approachable by air travel or through narrow roadways, there are no major highways or rail link to other Malaysian states. As these two states are predominantly rural, many of the people there still rely upon agriculture or fishing for their livelihood. Though Malaysia's economy does not rely upon the income songket textile production generates, many of the rural population of these two states do.

Hand-weaving of songket textiles is not seen as a hobby or way to pass the time, but as an essential means of employment to aid rural subsistence. In these patriarchal communities many women work from home permitting

²⁷ The recent exceptions are small workshops around Kuala Lumpur.

them to conduct household chores and childcare, see figure 3.1. This home-working empowers women, by allowing them to be involved financially within the family, providing regular financial subsistence which is often used for school fees, medical expenses, or household necessities (Leigh 2000, citing Joel Kahn 2000). An opportunity for alternative employment, which fits around the family and home responsibilities, is limited in these rural areas (Wan Hashim 1996).

The diminishing number of songket textile makers is a reflection of market competition from imported textiles, and the availability of alternative employment for young single women due to Malaysia's large industrial growth. Should the songket industry become totally mechanised and therefore centralised (necessary for maintenance), or decline completely, the economic repercussions to the families in rural weaving communities would be significant.

A living example of the financial subsistence which hand-woven songket textiles provide is that of maker Azizah, in the village of Pasar Panjang, Terengganu. Azizah, a widow in her early fifties, has been weaving since she was eleven years old, initially taught by her maternal aunt. She works from home and weaves convocation sashes for Malaysian universities, see figure 3.2. A middleman brings her materials and collects her finished textiles. Though she states she does not enjoy weaving, she has no other means of providing an income for her twelve year old son or herself (Azizah 2006). A daughter, still living at home works in a factory in Kuala Terengganu, and helps financially support her mother and brother. As Azizah has been a home weaver all her life, she has no future pension available to her. Without her being able to continue her weaving practice life will be very difficult for her financially.

3.2.1 Production Infrastructure.

In the past, commercial songket textile production was controlled by master weavers. They would train apprentices, usually female family members, and supervise the creation of motifs and patterns used, as well as the quality of craftsmanship. The master weavers were the *guardians* of the craft and were very secretive of their skills outside of their family (Maznah 1996). Since the early twentieth century, most of songket textile production

has been controlled by capitalist merchants and entrepreneurs. These producers are concerned with economic profitability prior to quality of design and skill. Therefore songket production has become capitalistic in nature rather than a concern for skill and craftsmanship (Maznah 1996).

A division of specialised labour predominates within the industry, and differentiated tasks are conducted by individual specialists (Maznah 1996). There are only a few craftswomen remaining who can conduct all the processes involved in songket textile production. Division of labour within this infrastructure is possible due to the detachable parts of the songket loom. The women who conduct these tasks are divided between hierarchies of pattern setters (leash makers), weavers, and ancillaries who make the warp and heddles etc. The patterns setters have the most intricate task and it is deemed the highest skill, with weaving judged as the middle skill and ancillary tasks as the least skilful.

The specialised tasks listed above, fall into three different types of manufacturing frameworks, namely, putting-out, centralised manufacture, and independent maker, see table 3.1 (Maznah 1996).

3.2.1.1 Putting-out System.

Since the early twentieth century most songket textile production has been conducted by using the putting-out system, where women work within their homes (Maznah 1996). Putting-out is still the most common form of songket textile manufacture. Here a producer or intermediary (male or female), will organise all the production tasks to be completed by various home workers, working within their specialities. All yarns and equipment, except the frame of the loom, will be supplied by the producer. Within this system of production, the pattern setter may have to follow the designs set out by the producer, or she may be allowed to create her own if very experienced. The home workers, whose working hours revolve around their domestic responsibilities, are paid by piece rate, with pattern setters being paid for each row of leashes necessary in a design. This home working is the lowest paid of all songket manufacturing (Wan Hashim 1996). This system of flexible production suits capitalists and entrepreneurs, as they can increase and decrease production as the market demands (Maznah 1996). Maznah (1996) argues, within the structural continuity of the putting-out system

deskilling and degradation of skills has occurred. Yet she continues that this does not indicate a dissipation of the industry, but these processes "*...are in fact adaptive strategies undertaken by the industry, without which it would have long been phased out*" (Maznah 1996:166).

3.2.1.2 Centralised Manufacture.

This production method involves groups of specialists consisting of pattern setters, weavers and ancillaries, working within a workshop environment. Here the pattern setters, weavers and ancillary workers may have the opportunity to learn the creative processes involved in songket motif and pattern design. The workshops are run and financially organised, both by women and men. Though men may be involved in the design of motifs and patterns, he would not weave any designs himself. The women who run these workshops, may have once been a songket textile maker, and understand songket weaving and its techniques. The person in charge of the workshop oversees the creativity of motifs and patterns and an experienced pattern setter drafts the designs. The women who work in these workshops are paid a daily rate for working set hours and days, usually eight hours a day, Sunday to Friday. All equipment and materials are owned by the workshop proprietor, and its workers are the highest paid in songket production. These workshops are suited to women who do not have family or domestic commitments.

3.2.1.3 Independent Weavers.

Independent weavers, though few today, are still producing songket textiles, but may pay to have the dyeing, warping, heddle making, and sometimes pattern setting completed by specialists. These independent female weavers work from home around their domestic chores. They can sell to commission, direct to market, or to the entrepreneur or merchant of her choice. The creative designs she weaves may be her own or provided by the merchants, however, she will not be paid until the songket textile is completed and sold.

3.2.2 Production Infrastructure and Creativity.

It is the pattern setters within this division of labour who are included within the creative practices of the textiles. The weavers and ancillary workers, who combine to produce the form of the textile, often have no inclusion in the textiles design. The division of labour – the collective efforts of many experts, "...reflect a compromise of an otherwise unlimited group of capabilities and energies" (Zaccai 1995:3). In some instances, under the supervision of merchants and entrepreneurs, the pattern setters are also told which designs to use. Maznah argues "*The developing of patterns and motifs are [often] decided by those above the hierarchy of production*" (Maznah 1996:167). It is the division of labour within production processes which Dant argues 'suppresses' creativity', where

"The embodied material practice of workers – their ability to interact freely with objects following the intentionality embedded in the object – is curtailed as behaviours and routines become rationalised, standardized and specified" (Dant 2005:46).

3.3 The Songket Textile Market.

The Malay people who live in weaving communities in Terengganu and Kelantan are very conservative in thought, and are devout nationalists. They feel that overall the Malay people will be patriotic to their local hand-woven songket, and it will be favoured over any imported ones (Siti Halimah, 2003). Wan Hashim (1996) is also of this traditionalist thought, evaluating imported Indian songket textiles he argues, "...[it is] no match to the better quality and finely woven Kelantan and Terengganu songkets which are always preferred by the consumers who are not attracted to these alien products albeit cheaper in price" (Wan Hashim 1996:77).

However, in a society of economic challenges, where consumers demand ever decreasing prices for goods, the reality is different. Many of the consumers in Kuala Lumpur, where much of the local and imported songket textiles are sold, do not have the social bond with Malay weaving communities and will opt for the best 'value' they can afford.

The current songket textile market in Malaysia provides much aesthetic and economic choice for society. The songket sarong and samping are the most popular items available, furnishings and accessories are also available

but in a much smaller quantity. Other items, such as full wedding apparel, are woven to commission. Local producers in Terengganu and Kelantan once monopolised the market, but since the 1990s they have had competition from less expensive jacquard and hand-woven songket textile replicas imported from Pakistan and India, and more recently China.

The commercial songket textile market is part of a modern Malay society, where economy, technology, political decisions, and other forces “...which neither rely [upon] nor develop tradition” reside (Hobsbawm 1992:11). The socio-cultural relationship between the textile and the place it was made has become diluted (Tilley 2006). Economics force the Malay individual to select a songket textile by financial consideration rather than any allegiance to local manufacture.

The imported songket textiles commercially affect only the lower end of the hand-woven songket textile market. The imported textiles, made from polyester and metallic yarns, incorporate supplementary weft motifs which are not necessarily of Malaysian origin, see figure 3.3, yet they are within the traditional Malay structural compositions of samping and sarong. So far, they do not affect the higher end market, which consist of silk ground cloth yarns and incorporate scattered motifs or intricate complex designs in many colours of metallic yarn.

Within the lower and upper commercial markets of Malaysian songket textiles there is not just economic competition, there is also aesthetic competition. As makers compete with each other in the local commercial market, they strive to produce a textile which is aesthetically ‘different’, which ‘stands out’ from the others (Frisby and Featherstone 1997, citing Simmel 1905). This aesthetic ‘difference’ consists of new, contemporary co-ordinations of colour, new motifs and patterns, and alternative dye techniques, see figure 3.4. Modernity within apparel Schneider (2006) citing Ferguson (2000) argues, evokes “...hoped for opportunities and chances...it permits the well attired person to imagine a better future” she continues, by participating in contemporary practices, “...people are expressing their desire and their ‘right’ to participate in modernity” (Schneider 2006:216-7).

The different songket textile markets, the lower, and higher quality differ in their consumer patronage. The higher market is supported by the financially affluent of Malay society. This includes those of high ranking social

status such as royalty and aristocracy, plus the newly rich entrepreneurs and industrial capitalists, where "...conspicuous display mark[s] high position" (Schneider 2006:207). By acquiring "...superior, beautifully crafted products, whose aesthetic qualities and obvious expense create[s] a magnetic effect", the financial and social elite are empowered and distinct (Schneider 2006:207). These consumers also want to be admired by others as well as themselves, and show their social or financial position. They do this by wearing a textile which is aesthetically different from what has been seen before (Bourdieu 1979, Frisby and Featherstone 1997 citing Simmel 1905). Due to their financial affluence, these elites are able to participate in the patronage of high quality, hand-woven songket textile production, where a songket samping or sarong can vary from £100 to well over £1000.

The lower market is supported by those of lower financial and social status in Malay society, of which there are many. Trying to imitate the prestigious songket textiles only afforded by the rich (Frisby and Featherstone 1997 citing Simmel 1905), the lower market provides songket textiles of lower quality materials and artisanal skill, see figure 3.5. Schneider identifies this emulation as the "...democratization of what was once courtly...sumptuousity" (Schneider 2006:209). The democracy and consumerism of modern Malaysia (Williamson 2007) motivates this section of society to project a conspicuous display of 'distinction'. However, with a songket samping costing as low as £16, depending upon the quality and patterning of the textile, the material content of display is much different than that of the higher quality songket consumers (Bourdieu 1979).

The creativity of the songket textile maker of all commercial market spheres is driven by consumers. Consumer demand for 'distinction' within the materiality of the songket textile, be it highly or sparsely decorated, opulent or simple, high or low quality, expensive or economical in price, motivates the songket textile maker to include creativity within her practice. As Schneider articulates, "*Artisans in the path of capitalist expansion have responded*" Schneider (2006:210).

3.4 Economics of Making.

Driven by a commercial market, makers' are challenged in their material creativity by consumerism and economics. A newly created textile must take

its place in the market and the cost of its production must be financially profit worthy to the capitalist entrepreneur or merchant. Whereas a designer may gain satisfaction of originality in creating a new songket textile design, 'the qualities of aesthetic and practical experience' (Borgman 1995:37 citing Dewey 1958) providing her with a sense of worth, pride, joy, the financial expenditure her creative practice commands must be feasible within the commercial market.

Historic songket textiles, woven in Malaysia's past royal courts patronised by sultans, were not limited by economic or commercial constraints. Songket textile makers were able to produce songket textiles without the restrictions of cost. The court artisans would be "*skilled, knowledgeable [and] artistically inclined*" (Schneider 2006:204). It is the economic value of songket textiles which has changed in its production, from a labour of 'selfless dedication' by courtly artisans' (Schneider 2006) to a labour solely of commercial concern (Maznah 1996).

Songket textiles have always had exchange value, given as gifts to aristocracy and members of the royal court (Maxwell 1990). Since the textiles capitalist mode of production they have become commodities of monetary exchange value (Schneider 1987). "*Commodities*" Appadurai argues²⁸ "*are generally seen as typical material representations of the capitalist mode of production*" (Appadurai 1986:7). Commodities produced under capitalism are endowed with *agency* independent of their makers (Keane 2006). This agency is the economic considerations which the maker integrates into her creative practice. Maznah (1996) claims capitalism hinders creativity, by striving to reduce costs in production and stretch the profit margins of capitalist entrepreneurs and merchants.

3.5 The Economic Cost of Creativity.

It is the financial cost of human labour, rather than those of materials or technology, which has become foremost in songket textile production, Schneider argues, "*...labor is, has always been, and probably always will be the largest cost factor in making cloth and clothing*" (Schneider 2006:214). Therefore, considerations of time and economic feasibility, regarding the

²⁸ Appadurai (1986) explains that a commodity can also be a service supplied for monetary exchange.

weaving of the songket design, very often dictates which type of aesthetic patterning a designer will create.

Estimations on how long it takes to weave a songket textile (including warping and setting of leashes) can vary from between two weeks for a simple polyester textile, to three months for an intricate silk textile (weaving 6 to 8 hours per day, six days per week) (Selvanayagam 1990, Tengku Ismail 2006). As the technique of creating and using the patterning leashes is the most time consuming part of songket hand-weaving (Selvanayagam 1990), songket textile designers consider ways to reduce the number of leashes which have to be made and the number of times they must be lifted during weaving. To simply reduce the number of motifs and patterns used in all songket textiles would dilute the aesthetic of the cloth. As a songket textile's patterning consists of either full (corak beranti) or partial (corak bertabur) decoration, tekak tiga or lima technique, and silk or polyester yarns, many practical and economic considerations have to be undertaken by the songket textile designer within her creative practice.

3.5.1 Fully or Partially Decorated Songket Textiles.

A songket textile only partially decorated, containing scattered motifs demands less leashes to be made. However, as the supplementary weft thread for each motif has to be individually tied into the cloth, and inserted into the warp shed by hand manipulation (to eliminate floating yarns on the reverse of the cloth), the time spent weaving the cloth can be considerable, see figure 3.6. When a songket textile design fully covers the textile, many leashes are required. However, the technique used to weave the supplementary weft threads into the textile is much quicker than the individually manipulated. The supplementary weft threads are placed into a shuttle and passed through the whole shed of the warp in one movement (this can leave many floats on the reverse of the cloth), see figure 3.7. Generally, a textile which consists of full pattern is more financially remunerable to the maker for her labour, and to the merchant for his profit.

3.5.2 Tekak Technique.

The tekak tiga technique produces the highest quality of songket patterning and is reserved for silk textiles (Halimatun 2003). The technique,

which allows supplementary weft yarns to float over three warp yarns in each motif, requires many leashes to be produced for the textiles patterning. The *tekat lima* technique, in which supplementary weft yarns are floated over five warp yarns, takes less time to be produced and is used currently for polyester textiles. Though there are no fixed rules of which ratio should be used with either yarn, a weaver would not use the highly considered technique of ratio three and one with a low quality yarn as she would not gain financial return (Halimatun 2003). Similarly, one would not use the lower quality technique of ratio five and one with a silk yarn²⁹, as this would be considered detrimental to the aesthetic quality of the cloth. The time taken by the maker to produce intricately decorated *tekat tiga* silk textiles, is financially compensated to the maker and merchant, by the textiles high cost to the consumer.

3.5.3 Motif and Pattern Repeats.

Whether a textile is fully or partially decorated, if a motif or pattern is to be repeated throughout the cloth, then fewer leashes are required to be made and weaving of motifs throughout the whole cloth is less complicated and time consuming. The hand manipulation of patterning leashes throughout the weaving of the cloth enables a motif to be repeated or geometrically reflected. Individual or groups of motifs are used repeatedly within the *badan*, *tepi kain*, and *kapala* of a single sarong or samping textile, see figure 3.8 (Azah Aziz 2006). This is in contrast to the separately designed structures of historic textile pieces (Hill 1948).

3.5.4 Further Economic Considerations.

The considerations of time within the makers' creative practice includes the use of silk or polyester yarn. A silk yarn has to be dyed prior to weaving, and due to its fragility compared to polyester yarns, has to be carefully woven. Purchased pre-dyed, polyester yarns have a greater tensile strength than silk yarns of the same density, and weaving is conducted with more speed. The decision of which yarn to use is often not in the control of the

²⁹ During the 1930s and 40s, because of World War II, *tekat lima* was used within silk songket textiles patterning technique, in order to weave the textiles more quickly (Abd. Azizi 2006).

maker. A maker will often be supplied or told by a merchant or entrepreneur producer which yarns she should weave³⁰.

3.6 Economic Reflections upon Quality and Skill.

In past days when songket production was patronised by royalty and the aristocracy, the prime concern was quality. However, since production became a commercial venture, the priority of the capitalist entrepreneurs is dictated by profit (Maznah 1996). It is only the few remaining master weavers who can afford to retain quality, and even this is of a diluted standard compared to past songket textiles (Azah Aziz 2006, Tengku Ismail 2006). Maznah argues, "*Present day sarongs are less elaborate and grand. In terms of quality and workmanship there has been a marked deterioration*" (Maznah 1996:152). Maznah (1996) blames the degradation in the standard of craftsmanship and quality of textiles upon merchants and capitalist entrepreneurs, who 'have the capital but not the skills'. She explains, capitalist merchants have direct knowledge of market conditions and are "*dictated by a concern for profitability rather than an obligation to maintain quality*" (Maznah 1996:175). In trying to compete with imported textiles, by lowering production and retail costs, Maznah argues "*These products have been made more affordable with the down grading of their quality*" (Maznah 1996:173). What is more worrying for the material, technical and socio-cultural agency of the textile is the argument of Gittinger (2005), "*When the creation of cloth and cloth patterning becomes solely an aspect of a commercial transaction, much of the power of the cloth diminishes.*" (Gittinger 2005:17).

Section B. Socio-cultural Analysis of Creativity within Songket Textiles.

3.7 The Training of the Songket Textile Maker.

The training of songket textile makers consists of informal matriarchal instruction in the home, or formal tutoring by the government body, the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, some makers have

³⁰ A master weaver has freedom to choose, but as her textiles are always of a highly skilled content, she almost always uses silk.

undergone both. It is the training of the maker which directs the continuity and creativity within songket textiles materiality and technology. Within informal and formal training the novice weaver learns through watching and making, a 'non-linguistic form of knowledge' (Marchand 2001). The novice weaver watches *how* it is done and doesn't question *what* is done. Marchand (2001) argues this type of apprenticeship is a refined form of mimicry and "*It is through the process of making that the novice eventually acquires an expert knowledge of his trade, and reaches a conceptual state of 'understanding'*" (Marchand 2001:122).

The Malay songket textile maker is taught the principles and contexts of creativity within songket textiles, taking from past and present practices. She is taught to create new motifs and patterning compositions, use decorative dye techniques and colour co-ordinations, all within socially recognisable design structures. Within her training the maker is not taught to question material and technical contexts, such as alternative yarns or weave structures. Therefore, her knowledge of materials and technology has been limited by the exclusion of these contexts within her training. The maker's creativity is guided by her *habitus*, the learning environment and social infrastructure in which she and her contemporaries are taught their practice (Bourdieu 1977). Her learning practice within *habitus* "...could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group" (Bourdieu 1977:86).

The learning *habitus* is directed by the creative practices and past learning of the trainer. Songket trainers reflect how they themselves were previously taught, combined with their own experience of creativity. The songket textile trainee maker comes to 'embody' the creative *habitus* of the songket textile trainer (Marchand 2001). Marchand also reflects upon Bourdieu's *habitus* in his explanation of Master Craftsmen of Iran,

"Disciplined team work, where a person in charge would control new trainees would be termed by Bourdieu as 'objective homogenising of the group habitus' resulting from the 'homogeneity of the conditions of existence enable practices to be objectively harmonised without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm'" (Marchand 2001:109, citing Bourdieu 1977:80).

Thus, the creative practices which are a part of the songket maker can be identified in the nature of their instruction and training.

3.7.1 Informal Matriarchal Instruction.

Until the late twentieth century all training in songket textile weaving was conducted between Master Weavers and female members of the family (Maznah 1996). A few Master Weavers still exist in Kuala Terengganu, and their knowledge of songket weaving is well respected, Marchand explains "*...the power of the Master Craftsperson is vested in his/her secret knowledge of the trade.*" (Marchand 2001:137). Marchand (2001) claims secrecy is essential for the Master Craftsman, as they endeavour to control the creative elements of the textile, and their role as protectors of the craft.

A weaving apprentice would often start as a young girl, from as young as eight years old, assisting her mother, grandmother or her aunt in the processes of weaving, such as winding bobbins of yarn, lifting the bunches of heddles and inserting the bamboo sticks which would aid the weaver in lifting the heddles. Generations of songket weavers have been taught by female family members and have tried to keep secret³¹ the methods they were taught, especially by the Master Weavers (Selvanayagam 1990, Maznah 1996). Marchand explains this type of learning "*...inculcated through the processes of making produces an essentially non-objectified form of knowledge which is neither propositional nor amenable to scrutiny*" (Marchand 2001:25). He continues "*...it is how an apprentice is taught, which allows him to proposition his skill or craft*" (Marchand 2001:25).

It is Islamic teaching and Malay custom through social *habitus*, to respect the knowledge of one's elders and teachers, and not to question, as this would be discerned arrogant and disrespectful (Azizi 1999, Marchand 2001). The novice weaver will not question or try to improvise upon the methods or equipment they are taught to use. Therefore, weaving practices have remained consistent within this matriarchal training. Though there are fewer young women who want to learn songket weaving, due to better paid industrial employment now available to them, this matriarchal training still

³¹ There is still great secrecy and competition within rural practices. A designer is very protective regarding her creativity, for fear of it being copied (Tengku Ismail 2006).

exists. Creativity within this rural training however is restricted by the socio-cultural and creative *habitus* of the trainer and lack of exposure to other design influences.

3.7.2 Formal Training.

In 1979 formal songket weaving instruction commenced at Terengganu and Kelantan weaving centres, under the umbrella government department of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (established in 1974) (Maznah 1996). The aim of the training at these weaving centres was to increase the depleting number of songket textile makers and encourage Malay entrepreneurship. Training for each songket maker was 18 months and allowed new and existing makers to upgrade skills and introduce new motif designs and products (Maznah 1996). The training was conducted by experienced songket textile makers and only those trainees who could get to the centralised workshops could participate. It was also the intention of MHDC to train young Malay citizens in all aspects of Malaysian handicrafts and in 1996 songket training was relocated to the National Handicraft Institute (Institut Kraf Negara) in Rawang, 20 kilometres north of Kuala Lumpur.

3.8 National Handicraft Institute.

The National Handicraft Institute has training curriculum for six different types of Malaysian handicrafts: weaving, batik, wood carving, ceramics, silverware, and rattan work. Students select to study one of the specialised courses full-time (34 hours per week) lasting for two years at 'certificate' level and three years at 'diploma level' (Halimatun 2003). Weave training at the institute consists of songket, songket limar, and pua weaving³². Students can be of any age, but must be of Malay or Bumiputra origin. The aim of the songket training at the institute is to train students in traditional and contemporary songket design and weaving techniques. The curriculum consists of drawing and drafting designs by hand, dyeing and warping yarns, making heddles, conducting the songket leash technique combined with a plain (tabby) weave structure, ikat incorporation into songket designs

³² Pua textiles are traditional ikat textiles of Borneo in eastern Malaysia.

(similar to songket limar), and creation of songket motifs and patterns. Research into alternative yarns³³ and technology is not considered due to the learning *habitus* of the trainers and the lack of available knowledge upon such contexts. Trainees are taught every aspect of songket textile weaving as it is practised in weaving centres and rural environments, including the use of traditional equipment and the yarns used in current commercial production. The apprentices are highly trained and skilled in songket textile making, and as graduates bring a high level of quality workmanship to the industry.

3.8.1 Creativity at the Institute.

Creativity is taught by the development of new songket motifs and patterns. Students are encouraged to compose new motifs derived from flora, fauna, and nature, as emphasised in Islamic teachings, see figure 3.9 (Azizi 1999). When living forms are depicted within design, they are normally abstracted. Within this creative practice traditional elements of the textiles structural composition are maintained. These are the compositional structures of the sarong, samping, and selandang, comprising of badan, kapala or punca, and tepi kain. The students, in their training, unquestionably accept that a songket textile 'must' contain these elements, even if not thoroughly knowing why. They may not know the spiritual or historic reasoning within the motifs and structures (Azah Azizi 2006), but will not question or confront their teachers.

Colour and dye techniques are also included within the creative practice of the trainee. Colour is taught by theory; students are lectured on fundamentals such as the colour wheel, primary, secondary, and complimentary colours. Yet the colours the students select for their songket textiles are repetitive. Stripes and checks of differing colours are woven by students, co-ordination of colours is conducted in the 'mind' or by copying from another songket textile. Therefore little variation in these co-ordinations is encountered. Trainees are limited by the dyes available at the institute and the lack of tuition upon colour and dye mixing. The methods used for yarn

³³ Research into alternative yarns was not conducted until I had a residency at the Institute in 2003. During this time I introduced supported metallic yarns for use in supplementary weft patterning of the songket textile, see chapter five.

dyeing at the institute are limited to small tins of reactive hot water hand-dyes manufactured by 'Dylon'. Tutors and students are not used to mixing these tins of dyes to obtain differing tones and shades, and generally use them in their original colour³⁴, with salt as a mordant. Though acid dyes are available at the institute the weave trainers explained that it was difficult for them to gain the colours they required when using them (songket weaving trainers 2003).

The creativity and design within the songket textile course is a reflection of its tutors. Training is conducted by six female tutors and a female head of department. All were trained themselves by the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation and have many years of experience in designing and weaving songket textiles. However, none of the seven weave tutors have had any prior or post (at 2003) design training. This has restricted the tutors' potential to greatly expand upon creativity within the course. Alternative patterning, weave techniques, structures, equipment, loom manipulations, yarns, and colour, is constrained by the tutors past and present knowledge, or as Bourdieu would argue their *habitus*. As Marchand explains, the tutors were themselves subject to "*authoritarian-style training processes*", they "*therefore have been principle agents in its reproduction*" (Marchand 2001:21-22). As all the tutors have similar past training in design and weaving, there is no-one who can input further creativity within the course. This does not mean that the tutors are not interested in change or creativity within songket textiles. Quite the opposite, it is simply that they do not have the knowledge, experience, or exposure, of how to inject radical change to songket textiles or its production technology. Textile designer Norwani Nawawi, who has undergone Malaysian and British training suggests, "*if new songket designers, who are not preconditioned by tradition, are trained from the beginning to accept abstracted ideas then songket design can move forward*" (Norwani 2006).

³⁴ The tins of dye at the institute were available in 16 shades; Cherry Flame, Pagoda Red, Cerise, Purple, Tangerine, Old Gold, Golden Glow, Peach, Desert Dust, Olive Green, Pewter Grey, Black, Turquoise, Arabian Night, Madonna Blue, and Deep Blue.

3.9 A Malay Creative Practice.

The materiality of songket textiles is constantly evolving. Entrepreneur producers and makers are continually appraising ideas which can be incorporated into songket textile designs. Between producers and makers there exists a determination to create a materially diverse songket textile. Incorporating newly designed motifs and patterns, plus alternative colour combinations. However, many of these creative ideas do not deter from the current material genre of the textile. As Gosden argues,

"Artefacts can exist as a mass in which they follow stylistic and formal logics of their own. This is because individual makers operate within an overall tradition, working to originality within that tradition" (Gosden 2006:440).

Patterning within songket textiles consists of a combination of old and new designs. When a designer has created a new motif which becomes admired or 'fashionable', it will be duplicated by other producers and will saturate the market. This can be seen in the high quality, large scale floral designs originally produced by Norwani Nawawi and now used by many designers, see figure 3.10. Creative practice has always been present within the materiality of the songket textile, but with the market competition from imported jacquard-woven songket replica textiles, creativity has become essential.

3.9.1 Creativity and Habitus.

The Malay maker's creative practice is directed by a social perception of songket textiles material form. This is not a conscious consideration, but a cognitive part of her creative practice. This embodied knowledge is learnt through her social *habitus* which is formed through mimicry and non-linguistic forms of learning 'gained through the experience of, and practice in, the external world' (Marchand 2001); it is inculcated and becomes habitual and efficient (Bourdieu 1977). Marchand explains, the maker's

"...contributions in terms of both habitual and innovative decision-making are...governed by a set of principles. These are grounded in the cognitive capacities and limitations of his human mind, and conditioned by the socialising processes of both his particular profession and by the value systems of his society. The weaving of the two socialising processes, that of

the trade and that of society, supplies a superstructure to the individual's decision-making" (Marchand 2001:137).

The creative processes of the songket textile maker are influenced by the schemes of 'perception and conception' orchestrated by the 'experience and knowledge' within her *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). The structures of *habitus* are second nature and accepted, only being challenged when the *habitus* of an individual or group encounters a differing experience (Bourdieu 1977).

3.9.2 Islam within Habitus.

Within Malay social *habitus* is Islam, it is more than a faith to Malay society, it is indoctrinated in their every day lives. Within Islam there are practices which include the attire and dress of the Islamic follower, both male and female. The following is a passage from the Qur'an (Koran) which addresses clothing and adornment and issues of modesty,

"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty. This will be most conducive to their purity. Verily, God is aware of what you do.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and should not display their beauty to any but their husbands, their fathers...(and certain other members of the household). Let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornments. O believers, turn unto God all of you so that you may succeed" (Qur'an, 24:30, 31, cited by Sandikci and Ger 2005:63).

Interpretations of this passage by Muslim theologians and intellectuals emphasize modesty in all aspects of life and calls for decency, humility and moderation in speech, attitude, dress and total behaviour (Sandikci and Ger 2005). However, 'religiously appropriate modest dressing', known as *tesettür*, has come to connote especially female clothing³⁵. A woman clothed according to *tesettür* is regarded as keeping her "dignity, honour and chastity, safeguarding herself from being the subject of gossip, protecting

³⁵ The underlying assumption in Islam is that it is easier for women to arouse the sexual feeling of a man, and therefore women should cover up those parts of their anatomy that can draw the male gaze (Sandikci and Ger 2005).

herself from molestation and harm" (Sandikci and Ger 2005:64). While there is a consensus that the main idea behind *tesettür* is not to attract male attention, what does or does not attract attention remains questionable. Inevitably *tesettür* is socially and culturally subjective; a Malay woman will dress according to her socio-cultural environment. Islam is a part of that socio-cultural environment, and a woman will not wear anything that offends a communal sense of Islamic embodiment. Within Islam, what can normally be exposed of a woman are the "*hands, face and feet, and the rest should be covered*" (Sandikci and Ger 2005:65). This is reasoning for the loose-fitting, tunics and long sarongs, which do not reveal the body contours of the Malay woman, see figure 3.11.

Within *tesettür* there are certain concepts of Malay dress that are *haram* (forbidden in Islamic teaching). One of these *haram* concepts is transparency in women's clothing. Though tudung (head cover) and selendang (shawl) may be transparent, a transparent tunic or sarong would not be worn. Therefore a songket tunic or sarong should not be woven in yarns or weave structures that would render it to have any transparent properties. Silk is also forbidden to be worn whilst praying (Tengku Ismail 2006), therefore, a highly decorated silk samping would never be worn when attending the mosque; instead a simple cotton or polyester samping or sarong would be worn. It is also *haram* for motifs to be in human or animal form as this would be construed as deity worship, which is forbidden in Islamic teachings.

As Islam is a part of the Malay social habitus, these concepts do not have to be consciously considered. A man or woman will select attire according to a subjective *tesettür* and the 'distinction' they wish to create (Bourdieu 1979, Sandikci and Ger 2005).

3.9.3 Objectification.

The Malay collective, due to objectification within *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977), would 'expect' songket textiles materiality to include formal traditional structures, metallic supplementary weft patterning, and the *tekat tiga* or *lima* technique in patterning. However, this collective material objectivity of songket textiles may be broken down in to differing groups, such as traditionalists and modernists, young and old, rural and urban, rich and poor, and so on. Songket textile material objectification by these groups can be

expanded upon, from traditional to contemporary motifs, traditional to contemporary pattern structures, gold coloured to multi-coloured supplementary weft patterning, etc., the objectivity of the textile depends upon each groups' habitus. Bourdieu argues,

"From this group specified subjectivity of habitus, we can see that habitus is culturally, socially, and environmentally dependent. A habitus and way of objectification of one group can differ from another" (Bourdieu 1977:95).

These diverse material objectifications challenge makers' creative practice. There are no written specifications of what represents the material form of a songket textile, only expectations. However, objectivity is not static, it is temporal; each introduction of creativity within the textile's design, either material or technical, pushes the objective boundary further. Recently, the introduction by Myriam Atelier of painted motifs as well as supplementary weft patterning on the textile pushed these materially objective boundaries, see chapter one.

3.9.4 Objectification in Practice

"Songket, literally the 'digging under' process" (Sheppard 1986:120).

"menyongket (making of songket patterns)...Songket, in other words, means inlaid gold thread or an extra weft weaved, in which all warp threads are carefully counted and arranged intricately so that no over shots will appear on the right side of the fabric" (Norwani 1989:5).

"The term 'songket' comes from the Malay word menyongket, 'to embroider with gold or silver threads'. Strictly speaking, songket is not 'embroidered'. It is woven using what is commonly referred to as the supplementary weft technique" (Selvanayagam 1990:XV).

One can see from the above explanations, the term *songket* is the technique which is used to create the textiles. Yet in modern day Malaysia, the term *songket* has now come to represent the name of the cloth (Maznah 1996). Songket specialists Azah Aziz (2006) and Tengku Ismail (2006) advise it is 'incorrect' to name the textile solely as 'a songket', and the correct name of the textile is 'kain benang mas' translated as 'cloth full of gold'. Of course, with the introduction of coloured metallic yarns and decoration which has sparing patterning, the term 'cloth full of gold' is no

longer the appropriate name for the textiles material form. This change in the socio-cultural representation of the term songket has had a bearing upon the material objectification of the textile, and therefore the material creativity within it. A songket textile no longer needs to be a 'cloth full of gold', it can be objectified by the nature of its 'songket' technique. It is social objectification which creates the limits and boundaries which the designers consider and challenge. Several of the songket makers I questioned would like to be more liberated in their creative practice, omitting the traditional compositional structures for sarong, samping, and selandang design, allowing the textile's aesthetic a less formal appearance (Leena 2006, Izan 2006). In my field research I discovered how material objectification limited the creative practice of one maker.

Leena Hassan is manager of Mahkota Songket Sdn. Bhd., a recently formed family run songket textile production company owned by her father, Hassan Mhd Jamil, from whom she takes advice and guidance. At 25 years old, Leena is a 'modern' Malay woman, brought up in urban Shah Alam, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Leena has no training in design or weaving, and she has extremely open ideas regarding songket textiles yarns and patterning, ideas which are not influenced by the textiles past material form. The focus of Leena's designs is to create songket textiles which appeal to a 'middle market' for Malay women of her generation.

Leena was contemplating the introduction of a less formal aesthetic to the textiles materiality, by disregarding the traditional compositional structures of kapala, badan and tepi kain. Leena was nervous to do this, she knew she would be challenging traditionalist views, she explained "*It is the [traditionalist] mindset, their way of thinking. More modern people think it is ok*" (Leena 2006). Leena (2006) wanted to design songket textiles which were less expensive and could be worn more frequently, for occasions other than special ceremonies. Influenced by Malaysian fashion magazines, the design she drew was a traditional knee length tunic (baju) which had a non-geometric, flowing composition of a floral songket motif, travelling vertically up the bodice. The matching sarong would also have an identical motif positioned on the front of the textile. Leena isolated the traditional tekak lima technique and metallic yarns to be the material indexes which were

representative of the textiles objectivity. However, after consultation with her father, Leena changed the design.

Her father advised Leena the tunic and sarong's motifs and their composition was non-traditional, too alternative, and as such they would not be recognised as songket textiles within Malay society. He explained consumers of a young middle-market may be preconditioned to look for traditional motifs and compositions within songket textiles. Hassan suggested that the designs should incorporate traditional motifs within geometric patterning, so as to be instantly recognisable as songket textiles. Hence, he considered that as well as the *tekat tiga/lima* technique and metallic yarn motifs, the textile should include traditional style motifs and composition in order to be representative of songket apparel. Hassan, has subjectively included the motif and composition as a part of songket textile's material objectivity. It is Hassan's objectivity of songket textiles material representation which challenged Leena's creativity.

These speculations of what is and is not a part of songket textiles material form are not just the subjective opinions of Hassan Mhd. Jamil. The collective practices of habitus produce 'continuity and regularity' within objectification in a social world. The homogeneity of *habitus* "...causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted." (Bourdieu 1977:80). It is a collective perception and supposition of songket textiles form within Malay society which designers cognitively reflect upon, and determines the extent of their creativity within songket textiles design.

3.9.5 Tradition and Creativity.

Within social habitus and objectification there is a further social influence to material creativity for the songket textile maker. That influence is tradition. Bourdieu, cited by Tilley explains *habitus* has obstacles within its practice, these are "...the weight of historical tradition and the material environment, which both constrain and condition people's access to material and non-material resources alike" (Tilley 2006:65). The continuity of tradition in making songket textiles, its materials, structural compositions, and technology constrain the maker by their very existence. This is best explained by Bourdieu, cited by Tilley (2006), who refers to *doxa* within

habitus. *Doxa* is the reality within *habitus*, what people perceive as reality. Tilley continues, tradition is a part of *doxa*, "...the world of tradition...experienced as a natural world" concluding, people express tradition as "*It has always been like this: how could things be otherwise?*" (Tilley 2006:66). Bourdieu argues tradition's schemes of 'thought and perception' produce 'cognitive' limits to objectivity (Bourdieu 1977).

It is *doxa*, the socially perceived reality of tradition, which permits the traditional compositional structures of the sarong, samping and selandang to be retained within the creation of contemporary songket designs. I individually questioned two formally trained songket makers upon the relevance of including these compositional structures into a contemporary songket textile. They explained though they did not know the reasoning behind these structures, the songket sarong, samping and selandang have always been designed within these structures. Further more, they explained consumers thought it was necessary, and both designers were not sure that the songket textiles would be accepted without these structures (Izan 2006, Atikah 2006). Malay textile authority Azah Aziz (2006) concurs that there is a lack of recognition by most Malays, regarding the socio-cultural relations of structural divisions within a songket sarong, she adds "*People wear sarong but they don't observe such relations*" (Azah Aziz 2006). *Doxa* can also describe the continued use and reverence of certain traditional motifs, such as pucuk rebung and mangosteen.

3.9.6 A Songket Textile Maker.

Within the constraints of materials, technology, socio-cultural objectification, and economics, the songket textile maker develops upon what she perceives she can change. Her creative strengths lie in motifs, patterns, and colour. The songket textile makers who graduate every year from the National Handicraft Institute are particularly active in their creative practice. One young graduate maker, Izan (2006), working as a designer at a songket textile workshop near to Kuala Lumpur would like to be radical in her creative practice. I spent six months designing and weaving songket textiles alongside Izan, and through our friendship and respect for each other's practice, was allowed to gain an insight into her creativity.

Brought up in rural Johor Bahru in southern Malaysia, Izan has lived near to Kuala Lumpur since 2000 and is influenced by the economic and environmental development which Malaysia has undertaken in the past three decades, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, see figure 3.12 (Williamson 2007). Izan explained to me that she didn't mind the one and half hours bus journey each way to work each day through Kuala Lumpur, as it allowed her to time to think and see what is 'happening' in the capital's urban sprawl. It allowed her to partake in the modernity of Malaysia, an experience which has an influence upon her creativity.

Encouraged by her supervisor Leena, Izan always creates contemporary designs, which she prefers as they are more challenging to her creativity than traditional songket designs, see figure 3.13 (Izan 2006). Izan's creative practice is influenced by images of flora and fauna within magazines, books, and within other textiles, a legacy of her training. She is able to conceptualise songket motif and pattern designs from abstract influences such as batik designs and cross-stitch patterns. Through my observation, Izan and I learnt that we conceptualise motif designs from images in a similar manner. By selecting an aspect of the image which inspired our creativity, we would sketch our abstract interpretation. We then transformed the sketch or sketches into motifs and patterns. I was mindful to make sure that Izan had not seen me do this previously before I discussed it with her.

Though Izan regularly uses images of flowers and plants, she explained that she would like to be more radical in her designs. Izan revealed to me patterns in books resembling the 'kinetic' art³⁶ of British artist Bridget Riley, see figure 3.14, advising she would like to reproduce these patterns within songket textile design, but felt they would not be socially accepted. It would be the decision of her supervisor if she could incorporate these designs. However, Izan lacked the confidence to 'propose' Leena regarding their use, in fear of being too controversial. As a designer constrained by material objectivity, Izan could only 'propose and not impulsively respond' to her creative practice (Morello 1995:73).

³⁶ Kinetic art is a part of the optic art movement of Europe in 1960s and 70s.

3.10 Summary.

Making songket textiles provides essential financial subsistence to many rural families in Terengganu and Kelantan. In order to sustain production in a competing global market, songket makers and capitalist entrepreneurs strive to create alternative designs for songket textiles. Songket textiles have been commercial commodities for over a century, as such economics is influential within the textiles making and creativity. Within the textiles production it is the technique of weaving the supplementary weft designs which take up the most time. As such the songket textile maker incorporates her skills of creativity, only after considering the financial cost of her labour in producing alternative forms. The maker has combined her creative skills with forethought upon the temporality of making. Yet, it can be argued concerns only upon the economics of the textiles production has caused a degeneration of the skills once required of the craft, where profit is primary and quality of craftsmanship is secondary.

Though economics is a necessary consideration within the practice of the maker, there are further influences to her practice. These are subconscious considerations within her creativity; the social and cultural *habitus* of her environment. The maker's *habitus* incorporates the 'practices' by which she lives her life, accruing social and cultural values and knowledge. Whilst subconsciously 'practicing' social and cultural *habitus* the trainee learns to make and design songket textiles. She is taught and influenced by trainers who are a collective part of the same *habitus*, and whom followed similar training. It is within her training that the maker learns to approach her creative practice, and which aspects of the textiles material aesthetic she can challenge.

Though the maker's creative practice will be influenced post training by her own experiences, what confronts her creativity is the socio-cultural objectivity of the songket textile. Through socio-cultural *habitus*, the objectivity which Malaysian society has placed upon the material aesthetic of the textile challenges the maker. Within this objectivity lie social perceptions and conceptions upon the material representation of the textile. It is the decision of the maker or the capitalist entrepreneur, if this socio-cultural objectification of the textile should be confronted and challenged within creativity, or conforms to genre for the sake of economics. Socio-cultural

objectivity is temporal, dependant upon social, cultural, political, and economic change. As the past has demonstrated, what was once a challenge can soon become a part of songket textiles genre and socio-cultural objectivity.

Chapter 4. Protection and Promotion of the Songket Textile Industry.

4.1 Introduction.

Since independence from Britain in 1957 the Malaysian Government has concentrated upon economic development and rapid industrialisation of the nation (Williamson 2007). Though Malaysian government intervention in handicraft industries took place in the 1950s it was not until the 1980s that handicrafts industries and women's employment (Maznah 1996) began to be included in the government's five year development plans.

The decline of the songket textile industry and the number of weavers has been brought about by global competition from imported textiles, plus alternative employment for rural women in industrial factories. Many past attempts have been conducted to reorganise the songket textile industry in order to make the textiles production more robust. This has resulted in an industry in which the introduction of materials and technology, the training of novice makers, and the sale of the industry's woven products is centrally controlled by a bureaucratic management (Maznah 1996). From a necessary subsistence providing handicraft industry, it has become a 'show-case' (Maznah 1996) of the Malaysian Government, representative of Malay nationalism and cultural pride.

The 'protection and promotion' of the industry (Maznah 1996) incorporates strategies for rural employment generation and support for women's empowerment. These strategies have led the Malaysian Government and non-government organisations to seek ways in which the production of songket textiles can be performed more economically and efficiently, whilst providing better working conditions for women. Several government bodies are now responsible for the industry, charitable organisations, patronised by royalty and political figures, and fashion designers and academics are all trying to protect the industry from its increasing decline.

Among the development incentives conducted by the Malaysian government and private enterprise includes the use of mechanical jacquard looms to produce songket textiles. Though still in its early stages, this production aims to compete with the low quality imported jacquard woven 'songket' textiles, and not to compete with the Malaysian hand-woven

textiles (Hassan 2006, Siti Halimah 2006). However, amongst all these developments and incentives are the songket textile makers, who appear to be permitted little influence in what happens to their industry.

4.2 Past Development Incentives to the Songket Textile Industry.

Prior to 1929, intervention by the Terengganu colonial government had been kept to a minimum due to the songket textile industries already accomplished commercial and social network (Fisk 1954). However, there is documented evidence of colonial government assistance to Malaysia's songket weaving industry since 1929, which include the abolition of financial tariffs and interventions upon dyeing methods. Some of these interventions gained limited success due to the lack of local knowledge by the colonial facilitator (Maznah 1996).

Assistance was provided to the industry in 1929, when the British Advisor to Terengganu, J.E.Kempe, requested that import duties on silk yarns be lifted. In 1935 the same British Advisor was involved in gaining preferential tariffs for the songket textiles produced in Terengganu. The Imperial Preference Policy (1935) implemented preferential tariffs for goods manufactured in Malaya which contained at least fifty per cent of British raw materials. Kempe argued songket textiles should also be allowed the preferential tariffs when imported into the other Malay states (Maznah 1996:246). In 1938 the Terengganu colonial government also lifted import duties on chemical dyes imported from the British Imperial Chemical Company.

Since its inception in 1929, the British administrated Terengganu Arts and Crafts Society had paid little attention to 'cottage industries', including songket weaving (Maznah 1996). In 1938, on realising the scale and lucrative potential of the industry, J.D. Dalley, the Society's Honorary Secretary, suggested to the state government an expansion of the industry. This would consist of setting up a centralised production unit, managed by trained professionals, where colour-fast dyeing could be taught and overseen by locals trained by the Imperial Chemical Industry. The British Governor, approved of the proposal in May 1938, and much preparation was conducted to administer the project. However, the outbreak of the Second World War in

1939 disrupted the whole procedure and it was never readdressed with the same vigour (Maznah 1996).

In 1956 textile industry specialist, J. Nunnikhoven, from the United Nations Technical Assistance Programme, investigated the potential of 'improving' (Fisk 1959) dyeing methods used within the songket textile weaving industry in Terengganu and Kelantan. His aim was to provide light-fast dyed silk yarns to local songket textile producers at a subsidised fee. He established a small dyeing centre in Terengganu, dyeing silk yarns utilising high quality light-fast acid and direct dyes (Nunnikoven 1957). The centre was not a success; though subsidised, the financial charges were substantially higher than the cost of dyeing by local villagers. Also, as the centre was a trial site and relatively small, the scale of the operation at the centre was too small to affect the quality of dyeing within the industry as a whole. Fisk (1959) summarises, the small amount of cloth which was produced using yarn dyed at the centre was not enough to influence the industry through demand by consumers for improved light fastness.

4.3 Local Government Development Incentives to the Songket Textile Industry.

Seeing the lucrative potential of sustaining rural employment the Rural Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) formed in 1950, was the first Malay government agency to take centralised control over the songket textile production. RIDA monopolised control of raw material imports, distribution, and marketing from the merchant capitalists. RIDA also provided a textile centre in Terengganu in 1958 which supplied raw materials, dyes, training, and quality testing (Maznah 1996). However, by 1959 RIDA had noticed a decline of the industry, attributing "*...limited market, product short-comings, and deficient entrepreneurial services*" for the reasons (Maznah 1996:271). RIDA were the first to conduct a survey on the number of songket weavers in Terengganu and Kelantan, advising in 1959 there were 3,344 hand-weavers in Terengganu and 826 in Kelantan (Maznah 1996). Maznah argues "*...the products of the handloom industry can no longer be seen as lucrative or even as easily marketable as prior to the war. Whatever available statistics that can be referred to only point to the decline of the industry*" (Maznah 1996:281).

In 1960 RIDA imported a mechanised jacquard loom from India, to their Terengganu weaving centre. However, within the compositional patterning of the sarong, samping and selandang, the tepi kain (a wide border at both selvedge ends) could not be produced due to the jacquard looms repeat across the weft. This made the makers of Terengganu very doubtful about the future mechanisation of the industry (Maznah 1996).

RIDA continued its control until 1974 when the Malaysian Handicraft Board (Lembaga Kraftangan Malaysia) was established. Centralised in Kuala Lumpur, this projected national centralised control over many types of Malaysian handicrafts (MHDC 1985). In 1979, spurred by the New Economic Policy (1973) and under the Third Malaysian Plan (1976-80), the boards name changed to the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC) (Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia) under the auspices of The Ministry for Entrepreneurship (MHDC 1985). The corporation remained under control of this ministry until 2005, when its control transferred to the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage.

This change in name to MHDC was orchestrated to administer a change in policy. The NEP made available economical and political incentives for developing the Malay entrepreneurial class (Azizi 1999). The promotion of the songket textile industry through the MHDC became a political tool to promote Malay nationalism, and songket textile entrepreneurs were able to profit from their involvement. As only bumiputra can participate within MHDC programmes, it evolved as a method to promote a bumiputra entrepreneurial class (Azizi 1999). The council of Small-Scale Industries was established under the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981 to 1985), its role was to primarily help bumiputra get into commerce including entrepreneurs within the handicrafts industry. The council provided supply, marketing, technical, organisational, and financial services (MHDC 1985).

As well as a method of assisting entrepreneurs, MHDC viewed handicrafts as a way of generating rural employment. Highly government funded, forty million Malaysian Ringgit was allocated to the MHDC under the 4th Malaysian plan (1981 to 1985). A further two million Malaysian Ringgit was assigned in 1987 to assist individual entrepreneurs in 455 cottage industry projects through out the country. This latter assistance created

employment for 1,234 people in a range of handicraft industries including songket weaving (no individual figures given) (Maznah 1996).

By the 1980s nine different Malaysian government agencies had relevance to handicraft development:

- Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC)
- Small Industries Services Institute
- Community Development Department
- Batek Malaysia Berhad
- Karyaneka Marketing Sdn. Bhd.
- Cooperative Development Department
- Council of trust for Indigenous People
- Bank Kerjasama Rakyat
- Village Industrial Division of Rural and National Development

(Source: Maznah 1996).

The function of these agencies was to provide advisory services for entrepreneurial development, particularly related to the building of a bumiputra base in trade, commerce and Industry. The most important of these agencies was the MHDC (Maznah 1996).

4.3.1 Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation.

The Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC) financially subsidised all Malaysian handicraft industries including songket production. Within centralised control MHDC extended their programmes extensively to uplift the handicrafts industries and boost production and sales. Originally these programmes consisted of:-

- Product Development - introducing and modifying products, information then disseminated to instructors, craftsmen and entrepreneurs.
- Industrial Development - appropriating modern production techniques, design expansion guidelines towards adoption of machinery and equipment.
- Skills and Training - short-term basic training provided to upgrade skills of new and existing entrepreneurs and makers, and design workshops to introduce new handicraft designs.

- Promotion and Support - distribute raw materials, promote and market the finished goods both locally and internationally.

(Source: MHDC 1985)

However, Maznah (1996) is critical of the effectiveness of these programmes,

"What was consistent in all the four activities was the emphasis on the use of 'new' techniques, technologies, and management strategies. Nowhere did it consider the contribution of tradition nor the usefulness of the expertise of artisans themselves, who were more familiar with ground conditions. The MHDC's emphasis was far removed from the artisans' real circumstances" (Maznah 1996:285).

By coming under the 'protection and promotion' of MHDC, the songket textile industry was subsumed with all other handicraft industries, and programmes developed by the corporation were designated to be utilised across all craft production processes. Whilst the songket textile makers continued to use their 'putting-out' production methods, the activities and programmes of the MHDC did not allow for these methods, Maznah explains,

"The putting-out system was still at variance with the new form of centralized control... The MHDC viewed itself as the new owners and managers of production. However the producers themselves were dispersed and operated within a different system of production that did not fit the scheme drawn out by technocrats trained in modern management skills" (Maznah 1996:285).

Management personnel at MHDC were drawn from graduates of 'technical, vocational, and tertiary institutions' in the country. They had little or no knowledge of songket textile or other handicraft industries and acted *"...quite apart from those they were supposed to be of service to"* (Maznah 1996:284-5). No formal surveys of baseline data of the songket industry was carried out prior to MHDC's administrators and implementers 'taking over' the industry *"...hence the continued misinformation regarding the actual needs and conditions of weavers in this country"* (Maznah 1996:284-5).

A study conducted by MHDC in 1985 concluded that all handicraft artisans generally had a negative perception of government efforts to aid them (MHDC 1985). Maznah argues, *"The services and provisions were either inaccessible or proved to be of little use to the more traditional weavers"*

(Maznah 1996:283-4). Reasons for this negative attitude were the *"...lack of co-ordination among government agencies with similar or overlapping tasks, thus making it inefficient to implement programmes effectively"* (Maznah 1996:283-4).

The community of songket textile makers were not strong enough to *"...constitute a powerful lobbying force, thus allowing policy decisions that were at variance with their interests to be implemented"* (Maznah 1996:284). These policy decisions were to speed up 'modernisation' in handicraft production, promoting technological upgrading, centralisation and absorption of new production skills and values (MHDC 1985). Artisans who really benefited from the centralisation exercise were the 'trainees' or young recruits. They underwent training courses conducted by MHDC, and learnt the skills formally through the training courses, rather than through prior informal experience in the craft. Maznah argues, *"Rather than fitting into the occupation of artisans, [makers] became non-autonomous producers, producing their crafts according to specified requirements"* (Maznah 1996:289). After training, the young makers were financially subsidised to purchase equipment and were offered contracts for goods which would be sold at government trade outlets (MHDC 1985).

Under the control of the MHDC the songket textile industry did not thrive as was initially expected by its management. However, the industry was maintained, albeit a different industry from its original in which creativity and production was controlled by master-weavers. Maznah argues under the purview of the MHDC the industry has created a new group of artisans who follow directives sent from centralised organisation rather from older, more experienced weavers.

MHDC has reorganised songket production under centralised management, which Maznah (1996) claims has not revived the textiles production, she argues,

"...it would seem more viable to emphasize programmes that revive old skills and use these as the basis for development rather than to completely wipe out the historical value of old products and starting anew" she continues *"...well-made products would be marketed more effectively given its 'edge' over mass-produced machine-made textiles"* (Maznah 1996:285). Here Maznah is not condemning modernisation, but is arguing MHDC should have

concentrated upon the revival of exquisitely decorated songket textiles and not on how to create a new songket market of less expensive and poorer quality textiles.

4.3.2 MHDC in the 21st Century.

Though Maznah (1996) demonstrates there were bureaucratic problems within the first decades of establishing the MHDC's programmes, the corporation has continued to financially subsidise and 'protect' the songket textile industry and other handicrafts. MHDC claim between 2004 and 2007, the number of crafts people increased from 3,480 to 6167, however, it does not provide individual figures for each handicraft (unknown author (online) 8th October 2008). The political expediency of handicraft promotion still exists, even more so in songket textiles than other handicrafts. As a recent national symbol of 'modern' Malaysia, songket textiles and survival of its industry have become more relevant to the state. As Wan Hashim evaluates "*...the new and revitalized cultural nationalism in Malaysia has made it a political necessity for traditional culture of various kinds to be placed in a forefront*" (Wan Hashim, 1996:12).

Though songket textile makers are still the silent majority in the industry's development plans (their presence is not sought at MHDC decision meetings, conferences or seminars) new additions to corporation's programmes have been developed. The songket textile designers of the MHDC Research and Development Department are state trained songket makers, some of whom have formal textile design training at Universiti Teknologi Mara near to Kuala Lumpur (Zakiah 2003). The designers introduce motifs and designs, and suggest products for songket textiles, such as hand bags, shoes, cushion covers, bedspreads, wall-hangings and ready-made garments, which are aimed at local consumers and tourists (Zuraidah 2003). However, Maznah argues the intervention of MHDC in protecting and promoting the songket industry has downgraded the quality of the textiles produced. By diversifying product ranges to meet changing market demand, the quality of woven songket cloth has been 'compromised' (Maznah 1996). She continues, "*The sprouting of the 'souvenir' industry with new uses for hand-woven fabrics [has led] to the lowering of costs of production and*

further devaluating of the original artistic worth of the products” (Maznah 1996:291).

4.3.3 MHDC Incentives.

A ‘Master Craftsman/woman’ award has been introduced by the Malaysian government to inspire makers with esteem and pride. The award, introduced in 1996, aims to provide honour and appreciation for individuals who have contributed to preserve, nurture and improve traditional crafts. The award has twice been won by Terengganu songket textile makers, Haja Zainab Bt Mamut in 2003, and Haja Habibah Zikri in 2007 (unknown author (online) 20th March 2007). The award is provided by the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Heritage, with MHDC acting as secretariat (Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia 2003).

Almost since its inception MHDC have had very active training incentives. Most of its training is conducted at the National Handicraft Institute in Rawang, established in 1996. Up to 1000 students attend the institute at any one time, learning skills from one of six³⁷ different types of traditional handicraft (Halimaton 2003). Each student will be provided with a small monthly allowance and the full-time residential courses will last between two and three years, training students to certificate and diploma level.

The songket textile makers who graduate from their training at the institute are highly skilled in making good quality songket textiles. However, it is not always easy for the makers to find employment after graduation. The makers with the highest skills may be employed in the workshops of entrepreneurs, but those who don’t find employment usually return to their villages unable to utilise their skills (Halimaton 2003). Graduated makers from the Institute are not provided any financial help in setting up their own commercial practice, and the cost of looms and equipment plus lack of marketing contacts often restricts the maker from going freelance.

Further songket textile training initiatives are currently conducted by MHDC. One of these training courses includes the revival of songket limar textile weaving. The commercially and historically displaced (Hill 1949)

³⁷ Handicrafts include, songket weaving, wood carving, metal work, batik, basketry and rattan work, and ceramics.

technique of tie-dyeing weft yarns prior to weaving as songket textiles is now being taught to weavers in Terengganu. This training is provided by Master Craftwoman Haja Zainab Bt Mamut who is one of the few remaining songket textile makers who can conduct this technique. Six songket makers are fully trained in the making of silk songket limar textiles, the course is full-time and lasts a period of one year. MHDC financially subsidise the trainees by providing a maintenance allowance. The textiles produced are the property of Haja Zainab Bt Mamut and are for sale at her sales outlet next to the workshop (Siti Halima 2006).

A further training initiative includes a recent proposition of a program conducted at the Terengganu workshop of the House of Tengku Ismail Sdn. Bhd. Twenty novice weavers will be trained for six months in high quality silk songket weaving. Once training is complete a further twenty will be trained. The training will be financed by the Malaysian government, providing funding for the trainers and trainees (Tengku Ismail 2006). So far no financial help is offered to the weavers once they are trained, so unless they have contacts in the surrounding villages or have access to looms and materials they will not be able to use their skills.

In March 2007, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi advised of the necessity to provide a 'school of creative design' to "*provide all the aid and guidance to give recognition to the art works of our race*" (unknown author (online) 8th March 2007). The school has yet to be formed.

4.4 Export Potential.

Terengganu and Kelantan songket textiles were once exported to Siam (Thailand) and Indoensia (Maznah 1996) but as Malaysia has become one of the most financially affluent countries in Southeast Asia which produce songket textiles, export to neighbouring countries Indonesia and Thailand is constrained by the high cost of labour in Malaysia³⁸. Colonial government representatives introduced songket textiles at the British Empire Exhibition of 1938 held in Glasgow, and large orders were placed for the cloth that year by Ronald Morrell Ltd. and Maple and Co. Ltd. (Maznah 1996). However, the

³⁸ Songket is also woven in Palembang, in neighbouring Indonesia, and is much less expensive than the Malaysian songket, due to the low economy of Indonesia.

quantities of textiles ordered could not be produced by the hand-weavers, due to their home and agricultural responsibilities. It was the high price of the textiles which inhibited producers from receiving any more orders from the exhibition. Hand-woven songket textiles were expensive compared to machine produced decorated textiles in Europe, and were only two thirds of the width, hence further numbers of imports could not be secured (Maznah 2006). As O.T. Faulkner (1938) a Terengganu British colonial official, cited by Maznah argued “...even the luxury trade is extremely catered for by European manufacturers” (Maznah 1996).

The MHDC annually attend international trade shows around the world. Many types of Malaysian handicrafts are exhibited at these shows, including songket textiles, basketry, wood carving etc (Zakiah 2003). It is the high quality and elaborately decorated songket textiles which are represented at these trade shows, and therefore the most expensive. The market MHDC hope to attract by including songket textiles is one which appreciates a hand-woven textile, which due to the nature of their production, being dyed and woven by many individual makers, does not produce textiles of exact replication.

MHDC held one of it's largest and most prestigious Malaysian handicraft trade shows in March 2009, at Harrods of London. The month long promotion, launched by Her Royal Highness the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Nur Zahirah (HRH The Queen of Malaysia) and named 'Malaysian Craft at Its Best', consisted of 3174 handicraft products, including songket textiles, batik, ceramics and metal artefacts (Rohana Mustaffa online 2009). The most expensive item exhibited at the show was a songket textile selandang, for sale at £7,890, it had been woven by Master Craftswoman Haja Habibah Zikri (Khalid online 2009). Once the exhibition was closed all remaining artefacts not sold were returned to Malaysia.

4.5 Non-government Incentives.

There are charitable organisations, patronised by royalty and prominent members of Malay society, who, through publicity and promotion aim to support songket textiles and the hand-weaving industry. Datin Perduka Seri Endon (1940 to 2005), the late wife of the Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, formed Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia in 2000. The

charitable foundation administers funds for education, public welfare, research, health, and medical purposes, for 'needy' Malaysians (Yayasan 2007). Within its subscription is the promotion of Malaysian culture, arts and heritage. Datuk Perduka Seri Endon and the foundation have promoted the revival of the nyonya kebaya, the batik industry, and just before her death in 2005, songket textiles and their industry. Datuk Perduka Seri Endon actively promoted songket textiles, by publicly encouraging Malay society to wear songket textiles at all formal occasions (Malaysian produced batik textiles are also used at formal occasions) (Haji Nik 2006). As wife of the Prime Minister, and the First Lady of Malaysia, she had overwhelming influence. The manager of the large songket textile producing company Wan Manang Songket Sdn. Bhd. claims orders for songket samping and sarong by government officials and ministers increased during the time Datuk Perduka Seri Endon was promoting songket textiles. Yet immediately after her death any outstanding orders were cancelled (Haji Nik 2006).

A more recent charitable foundation is Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahira (YTNZ), formed in 2007. Patronised by and named after the current³⁹ Queen of Malaysia, herself from Terengganu, the foundation's aim is to improve the economic status and employment conditions of rural songket makers (Khalid 2009). So far the foundation has set up a centralised rural songket production unit in one village near to Kuala Terengganu, which has eighty single mothers⁴⁰ from surrounding villages being trained in the making of songket textiles. A unit housing forty songket weavers and designers has also been established in Kuala Terengganu. These include graduates from the National Handicraft Institute and other established weavers. The textiles produced by these two units are sold at the foundation's headquarters in town of Bangsar Baru near to Kuala Lumpur, which attracts middle and upper class Malaysians and expatriates (Khalid 2009).

³⁹ The role of King and Queen of Malaysia rotates every five years between the Sultan and Sultana of every one of the thirteen states in Malaysia.

⁴⁰ Single mothers are rarely unmarried, the women may have been abandoned by their husbands or widowed.

4.5.1 Fashion Designers.

Malaysian fashion designers both local and international use songket textiles within their designs. The most notable designer in Malaysia to use songket textiles in his couture collections is Salikin Sidak. He regularly produces collections which predominantly utilise the textile and annually participates in Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week. He designs the motifs, patterns and chooses the colour of the textiles to be woven, which are then made into the apparel of his designs (Salikin 2003). Malaysian fashion designers who are based overseas in England and America also use songket textiles in their designs. New York based Zang Toi introduced his collection of alternative songket designs for a western market, at a Malaysian Culture Festival in Dallas in 2007.

4.6 Jacquard Loom Production.

"Diversity in cultural goods has its own value because it increases consumer choice and enriches people's cultural experience. But cultural goods also enjoy economies of scale. So the products of large producers tend to crowd out the products of smaller producers" (UNDP 2004:12)

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, Malaysia has manufactured jacquard and power loom produced textiles and garments, and the industry is an important contributor to labour absorption and export earnings (Smakman 2003:18). However, it is only in the past decade that advances in weaving technology have affected the songket industry (Siti Halimah 2006). Songket simulations produced in India and Pakistan, and more recently in China (Hassan 2006) on jacquard looms are now flooding the Malaysian market. These simulations are aimed at the lower end of the market, and cost around a half less in price than the hand-woven Malaysian songket textiles⁴¹. These three countries can produce a less expensive 'songket' textile as they produce the raw materials for weaving, and due to less economic advancement in these countries, labour costs are much lower. Plus, the major factor, the use of jacquard looms speeds up the production process.

⁴¹ A simple Malaysian polyester songket sarong or sampang costs between £16 and £50. More intricate songkets, containing more metallic thread, or woven in silk cost from £100 and can reach prices well over £1000.

The 'songket' textiles India, Pakistan and China produce are predominantly men's sampings, the songket textile which is most often purchased in Malaysia (Hassan 2006). As a jacquard loom has to weave continuously across the weft, the textiles are usually full of gold motif to eliminate excessive floating yarns on the back of the cloth, see figure 4.1. Chinese producers however are now producing textiles which have scattered motifs, almost invisibly 'tying' the floating supplementary weft yarns within the warp every centimetre or so, see figure 4.2 (Hassan 2006). This leaves a slightly shimmering finish to the face of the cloth. Though the imported sampings are very similar in quality to the Malaysian textile, the motifs used are in most instances different in character, see figure 4.3 (Halimatun 2005, Abd. Aziz 2006, Azah Aziz 2006). The external textile producers use the 5/1 tekak technique but the motifs are very abstract from the influences of flora and fauna which the Malay designers appropriate from (Halimatun 2003). Zaccari (1995) argues the affordability of machine made products helps the consumer to overlook many shortcomings of the textile. If India, Pakistan and China continue to flood the Malaysian songket market with their own patterning, it is worth considering if this may dilute the cultural value of the cloth.

The Malaysian Government has considered how to compete with the imported jacquard produced 'songket' textiles. Considering trade tariffs would reduce choice for the consumer, and could cause political contentions. On tariff introduction the United Nations argues "*Support to cultural industries rather than tariffs would do more for diversity*" (UNDP 2004:12). Therefore in 2003, the Malaysian Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, at the request of the then Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (in office from 1981 to 2004) responded by proposing mechanisation within the songket industry, as a means of competing with the foreign imports (Rahman 2003). The agency in control of introducing this mechanisation was the MHDC. Though this agency was instigated to 'promote and protect' the handicraft industry, it is the only government agency which has knowledge upon current songket textile production (Abdullah 2003).

Past trials of weaving songket designs on a Jacquard loom in the 1960s, proved inadequate because of the permitted weaving repeat size of the Jacquard loom and the composition of the songket samping, sarong and

selandang (Maznah 1996). However, with advancing technology, two Jacquard looms used to produce sari textiles in India, were sourced and purchased by the MHDC in 2005, to produce songket textiles (Hassan 2005). The 'sari' looms additional two small beams above the main warp beam permit a repeat of patterning upon the selvages of the cloth, which provide the tepi kain of the sampang, sarong and selandang. These two looms are punch card operated and permit six yarn or colour changes⁴², see figure 4.4. The loom incorporates a size 40 reed, and the polyester yarns used are the same counts as the polyester yarns used in hand-weaving. They are operated by women and maintained by men. It is also men who transfer songket designs onto punch cards using imported computerised equipment, in 2006 eight designs had been transferred onto punch cards, see figure 4.5 (Siti Halimah 2006). The eight designs are woven repeatedly, producing hundreds of metres of the same eight designs. Zaccai (1995) argues, in producing quantity the 'social value of the textile is diminished, it becomes less valued'. The result of using these eight patterns has resulted in a stock of songket textiles with repeated designs and colour, a far cry from the individually patterned and coloured textiles of the rural songket textile maker.

The textiles produced include sampings and cloth by the metre to be used in the production of handbags, shoes, and other accessories. The yarns used are polyester and metallic gimp yarns; the quality of the woven cloth is low and comparable with the imported 'songket' textiles, it in no way resembles the higher quality of the hand-woven polyester or silk yarn textiles.

I questioned songket makers and designers at the MHDC centre in Terengganu where the jacquard looms are used, upon the relevance of using the jacquard looms within the handicraft environment of the centre. Most questioned were not averse to having the looms at the centre, and advised it allowed them to understand the jacquard technology which is threatening their industry (Siti Halimah 2006).

⁴² Loom specifications: 600/1790 hooks, 6x6 shuttle changes.

4.6.1 Private Enterprise.

In August 2005, the Malay owned private company, Lunas Atur (M) Sdn. Bhd., situated in Shah Alam, twenty kilometres south of Kuala Lumpur, purchased four jacquard looms from Pakistan in order to weave songket textiles. Lunas Atur is the first private company to weave songket samplings on a jacquard loom in Malaysia (Halimaton 2005, Zin 2005). Early in 2006, two technicians from Pakistan spent one month at the company to set up the looms and teach four male staff how to use and maintain them. However, not long after the technicians returned to Pakistan the Malay technicians were unable to produce a completed songket sampling due to anomalies in patterning in one section of the design, see figure 4.6 (Zin 2006). Members of staff have repeatedly checked the punch cards which produce the design, and the loom, but cannot resolve the problem. The Malay technicians are not certain whether it is deliberate sabotage of the loom, or a lack of their technical knowledge which has caused the defective patterning. At the time I was in contact with the owner of the company, Mr. Hassan, in 2006, he was preparing to purchase a Jacquard power-loom (high speed) from Pakistan which permitted up to 8 yarn or colour changes. The cloth the technicians have so far produced is being made into accessories and furnishings, eliminating the defective section.

Prior to the 'malfunction' of the looms or punch-cards, Lunus Atur Sdn. Bhd. were producing six songket samplings per day, comparatively, it would take a hand weaver between eight to twelve weeks (including ancillary preparation) to produce the same number of textiles. With warp lengths of 100 metres, and a width of 0.8 metres, twenty five songket textile pieces of two metres in length, are woven using the same design, the remainder of the warp yarn (fifty metres) is wastage (Leena 2006).

Mr. Hassan, the director of the company plus the male technicians who operate the looms, have no experience in the songket industry. I questioned the Manager of the company, Leena Hassan (who is also the manager of the hand-weaving songket textile company Mahkota Songket), upon the opportunity for women to operate the jacquard looms. Leena explained she would be willing to employ any woman who wanted to operate and maintain the looms, but she felt it was dirty and heavy work and would not appeal to women (Leena 2006).

In order to meet the demand of his pre-sourced customers, including the Ministry of Defence and the Police Department, Mr. Hassan has commissioned jacquard woven songket sampings, and also sarongs, to be woven in China. It is too early to speculate whether Mr. Hassan and Lunas Atur Sdn. Bhd. will be the pioneers of privately mechanising the songket industry, or if their production will expand.

4.6.2 Effect Upon Hand-weaving Industry.

There is an unconcerned and almost lethargic attitude to mechanisation of the songket textile industry by rural songket makers in Terengganu. Siti Halima, a designer at the MHDC Terengganu centre, argued "*Malay people will always be faithful to the hand-woven songket textile produced in Terengganu*" (Siti Halimah 2003). I questioned Azizah, a rural maker upon jacquard produced songket textiles, she advised "*It's ok, it provides a wider market, but its not as good quality as the hand-woven one*" (Azizah 2006). Malay songket makers are aware jacquard produced songket textiles are woven more quickly, but feel that the good quality of the hand-woven songket, even at the lower market, and the loyal Malay will be patriotic to their textiles. However, the imported textiles do sell well in Kuala Lumpur, where Malay society does not have the social ties of conscience with the east coast rural makers.

The rural makers are aware that whilst the putting-out system is the largest form of production, the centralisation which mechanisation brings would not be accepted by the makers. Mechanisation would also be detrimental to the Malay songket textile entrepreneurs, whom the government are promoting, as the putting-out allows more flexibility in labour and capital investments. As Maznah argues "*As long as the putting-out system is maintained, it will not be possible to introduce massive immediate technological innovations that are prerequisites for production expansion*" (Maznah 1996:286).

4.7 Summary.

Assistance has been provided to the songket industry since colonial times. Initial assistance took the form of abolishing trade tariffs, and introducing projects which would provide a higher quality textile. However,

assistance to the industry had little effect until the Malaysian Government took over control from the Master Songket Weavers.

The Malaysian Government have invested financially in the industry, providing training, local and international marketing, and research and development. The result is an industry which is much different than that of pre-government intervention. Instead of local Master Weavers controlling the productive quality of the textile as in the past, the industry is centrally controlled in Kuala Lumpur, hundreds of miles south of the industries main production areas. It is run by management and business bureaucrats who have little or no prior knowledge of the industry. Though government intervention may have helped to conserve and protect the songket textile industry, the textiles which are produced are of a lesser quality.

The recent resurgence of the textiles popularity has been instigated by the textile being used as a symbol of Malay nationalism. This has generated non-government organisations and individuals to provide assistance in the preserving the industry. Charities patronised by social and political influential members of Malay society, plus, academics and fashion designers now promote the songket textile.

What is not present within these conservation, protection and promotional activities is the voice of the songket textile maker. She is the passive recipient of this assistance. Though the recent introduction of Jacquard power looms to produce songket textiles has not yet reached a production capacity which poses a threat to the hand-woven songket textile makers, it is not certain how long they can continue with their hand-weaving practice. Though it appears songket textiles will remain for now a part of Malaysia's identity, the high skills and intricate techniques, of which Terengganu and Kelantan people are so proud, could be irretrievably lost.

Chapter 5. Textile Praxis.

5.1 Introduction.

By utilising my own textile design and weaving practice I aimed to challenge the socio-cultural objectivity of songket textiles materiality. As a maker of culturally differing training background and socio-cultural *habitus*, my practice would create songket textiles consisting of alternative materials and weaving techniques.

In order to prepare and conduct my practice a collection of activities were required. These activities I shall term 'textile praxis', they are the collective practices of participant observer (see appendix 5.1), facilitator, studio practitioner, field practitioner, desk practitioner, and member of an academic research community. It was this praxis which enabled the consideration of intellectual and practical decisions during my creative practice.

Today's songket textiles are the assimilation of many historical and cultural influences; the textiles inception derived from the importation of Indian Patola cloths and silk and gold yarns (Maxwell 1990). These influences have not been inflicted upon the Malay songket textile maker; they have been facilitated by an intermediary, an instigator of change. This instigator of change can be social, political or economic. However change happens, it is the decision of the maker and the temporal socio-cultural objectivity of the textile which permits this change.

The aim of my practice is not to inflict my creative ideals onto the practices of the songket textile maker, but to facilitate a cross-cultural exchange of creativity. This exchange will inform both the Malay maker and my self; an 'intermediate' exchange which we will reinterpret to suit our creative environment and socio-cultural habitat (Eglash 2004).

My practice consists of formal training in textile design and weaving to honours degree level in a British university. My professional practice includes conducting surface design for printed and woven textiles for a European design company, and acting as trainer and lecturer of woven textile design in Nepal and Malaysia.

Within this project my practice was conducted both within the field and studio, where I learned to design and make songket textiles. Using both

traditional and modern loom technology, I encountered the interdependent complexities of material, technical, socio-cultural, and economic contexts which the Malay maker instinctively considers. These contexts were to prove paramount in the challenging and questioning of my creative practice.

Two research trips to Malaysian songket textile making environments were conducted lasting in total 13 months. By conducting my practice alongside local makers, both the makers and myself would be able to develop a relationship, in which we could share our approaches to making and creativity. These approaches would prove to be both similar and differential, depending upon the context.

By conducting studio practice in London between 2003 and 2006, I was able to make songket textiles within my own creative environment and *habitus*. Within the London studio environment the focus of my creativity would be influenced by my surroundings and peers, and by the challenging of materiality and technology which my creative practice incorporates.

Introducing alternative materiality and weave techniques, the field and studio practice challenges and questions the socio-cultural perception and conception of songket textiles materiality. By incorporating and temporarily abstracting from Malay socio-cultural objectification, this documented practice provides textiles which are representative of cross-cultural objectivity. The chapter concludes by evaluating my practices within a Malaysian context of songket textiles, their place, abstraction and decontextualisation.

Imperial measurements, a legacy of colonisation, are still frequently used in songket weaving, and where necessary these measurements will be used throughout this chapter.

5.2 Initial Materials Research.

My first experience of introducing alternative yarns into songket textile weaving was in 2003 at the National Handicraft Institute, Malaysia. I was invited to the institute to conduct a residency as Visiting Lecturer by Dato' Zakiah Ahmad, the Director General of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, the umbrella organisation of the institute. Dato' Zakiah informed me she "*wanted to see the institute produce something*

different in songket textiles" and that "year after year they [weave trainers and students] *produce the same stuff*" (Zakiah 2003).

I had selected the institute as a viable establishment to implement my initial research, as I perceived within a training environment the receptiveness of creativity would be more encouraged. Further more, I had met the weave training staff I would be working with previously, six first generation songket textile makers, and knew that the trainers enjoyed weaving and did not see it as a chore. I was also aware staff at the institute were paid a monthly civil servant salary, and I would not be impacting upon them financially. This was reasoning for my not imposing upon the time of rural songket weavers who were economically dependent upon their textile production.

I wanted the research to be as participatory as possible, allowing the six weave trainers I was to work with to participate in the projects ideas, analysis, and decisions. My past experience with development agencies in Nepal in 2002, such as the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), revealed participatory methods currently used by such organisations had the most success of development implementation (Chambers 1999). Chambers argues 'local knowledge' is essential in implementing alternative or intermediate technology, he advises,

"Outsiders do not dominate or lecture; they facilitate, sit down listen and learn. Outsiders do not transfer technology; they share methods which local people can see for their own appraisal, analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation. Outsiders do not impose their reality; they encourage and enable local people to express their own." (Chambers 1983:103).

Though all decisions where possible were reached through discussion, there were individual responsibilities within the project which were allocated to the trainers or myself, see table 5.1.

I had decided upon this delegation of responsibilities as I wanted the trainers to feel some responsibility for the project, 'empowering them to initiate' and own certain aspects such as motif and pattern design and weaving (Pratt and Loizos 1992). The designing and weaving of motifs were aspects which the trainers would have greater experience than myself, plus, I did not want to influence the textiles with a Western designer's patterning.

I was in contact with the trainers on a daily basis (Monday to Friday), and in order for them to have some degree of confidence, we held our meetings and discussions in their familiar surroundings; the institute's weaving studio. Prior to sourcing alternative yarns and starting to discuss with trainers their design ideas, my first concern was to learn to weave a songket textile.

5.2.1 Weaving a Songket Textile.

Learning to weave a songket textile myself, using current local yarns, was a priority element in determining which alternative yarns I should start to source. I had previously read literature regarding songket textiles techniques by Norwani (1989) and Selvanayagam (1990), observed rural songket weavers producing the textiles, and understood technically how its motifs and patterns were formed. When researching weaving practices within different cultures to my own, I have always learnt the local technique and woven alongside local female weavers. So far in practical research, I have found this action provides a relationship of trust between my self and the women I am weaving alongside, which otherwise would not exist. The relationship consists of equality as weavers, and empowers some women to make comments upon my skills and progress. At the institute I was told by a trainer (2003) that I was '*quick to learn*' when I was weaving a simple plain weave structure, even though I had previously explained that I had five years weaving experience.

The practical relationship which the trainers and I developed whilst I was learning the songket weaving technique went beyond that of traditional Malay practice. When I started to discuss my own practice with the weavers, a slow process of exchange of skills and knowledge began. This sharing of knowledge encouraged the trainers to be overt in sharing the techniques of songket textile designing and weaving. However, in the case of songket patterns which the trainers had designed themselves over the years, they were very secretive. I was allowed to see only the designs they would show their students, plus the new patterns they had designed for my project.

In order to commence my 'training' in songket textile weaving at the institute I was taught, by my observation and practical repetition, how to prepare the yarn for warping, dress the loom, arrange warp for supplementary weft insertion, design patterns, make pattern leashes, and

finally weave the textile, see figure 5.1. This provided a practical understanding and tacit knowledge of songket textile weaving, which reading or observation had failed to do. As Marchand explains, "*It is through the process of making that the novice eventually acquires an expert knowledge of his trade*" (Marchand 2001:122). This practical knowledge allowed me to analyse and make judgements upon the technical constraints of songket textile weaving, when attempting to use alternative warp, weft, and supplementary weft yarns. These technical aspects emerged as the reed, heddles, and songket patterning technique.

5.2.1.1 Constraints of the Reed.

Unlike my own studio practice, where I would select a reed size according to the density of the warp yarn or structure of the cloth I was to weave, the songket weaver has no choice other than the 40 dents per inch reed. Having a varied range of reed sizes would be out of economic scope of a rural weaver. The 40 dents to the inch restricts which 'count' (density) of yarn can be used on the songket loom. Therefore, when sourcing alternative yarns for the warp, I had to be sure they were compatible with this 40 dent per inch reed coordination.

The silk and polyester ground cloth yarns used currently with the 40 dent per inch reed uses 80 warp ends to the inch. With two warp ends placed through each dent, providing a set of 80 warp ends to the inch (four warp ends to each dent at selvedge ends). The 40 dents per inch reed can be used with yarns which are of a higher or lower density, to the current yarns, but there will be limitations. Depending upon the density of the yarn, the number of warp ends to the inch can range between 40 and 160. Using any yarn counts lower or higher than this could produce a poor quality cloth, where the woven set is too open and loose, or too crammed and tight.

5.2.1.2 Constraints of Heddles.

A consideration of the heddles if using very fine yarns is the 'permitted' number of heddles on each shaft. If alternative warp yarns are very fine in density and require more heddles per inch then there is a danger that there will be too many heddles on each shaft. This would cause heddles to 'stick' together and prove difficult to lift yarns for weft insertion, which result in

broken warp yarns. This could be counteracted by introducing additional shafts and treddles, but as all songket looms consist of only two shafts, this additional technology may render the alternative yarns too complex to introduce at this initial stage.

5.2.1.3 Constraints of Patterning Techniques.

The density of the warp and weft yarns used influences the scale, length and width of songket textiles motifs and patterns. Supplementary weft yarns float over three (tekat tiga) or five (tekat lima) warp ends to form motifs. Figure 5.2 provides examples where the same motif has been woven on a silk warp, with supplementary weft yarns floating over three, five, seven and nine warp ends. The motif is distorted width ways when floated over seven and nine warp ends. If warp yarns of alternative densities are introduced, then a warp thread which is finer and uses more warp ends per inch will shorten the width of the motif, similarly, a warp thread which is thicker and uses less warp ends per inch will widen the width of the motif. To counteract this, supplementary weft thread may need to float over less or more than three and five warp yarns to enable the motif to retain its shape. As it is characteristic of Malaysian songket textiles to float over three or five warp ends, it may not be appropriate to change the number of warp ends which are floated over.

5.2.2 Selection of Alternative Yarns.

As my time at the institute was limited, and due to the above patterning concerns when using an alternative warp yarn, I decided to source only alternative yarns to be used in the weft and supplementary weft. The warp would be constructed from the 2/140 silk yarns currently used at the institute, alternative warp yarns would be sourced later in my practice. I had intended to source alternative weft yarns in Malaysia, but there are very few retailers of yarns suitable for weaving. There are wholesale suppliers of polyester yarn for industrial use, plus a few retailers in Kuala Lumpur which supply small amounts of embroidery cotton and silk threads, rayon, acrylic, flattened unsupported metallic yarns, and various densities of elastic thread, more suitable to the hobby enthusiast than commercial production. Import and distribution of silk and polyester yarns to entrepreneurs, weaving

centres, and independent weavers, is conducted by a few private Malaysian companies and the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation⁴³. Therefore alternative yarns sourced were imported from Fairfield Yarns Ltd. and Lurex Company Ltd. in England.

In selecting the yarns for ground cloth weft, the criterion was that each yarn should consist of a material quality not currently used in songket weaving. The yarns should also produce a textile of light weight, suitable to the Malaysian climate. This included textural slub yarns, transparent yarns, yarns with 'elastane', in different colours and densities. Yarns for supplementary weft consisted of supported and unsupported metallic yarns in varying colours and differing densities of metallic gimp yarns in varying shades of gold and silver. When selecting the yarns to be imported I wanted the trainers to feel a part of the yarn selection process and questioned them upon yarns they would like to weave but had never had the opportunity to. Replies were linen and wool, yarns which they had heard of but had never encountered. I included these two yarn types to be imported, simply to encourage the enthusiasm of the trainers.

When making the selection of alternative yarns, I asked the six trainers to look through sample catalogues⁴⁴ of metallic yarns provided by 'The Lurex Company'. The trainers felt unable to select yarns to order from these catalogues as they had never before had to select alternative yarns for weaving. They were not able to abstract and visualise the small samples of yarns from the catalogues within a finished songket textile. The trainers had themselves been trained to use silk or polyester yarns for warp and weft, and metallic gimp yarns for supplementary weft. Citing Connerton (1989) and Bourdieu (1977), Marchand, in his comparative study of carpentry and stonemason apprenticeships in Quebec and Yemen respectively, claims that it is how an apprentice is taught that allows him to proposition his skill or craft. He explains that where trade knowledge is exchanged through making (as songket weavers do), and there is limited "...*propositional information*

⁴³ There are no tariffs in place which prohibit the importation of alternative yarns (Ibrahim, 2003), but there is an import tax of five percent levied on any yarns imported by private businesses (Zin Hassan 2005, Malaysian Customs and Excise 2007).

⁴⁴ Lurex Company catalogues used were 'Supported Fine Lurex Yarns', 'LX Bouclette Bouclargent', 'The Gimp Yarns', 'Supported', and 'Unsupported'.

exchanged during the training, both in terms of instruction and questioning" (Marchand 2001:167), then the knowledge is less open to scrutiny. The inability of the trainers to select alternative yarns is also explained by Biersack (1982) who explains 'it is the cognitive processes of traditional societies to be bound to experiential and empirical thought, which cannot be said to be deductive or abstract'. I therefore made the selection of yarns my self, choosing a range of yarns⁴⁵ which would provide alternative textures and densities of yarn for the trainers, see table 5.2 for yarns imported. .

The arrival of the imported yarns caused excitement for the trainers and though not directly involved in the research, the weave students at the institute. Each box of imported yarns was opened by myself and the trainers as a group. This allowed me to observe the response of the trainers to the stimulation the 'new' yarns had instilled within them as makers. There was much fun and larking around as each cone of yarn was taken from its box by the trainers, see figure 5.3. After all the yarns had been removed from their boxes and visually analysed, the characteristic response of the trainers, and that of weave students at the institute, was '*tidak boleh*' translated as 'can not'. Referring to, 'the yarns *can not*' be used in songket weaving'. Once again, this may be explained by Marchand's theory of training. The trainers themselves, and students, were taught not to 'proposition' the yarns used in songket weaving, but to abide by an instinctive "*controlled set of laws and procedures*" (Marchand 2001:166). The expressing of '*tidak boleh*' could also be a reflection upon Biersack's (1982) opinions upon 'experiential and empirical thought. The makers had to experience the yarns in use themselves to cognitively accept them, they had to see concrete evidence, the concrete alleviates uncertainty (Biersack 1982)

In order to challenge this response, I asked the trainers to freely select from the imported yarns and sample them on songket looms using a plain weave structure, see figure 5.4. The weavers were reticent to try some of the more radical yarns, such as the 'lycra' and 'lurex' mix, and translucent polyester. They had not seen most of the yarns before and were not confident in using them, unsure of how they would react within weaving. In

⁴⁵ The importation of small amounts of yarns was financed by the MHDC, with yarns costing approximately £20 to £40 per kilo, with the exception of a 'lurex' and 'lycra' mix which was £72 per kilo.

order to utilise the 'lycra' and 'lurex' and translucent yarns, I asked two of the more confident weavers to weave small samples using the yarns, see figure 5.5. Once all trainers had woven samples of differing yarns, the samples were discussed by the trainers and my self, debating difficulties of weaving particular yarns and incompatibility of yarns' woven alongside each other.

5.2.3 Yarn Sampling and Selection.

After a visual analysis of the woven samples, the trainers were quite confident upon which yarns created a good aesthetic and technical combination, and which did not and why, (these were usually selvedge tension anomalies, see figure 5.6). More importantly for the incorporation of the alternative yarns by the trainers, the trainers knew which yarns they thought amenable to weave with and which yarns aesthetic they personally liked. I extracted and channelled the ideas of the trainers regarding the selection of yarns which would be incorporated into the weaving of six songket textiles. Further samples were then ready to be produced which would incorporate the final combination of yarns, motifs and colours, prior to weaving the concluding pieces, see figure 5.7. The alternative yarns finally selected for use is shown in table 5.2.

5.2.4 Patterning.

Prior to weaving the full size textiles, the trainers designed their own motifs and patterns for the textiles, some creating new motifs, others using traditional motifs, see figure 5.8. The different languages, namely Malay and English, between the Malay trainers and myself were not a barrier when designing or weaving. If there was a problem in weaving or design we could not verbally discuss, then sketches were done to realise them, see Figure 5.9.

Whilst the trainers were designing the patterns, I noticed a similarity between each of the trainers' designs. There was a tendency for each trainer to place motifs over stripes on the ground cloth, see figure 5.10. I asked the trainers if there was a reason for this, or was it simply an aesthetic concept. The trainers could give no reason for the positioning, except that it appears to be a recent design influence, and one characteristic of the songket textiles

produced at the institute over the past few years. One trainer volunteered to place her motif between stripes, she was the most confident and competitive of all the six trainers. However, once she started to weave the songket textile she reverted back to placing the motif over a stripe. This could have been lack of confidence, but after we discussed the change in design, she started the weaving of the textile again, this time placing the motif on the edge of a stripe, not in between and not directly on it, see figure 5.11.

5.2.5 Colour.

As I had selected the alternative yarns for import, their choice of colour had also been 'delegated' to me. As the trainers were not used to using the weft yarns they felt unconfident in their choices of colour for the warp yarns. The colour of songket textiles has not remained static over the centuries, along with motif and pattern it is a part of songket textiles materiality which has been much developed locally. Therefore, I did not wish to greatly influence the colour co-ordination of the textiles, but to select colours which would be in keeping with the current colours of songket textiles. I also wanted the research to focus upon the alternative yarns used and not alternative colour co-ordinations. I had also at this time not had a chance to research thoroughly into colour and its socio-cultural representation in Malaysia, and did not want to make a cultural 'faux pas'. Colours chosen for warp yarns, dyed by the trainers using 'Dylon' dyes in their full hue were, peach, olive green, navy, black, and lilac, one set of warp yarns were left undyed, see figure 5.12.

5.2.6 Trainers' Response.

Once the trainers started to weave full size songket textiles with the alternative yarns, any initial apprehensions of the yarns suitability, gave way to surprise and then confidence. Two of the more senior (in weave experience) trainers were so confident with using their selected yarns of linen and supported metallic gimp, they wanted to change their designs to include more complicated and detailed motifs. Though there was not enough time to do this, it demonstrated the confidence which the trainers had developed in using the yarns. After approximately 3 to four days, the trainers took 'ownership' of the songket textiles they were weaving. They began to take a

pride in their textiles; they were keen to examine each other's work and to show their weave students what they had woven. It prompted one of the only two male⁴⁶ weave students at the institute to ask me if he could use some of the 'lurex' yarns in his own work. The trainers actually started to relax whilst they were weaving, they would joke with each other, and sing along to the continuously playing radio. The most competitive trainer inserted her forename discretely into a motif in the patterning of her textile. I was told by Malaysian textile historian Azah Aziz (2006) that this is not normal practice in songket textile weaving. On completing a textile which incorporated the 'lycra' and 'lurex' mixed yarn, see figure 5.13, which was probably the most radical of the alternative yarns introduced, the trainer asked to take it home to show her family, as she was proud and astonished, she exclaimed "*I never thought I could weave something like this*" (weave trainer, 2003). This comment by the trainer revealed to me that my research had not only introduced alternative yarns to songket weaving, but it had allowed this trainer to expand upon her own weaving practice.

Though the weavers were satisfied with the final outcome of the songket pieces, see figure 5.12, they critically analysed how each one could be improved. For example, making the motif more distinctive outlining it in a darker shade of the same yarn, provide a softer handle to the finished cloth by omitting the quantity of unsupported metallic yarns in a single textile.

5.2.7 Continued Use of Alternative Yarns.

The success of incorporating alternative metallic yarns can be measured by the long term effect it has had upon songket hand weaving production in Malaysia. When I returned to the National Handicraft Institute in September 2005, the supported metallic yarns were now being used in the songket textile designs of the student weavers, alongside the metallic gimp yarns. Also in 2005, a songket textile production company, Mahkota Songket Sdn. Bhd., started to import very similar polyester supported metallic yarns from China. The yarns retail in Malaysia at approximately £10 per kilo, half the price of the yarns imported from England. These imported, supported

⁴⁶ This is the only time I have encountered men weaving songket textiles. One of the men is now a songket trainer at the institute and it is not certain if the other man went into commercial textile practice.

metallic yarns, are now used by the institute and weavers of many high quality songket ateliers, such as Wan Manang Songket, Ateequah Songket, and Habibah Songket. They have become integrated into the material, technical, and social and cultural objectification of the songket textile, and were still being used by songket weavers on my last field visit to Malaysia in 2006.

5.2.8 Influence Upon Practice.

Practically working with the trainers at the institute allowed me to gain primary knowledge upon songket textiles technical considerations which I have not previously experienced documented. This includes,

- The restrictions of reed sizes available and therefore the density of the warp yarn.
- The densities of warp and weft yarns affect the dimensions of the motif.
- The adherence of supplementary weft floating over three or five warp yarns.
- Patterning technique not easily transferable to metallic heddles.
- Lack of alternative yarns readily available in Malaysia.

Culturally, I was able to take part in the cognitive processes of songket weaving in a local academic and creative environment. The achievement was an alternative yarn had been introduced into songket textile weaving, which has since been re-sourced by a Malaysian at a more affordable cost to the songket market. Just as important is the research at the institute added experience and knowledge to my practice, that of the six trainers, plus the songket textile makers of Malaysia. Our creative *habitus* has been exposed to cross cultural practice.

5.2.9 Post Practice.

When these six textiles were exhibited at the MHDC Head Quarters in Kuala Lumpur in 2003, the details of my own part in the textiles production were not included. At the time this troubled and confused me. The MHDC and the institute had taken all credit for the work and I felt disappointed by this. Now, after I have conducted further cultural and political research of

Malaysia, I understand why this was the case and I do not mind at all that my details were not included. Reasoning for the lack of my inclusion in the production of the textiles is outlined below.

Since the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1973 the Malaysian government have strived to empower Malay society in a multi-ethnic Malaysia. Empowering them with self-confidence, motivation and enthusiasm "*...which can mobilise the people to extraordinary levels of achievement*" (Muhammad Haji Muhd 1996:20). Reasoning for this is articulated by Muhammad Haji Muhd (1996) who argues 'certain negative Malay traits need to be recognised'. Muhammad explains,

"Feelings of inferiority and dependency hamper the Malays. They feel inferior not only physically but also in their thinking and psychology. This inferiority complex robs them of their self-confidence". He continues "*This sense of inferiority leads to dependency on others whom they regard as superior, to provide for their needs...For example, they rely on others for capital, technology, information, expertise, initiative and leadership to show them the way in new and unfamiliar fields*" (Muhammad Haji Muhd 1996:6).

This feeling of inferiority and dependency, which permeates a vicious circle, is caused by 'shadows' of past feudalistic and colonial rule, "*...a master-servant or superior-inferior dichotomy*" (Muhammad Haji Muhd 1996:8). By my lack of inclusion in the textiles exhibition, the textiles were seen to be a Malay 'creative development', enhancing the empowerment of the Malay in instigating change, hence promoting self-confidence of the Malay in a multi-ethnic nation.

5.3 Field Practice at Urban Weaving Centre.

After initially introducing alternative yarns to songket textile making at the National Handicraft Institute and conducting studio practice at the Royal College of Art in London (detailed later in this chapter), I went on to carry out further field practice in Malaysia in 2006. The reasoning for this practice was to introduce alternative warp and weft yarns, plus patterning composition, within a songket textile making environment. This would permit me to assess the relevance of my studio practice within the context of songket textiles 'local technology' (Eglash 2004). I conducted this practice at Mahkota Songket Sdn. Bhd., a small family-owned hand-weaving songket workshop in

urban Petaling Jaya, 25 kilometres southeast of Kuala Lumpur. I was allowed to conduct my practice at the workshop by the proprietor Mr. Hassan, in exchange for textile design instruction for its senior designer, Izan. I was already aware of Izan's creative practice as she had been a senior student at the National Handicraft Institute whilst I was a Visiting Lecturer there. In my instruction with Izan, Mr. Hassan and his daughter Leena, who managed the workshop, were very keen for me to create new motifs for songket textiles and share these with Izan. This is something which I was also asked to do whilst interviewing proprietors at commercial songket textile weaving centres in Terengganu. Whilst I replied to these proprietors and Mr. Hassan that I was very willing to share the designs and knowledge of materials within the textiles which I had created in my studio and field practice, I was unsure at that time about the cultural ethics of creating new motifs myself. Further personal reasoning for not creating new motifs at this time, was I felt my creative practice would have been commercially exploited by the proprietors. However, this experience was enlightening to my research; it taught me that Malay songket textile producers would openly welcome motif designs from an external cultural force. This has made me question whether future research, external to this investigative project, should include motif design, not to be copied, but to facilitate influence to the creativity of makers.

My practice at the urban weaving centre was carried out alongside five Malay songket textile makers whom I already had working relationships with, as I had taught the young makers whilst a Visiting Lecturer at the National Handicraft Institute when they were students. My practice at the workshop provided a different dimension to our relationship. They were now professional makers and I was a research student and novice songket textile maker. This time the young makers were going to observe and participate in my practice, as I had done in theirs in 2003. The fact that the makers and I already had a relationship was a positive influence to my research practice; the makers had experience of how I successfully introduced alternative yarns to songket textiles at the Institute, and knew that I understood the complexity of songket design and making. I was already a part of their creative *habitus*, and my practice, based upon technology within materials, was not alien to them. These makers never said 'tidak boli' or 'cannot' to me as they once had at the Institute.

The practice of the makers had changed since I last observed and worked with them in 2003. It was evident the young makers had more confidence in their practice now they were working in a commercial environment. They were able to make decisions alone and explain their practice to me. One maker apologised regarding the colours of the yarns she was using, explaining that it was a commission and the colours had been selected by the person who commissioned the textile.

The creative atmosphere at the workshop was evident in the textiles the makers were weaving. The majority of the songket textiles woven included new motifs and compositions, see figure 5.14, only weaving traditional designs to commission. The workshop, opened in 2005, was owned and managed by business entrepreneurs, who were not experienced in weaving textiles. The proprietor, entrepreneur Mr Hassan and his family had no training in songket textile making, they were however Malay, and had the tacit knowledge and *habitus* of the songket textile consumer and wearer.

As I observed at the Institute, music playing on the radio was continuous, and seemed almost 'essential' within the makers' practice, this is a concept which I had not observed within rural makers' practice. Temperatures in the workshop varied between 36 and 40 degrees Celsius, and with the air conditioning often broken the humidity was high. Yet the makers appeared relaxed and happy within their making environment, and would make jokes and laugh with each other. They wove conscientiously and continuously, temporally challenged by economics and the commercial commodities they were making.

5.3.1 Documentation.

To produce the motifs and patterning of the textile I wished to use within the textile, I used the 'paint' function of 'Microsoft Windows' software, which was used by the designer at the workshop. It was originally used by trainers at the National Handicraft Institute and when printed, the design resembles the hand drawn charts used by rural weavers. Having produced hand-drawn charts and utilised the 'paint' software, I realised the software is the quickest and easiest option. Mistakes can be easily rectified and laborious repeats are 'rotated' or 'copied and pasted'. In using the same documentation methods as the workshop for the textile I was to produce, the

designs, see figure 5.15, could be easily comprehended by the songket makers who were to observe and participate in my practice. Apart from dyeing specifications, this is the only documentation used by Malay songket textile makers. Unlike a western weaver's practice, warp and weft orders are not easily produced, it would take up too much concentration by the weaver to count each warp and weft pick used. A space between motifs and the amount of ground cloth fabric woven is calculated through motif composition on the charted design or measurements in inches. A cultural difference in weaving documentation is something I have become aware of whilst conducting research in other countries; I also encountered differences in documentation during my past experience with weavers in east Nepal⁴⁷.

5.3.2 Yarn Preparation.

Within my studio practice in London, I had already sourced and sampled the yarns I would use in my practice at this urban workshop. I had sampled them for their compatibility to be woven together, for use as warp, weft, and supplementary weft, plus their shrinkage levels when dyed. To assess the feasibility of using these yarns outside of my studio practice, I chose to weave them as a selandang (shawl), within a songket textile production environment. A selandang would be quicker to weave than a sarong and was a socially recognised object. The yarns selected consisted of 2/200 count spun two ply silk yarn for warp, and silk organzine, silk slub, and supported transparent and 'Lurex' yarns for weft or supplementary weft, see table 5.3.

I was also encouraged by Mr. Hassan to examine the yarn stock of the weaving centre. It is Mr. Hassan who started to import supported metallic yarns sourced from China, in 2005. These yarns are very similar, and have replaced the yarns I introduced to the National Handicraft Institute and songket textiles in 2003. Showing Mr. Hassan the yarns I had brought from

⁴⁷ In Nepal I had drawn to scale the motifs and composition within a textile design which I had asked local weavers to weave, but as the weavers do not use any documentation (motifs are taken from previous textiles and patterns constructed whilst weaving. In west Nepal designs are documented on squared charts similar to the Malaysian songket charts) my design could not be visually translated to them. The result was to instruct each pick of the design to the weaver. Once this initial textile had been produced, and the drawn concept had been visually explained, the next drawn design to be woven by the same weaver was conducted with more ease.

England, he assured me that he could probably source some of the yarns such as the 2/200 spun silk, and silk organzine from China. Upon examining a small amount of 'pineapple fibre' yarn, Mr. Hassan had purchased from Indonesia⁴⁸ I realised that it was actually a very fine density gummed four tram yarn, and very likely, silk.

All yarns used were not dyed prior to weaving as the woven textile would be piece dyed when removed from the loom. This would save preparation time and facilitate the makers at the workshop with an alternative dye technique. The 2/200 silk yarn was prepared for dressing the loom by winding on to spools made from cut lengths of plastic tubing. These tubes, available easily from hardware stores, replace hollow bamboo stem spools used in the past (Fisk 1959). The ancillary equipment used at the workshop, such as spool winding and warping table, are similar to those used in traditional rural weaving environments. The workshop had also recently purchased an electric spool winder, but it was only used with dyed hanks of yarn. For technical authenticity I used the traditional wooden hand-winding spool equipment, see figure 5.16. It took me two hours to wind approximately 200 grams of silk yarn onto 20 spools to be used for the warp.

With the participation of one of the makers, these 20 spools were rewound onto the warping table to produce the warp, see figure 5.17. The number of spools used to produce a warp differs depending upon the skill of the warp maker. In his report of songket textile production Hill (1949) observed that between 5 and 40 spools could be utilised at one time in the warp making process. In my studio practice, using an upright warping mill, see figure 5.18, I usually use one single yarn at a time to produce the warp, which takes much more time than the warping table method used at the workshop.

The four songket makers' who worked at the Mahkota workshop also assisted in wrapping the warp yarns around the warping board and dressing the loom, see figure 5.19. After winding, the warp yarns were tied onto the end of an existing warp on the loom which had already been woven and placed through heddles and 40 dent per inch reed, see figure 5.20. This is quite common practice and eliminates the need to remake heddles for the

⁴⁸ Though purchased in Indonesia may have not been the original source of the fibre.

new warp. As all heddles for songket looms have to be made by hand from nylon cord, re-using the heddles is an economic and time scale consideration. In total it took eight hours to tie the warp ends of the warp of width 60 cm. This compares with three days in making new heddles and placing yarns through the reed. The assistance of the makers in these processes saved much time and allowed them to become familiar with the fine density warp yarns. The warping board of the songket loom does not require any additional manipulation when winding on a warp yarn of alternative density to what is normally used.

The yarns to be used in the weft of the textile were wound on to spools using the same traditional winding equipment. More care had to be taken when winding the silk organzine yarn from a 'cheese' (cylindrical cone) on the spool winder. The 'springy' nature of the organzine yarn caused the yarn to unwind faster than it could be wound onto the spool. This caused the yarn to tangle and form knots. I eventually controlled the yarn by developing a tension with thumb and forefinger when the yarn left the 'cheese', creating a rhythmic and slower hand-winding speed.

5.3.3 Patterning.

Within the textiles patterning I used a traditional motif taken from a songket sarong dated around the early twentieth century, which I had previously observed at the Malaysian National Museum in Kuala Lumpur. The motif, a rose with stem and leaf was used in its original scale, in its full capacity, plus, abstracted by removing the stem and leaf, see figure 5.21. The traditional structures of *punca*, *badan* and *tepi kain* of a *selandang* were to be used, and along with the traditional motif these were to be part of the textiles material indexes of recognition.

When the head designer of the workshop, Izan, saw the motif she did not recognise it as a Malaysian motif. The motif was of a style, consisting of large singular motifs, which was only used during the 1930s and 1940s, one which is not often currently reused (Abd. Aziz 2006). Izan was not aware of many of these motifs, but she was aware that the motif was old. She explained old motifs are opaque in metallic yarns, unlike more contemporary motifs which have an outline of metallic yarn, allowing the negative space to create the motif's form, see figure 5.22. These outlined motifs save time in

creating butang (patterning leashes) and decrease the amount of metallic yarn used.

Though traditional structures were used for the selandang textile, the compositions of motifs within the structures were not to be traditional. In order for weaving for this textile to be a challenge for my research and practice, I incorporated design elements which I had not observed before in a songket textile. This element was the 360 degree rotation⁴⁹ of motifs within the badan of the selandang. The motifs were composed so that they were rotated in eight different directions, see figure 5.23. Once I had drafted the composition of the design, by counting each different row of supplementary weft threads which needed to be woven, I was able to calculate how many patterning leashes would be required for the design. It was at this stage of my practice I realised a part of the pattern I had designed, namely the 360 degree rotation of motifs, would require 378 butang to be produced. This was an extremely large amount for the scale and form of motifs which would be formed. Izan informed me that it would not just be time-consuming to prepare and weave the pattern, but it would also require much concentration to remember the order of the rotation when lifting butang. To make and weave this number of butang and concentrate on the order of the patterning, would take a long time, and though I was not constrained by the 'economic' considerations of time, I was limited to the time within my field practice. The agency of time forced me to rethink the design.

5.3.3.1 Patterning Reevaluation.

The 16 motifs within the badan repeat, requiring 378 butang, would provide alternative patterning to the cloth, though this would only be noticeable when closely studying the textile. An alternative, to justify the economic and temporal feasibility of using so many butang would be to use 16 completely different motifs. This would provide a textile of economic and social value, but would of course also take more time in sourcing and creating motifs. To compromise between temporality and creativity, the same motif was used but instead of rotating 360 degrees, the motif was simply reflected 180 degrees vertically within the repeat, see figure 5.24. This would

⁴⁹ Within geometry there is rotational, reflective, scaling and sliding movement, see chapter two.

permit the reuse of one set of butang, this did not greatly detract from the material aesthetic of the cloth I wanted to produce, and the number of butang was reduced to 72.

A further reevaluation due to timescales was the amount of patterning to be placed into the punca structure of the textile, and the inclusion of the tepi kain within the selvedge. The punca of the selandang, similar to the kapala of the sarong, is usually the most decorative part of the textile. To create extensive patterning in this structure would require many more butang to be prepared and woven. Though I was aware that a traditional hand woven songket selandang can take up to three months to weave, combined with the revelation of the number of butang for the original badan design I voiced to Leena "*This design could take me up to three months to weave it couldn't it?*". Leena very knowingly nodded yes. As well as reevaluating the pattern for the badan, I also modified the punca and the structure of the selandang. The patterning in the punca of the textile would now consist of a single row of rose motifs, see figure 5.25. To replace the omitted supplementary weft patterning in the punca, which forms the divisions between the structures, I included a textured slub silk yarn within the weft, see figure 5.26. The tepi kain border was omitted, this is now a regular practice in designing modern selandang (Azah Aziz 2006). The omission of these two traditional elements did not detract from the material objectivity of the selandang textile. The traditional motif existed in metallic yarns, the tekak tiga technique was present, and the compositional structures were present in part.

5.3.4 Weaving the Textile.

As in the preparation of the yarns and patterning, the weaving of the textile also involved the participation of one of the makers from the workshop. The use of the alternative warp yarns by Izan would inform me if they were easily manipulated by the songket textile maker. Though predominantly the textile was woven by myself, I would often arrive at the workshop to find Izan at my loom, having woven several centimetres of the textile prior to my arrival. Izan was quicker than I at weaving the textile, as a novice it was the lifting of butang and insertion of supplementary weft yarns which slowed down my weaving practice, see figure 5.27.

Whilst weaving the textile a concern I had with using fine silk yarn such as 2/200 spun silk for the warp of a songket textile, was the tension the yarn is put under whilst inserting supplementary weft yarns. The wooden shed rods holding taught the warp yarns during a supplementary weft shed, see figure 5.28, often become rough to touch and splinter at the edges. The rods are constantly sanded down to remove splinters, but often splinters are only recognised after they have snapped warp yarns. A snapped warp yarn can be tied by a small knot, but will cause a weakness in the yarn when put under tension, it can also affect the tension of other warp yarns, and may produce a weakness in the cloth once woven. A knotted yarn is also weakened as it passes through the nylon heddles; the strength of the heddles yarn formed into a loop often inhibits the knot from passing through and breaks the warp yarn again. Though I often sanded the shed rod (around twice a day) it did occasionally break some of the warp yarns, see figure 5.29. To compensate for the knotted, weakened warp yarns I allowed more gentle movements when beating down each weft pick and lifting the shed for supplementary weft insertion. Another method to counteract warp yarns from breaking is to ensure the butang (patterning leashes) are pushed as far to the back of the loom as possible when not in use, a tactic I learned by observing Izan. The butangs collection, see figure 5.30, near to the front of the loom when weaving causes a very small shed in which to pass through the shuttle.

5.3.5 Piece Dyeing.

Once the textile was completed and removed from the loom it was ready to be washed and pieced dyed. The makers at the workshop were nervous regarding the immersion of the textile into dye after so many hours of weaving; worrying the textile may be ruined by shrinking. As I had piece-dyed these yarns before in my studio practice, I had more confidence in the success of the textiles dyeing. The textile was dyed using the methods and equipment at the workshop. One tin of 'Dylon' dye in shade olive green mixed with salt as mordant, in a large aluminium container with four litres of water. The dye was heated over the flame generated by a gas burner, see figure 5.31. All makers from the workshop observed the dyeing and were quite relieved that the process had not damaged the cloth.

5.3.6 The completed textile.

Width of textile on loom = 60 centimetres.

Finished width of textile = 59 centimetres.

Length of textile on loom (inc. fringe) = 136.5 centimetres

Finished length of textile (inc. fringe) = 135 centimetres.

Warp ends per inch = 80

Size of reed = 40

Loom = wooden songket hand-loom⁵⁰.

Dye used = 'Dylon' olive green.

Motifs used:

- Rose with stem and leaves
- Rose bud

Weaving of the songket textile was conducted over a period of four months. However, this time frame was not continuous, field research to Terengganu and museums were also conducted during this time, plus, the workshop was closed for ten days due to Ramadan celebrations. The actual design, preparation and weaving of the cloth took seven, five day weeks of six hours a day, approximately 210 hours.

The textile produced used a traditional songket loom, equipment, and techniques. The motifs used are traditional and their original scale is retained, yet their arrangement is not typical. Composition consists of formal rows of motifs, separated by large bands of 'slub' yarn woven sections, see figure 5.32. Yarns used in the textile are alternatives to past and present songket yarns however the cloth retained an extremely formal appearance. The metallic yarn used was a supported thread and of very fine density, used in four ply for each supplementary weft pick, see figure 5.33. A single colour was applied to the textile post weaving, and the textile proved washable.

Practice conducted during this experience at the Mahkota workshop was a combination of both my own and the Malay songket textile makers. The Malay makers assisted and contributed to the weaving of the textile, and at

⁵⁰ Weft order is not produced for this textile, as songket weavers use the charted design to count the spaces between motifs. Unlike a computerised or doobby loom which counts the number of picks used.

each making process the makers were consulted for their opinion of the design's relevance to songket textiles material objectivity. A feature of the Malay makers' practice which was highlighted during this workshop experience was the intuitive ability of the makers to comprehend almost immediately the approximate number of butang and time a new design would take to weave. A skill which is learnt through time and experience, and one that helps direct the maker to productive creativity. The overall participation and observation experienced by the Malay makers and myself during this field research added to both of our creative *habitus*.

5.4 Studio Practice.

The textiles produced within my studio weaving practice would draw upon praxis I had conducted within my research. This theoretical and practical knowledge which I had gained upon songket textiles' materiality, technology, and socio-cultural representation, would be highly significant whilst creating songket textiles within my studio practice.

The aim of my studio practice was to introduce alternative yarns and techniques to songket textiles whilst contemplating the effects this would have upon the socio-cultural representation of the cloth. The textiles to be produced would provide a new genre of songket textiles, yet not detract from their socio-cultural representation. It was important during my studio practice that any alternative yarns and technology used should be transferable to the local Malay technological framework. This would permit a transfer of creativity from my own studio practice to the Malay technological environment.

Current songket textiles are an assimilation of many social and cultural material influences, from the imported Indian patola cloths, to centuries of Animist, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic beliefs. The socio-cultural ethics of my studio practice were to provide creative 'influences' to the materiality of songket textiles, from which the Malay maker can directly or indirectly choose to reproduce.

The possible use of these alternative yarns and techniques by Malay makers would provide an addition to the high-end of the Malaysian songket textile market; the market which provides exclusive and high quality woven cloth. It is this market which has introduced other material changes to

songket textiles, such as coloured metallic yarns and hand-painted patterning, and received the financial remuneration hand-woven textiles demand. It is also the middle and upper class consumers of this market who aspire to acquire and wear songket apparel incorporating modernity and distinction (Bourdieu 1979).

As the yarns and techniques I was to introduce to songket textiles were to influence a high-quality yet commercial market, the economic considerations of commercial commodities were assessed during the practice. However, the cost of the yarns used was not a resultant factor in their choice. I sourced yarns at trade fairs and retail outlets in Europe simply for convenience. Yarns similar to the ones I selected could be sourced which are less expensive and available in countries closer to Malaysia. The supported metallic yarns I introduced to the National Handicraft Institute from England in 2003 had already been sourced in China in 2005 by a Malay entrepreneur. The time taken to weave the textile, and the extent of hand-labour however was a significant factor in the choice of techniques. My field research had shown the patterning technique of songket textiles is the most time-consuming process of production. Weaving fewer motifs whilst still retaining highly decorative patterning could save time in the making process. By introducing yarns which had reactive properties, decorative surfaces could be created which would replace the need for such elaborate and time consuming leash making. This influenced both the selection of yarns and techniques used within my practice.

5.4.1 Studio Environment.

As a student at the Royal College of Art I felt my initial practice should represent contemporary textiles, using contemporary yarns and weaving techniques. The standard of contemporary practice at the college is very high, and my practice was influenced by this environment and my peers. However, I was not able to abstract myself totally from the practices of the Malay songket makers. The resulting studio practice was a combination of the contemporary environment at the RCA and the practice I had encountered whilst making songket textiles at the National Handicraft Institute in Malaysia.

My initial focus in producing the textiles was in a contemporary context, sourcing yarns which would provide a modern textile in a western sense, and techniques which would enhance this modernity. Yet, at the same time as selecting these yarns and techniques I considered their relevance to the songket loom, songket technique, the skill of the songket textile maker, and their place within a Malay socio-cultural context. By incorporating different levels of Malay socio-cultural objectification of the textile within my practice, I was able to produce two different textiles, both a departure from current songket material genre.

Within songket textiles materiality lays its socio-cultural objectivity and its material indexes of socio-cultural recognition. A question within my practice was how to maintain these representations whilst creating a new material genre of the textile. Analysis of constant materiality within creativity detailed in Chapter Two suggests these indexes are traditional compositional structures, metallic yarns, supplementary weft patterning technique, and formal appearance. To retain the socio-cultural objectivity of the textile I included several of these indexes. These were traditional composition structures, metallic yarns, and supplementary weft patterning technique. The textile's formal aesthetic was something I was going to challenge within my practice.

5.4.2 The Textiles.

I had decided quite early in my research that my practice should produce full sized songket pieces. At the beginning of my research, in order to promote dialect within my field practice, I had woven samples of alternative yarns each measuring around 30 centimetres square, see figure 5.34. However, I realised it was difficult for some of the people I interviewed, such as entrepreneurs and merchants, to conceive of the samples within songket textile apparel. The samples did not contain the form of an object, a sarong, sampang, selandang or any other recognisable songket textile object. It was not until I produced a recognisable form such as the selandang, that the entrepreneurs and merchants were able to recognise what my practice was trying to achieve.

The decision to create songket selandang within my studio practice was determined by the history of material creativity within songket textiles. Upon

the songket selandang Selvanayagam argues "*There is [now] total freedom in the creation of patterns*" (Selvanayagam 1990:57). Over the past two centuries the songket selandang (or kain panjang as it was originally known) has become much smaller in size, with less decorative patterning, and it is the 'freedom' within pattern creation which influenced my decision to produce songket selandangs. Though songket sarongs and sampings are plentiful within the market, the songket selandang is generally only produced to commission. Malay women regularly wear selandangs at formal occasions, yet the selandang is becoming commercially replaced by less expensive and poorer quality textiles, normally imported and without woven patterning.

By including a selandang in to my practice, a Malay product, the textile already has social and cultural representation. Any transfer of materiality and technology I introduce in my studio practice could be easily appropriated by the Malay maker within a product she has knowledge upon. If inflicting alien products upon the local weavers, it would be difficult to sustain creativity, as they may not comprehend the context in which the product is used. Two selandangs were produced within my studio practice.

5.4.3 Materiality within Practice.

In conducting my studio practice I wanted to challenge the surface texture within the ground cloth of the songket textile. Usually a very smooth surface, formed by plain weave silk or polyester yarns, it is used to provide background colour and structure to the textile, with most focus being upon the supplementary motif and patterns. By introducing alternative yarns and techniques my practice aimed to incorporate decorative qualities to the ground cloth of the textile, with motifs being the secondary focus of patterning.

5.4.3.1 Materiality and Islam.

Care must be taken in selecting alternative yarns and techniques for apparel to be used in an Islamic society. One should consider the textile's relationships to socio-cultural sensitivity, such as Islamic stipulations upon transparency in apparel (see Chapter Two). Islamic teaching recommends 'modesty' in dress for females, and though transparency may be 'permitted' for a selandang, it would not be appropriate for a sarong or samping.

Modern Malay women do wear transparent selendang and tudung (head covers). The female Director General of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation would regularly wear transparent tudung, which demonstrated her confidence and modernity.

5.4.4 Alternative Yarns.

Yarns selected for the warp of both textiles had to have the tensile strength required to sustain the tension it would undergo during the weaving processes. Warp yarns are continuously lifted and remain taut whilst supplementary weft yarns are placed between the formed shed. The yarns would also have to be compatible with the size 40 reed regularly used by Malay songket weavers. Selection of weft yarns permitted more freedom within my practice. However, the reactive properties of weft yarns had to be continuously sampled. Yarns have different active qualities when removed from the loom or immersed in water. They may stretch or shrink differently, and cause anomalies within the surface of the woven cloth.

Though many yarns were used within the weft of the textiles, the predominant weft yarns had high-twist properties. These high-twist yarns in silk, and wool and silk combination, would provide the texture within the surface of the textiles, see figure 5.35. When sampling these high-twist yarns prior to weaving a difficulty encountered was dyeing the wound hanks of yarn. The fineness of the yarns combined with their high-twist properties caused the individual yarns to uncontrollably twist around each other and become knotted, causing many breaks in the thread when unwinding the yarn. The solution for this predicament was to weave the yarns un-dyed and piece-dye the whole cloth once removed from the loom. This decision produced several challenges; all the yarns used in the textile should be compatible in shrinkage levels when dyed, plus, cross-dyeing of different yarn properties could result in different levels of dye saturation. These challenges were resolved through weaving samples and assessing the shrinkage levels and dye saturation of warp and weft yarns. I used the cross-dyeing facility of piece-dyeing to an advantage by incorporating pre-dyed coloured yarns, and combining natural and synthetic yarns, which have different dye saturation properties, see figure 5.36. The unnecessary requirement of pre-dyeing yarns for weaving saved much time in

preparation. Decisions taken which have a 'domino' or counter effect can often be used to advantage as Dant, citing Winner, explains

"Provided that there is a sufficient material reason to proceed, then the unintended consequences will be treated as a necessary evil or, as is often the case, will be found to be beneficial and will be embraced" (Dant 2005:53).

5.4.5 Patterning.

Many Malays recognise the traditional compositional structures of the songket selandang and even though motifs were sparse in the design of my textiles, the traditional divisional structures were adhered to in order to retain the selandang's socio-cultural representation, see figure 5.37. Selvanayagam (1990) argues the punca of the selandang and the kapala of the sarong and samping are the most highly decorated structures of the songket textile. She continues they are also the only structures which should include the revered pucuk rebung (bamboo shoot) and lawi ayam (cockerel's tail feathers) motif. The patterning of the textiles in my studio practice allowed for this material index, by using a traditional pucuk rebung motif in the punca, see figure 5.38.

The material indexes of 'socio-cultural recognition' (Gell 1998) selected included the badan and punca structures of the traditional selandang, traditional motifs, and metallic yarns. According to songket textile specialists, Azah Aziz (2006), Azizi Bahauddin (1999), and Halimatan Shukor (2003), a Malaysian songket textile must contain metallic supplementary weft patterning, as without this the textile would not be classed as songket.

The motifs selected for use in the badan of the textiles were traditional songket motifs, which have been used time and again within songket textiles, see figure 5.39. Even though I was not concerned with the symbolism or meaning of the motif, at the time of my studio practice in 2006, I felt that using motifs designed by myself would inflict too much 'Westernisation' upon the textile, and detract from its Malay cultural value. However, during field research in Malaysia since the production of these textiles, songket producers and makers requested that I create new motifs and patterns, unconcerned by the Western influence.

5.4.6 Technology.

A technological contention I encountered during my studio practice was the looms available within the studio. The looms consisted of 16 shaft Harris looms, 16 shaft dobby looms, 24 shaft computerised AVL looms, and a computerised Jacquard loom. I did not consider using the Jacquard loom, as my research was to identify and use hand-weaving techniques. Plus, the warp yarn used on the college Jacquard loom is polyester with 98 ends per inch, in order to provide a standard for all college practitioners. As the 'lift plans'⁵¹ for the textiles to be produced were very long due to the number of supplementary weft picks required, the 16 shaft Harris and dobby looms would take an extremely large amount of time to prepare, and mistakes could easily be made. The AVL loom however, by its computerised ability to easily store and manage lift plans was selected to weave the two textiles within my practice, see figure 5.40.

The computer software within the AVL loom controls the lifting order of the warp yarns and pre-selected lift plans are easily placed within the program by the weaver. In comparison to the songket loom this computerised section of the AVL loom simulates the production and use of patterning leashes. However, this technology greatly restricted which motifs I could use. With only 24 shafts upon which to plan each supplementary warp lift, the supplementary weft designs which could be used was limited. The songket loom allows each warp end of yarn to be lifted individually or collectively by a series of leashes, and is unrestricted in motif design.

Though the looms available within the studio limited which motifs and patterns I could produce in my practice, the techniques I conducted could easily be duplicated on a traditional two shaft songket loom. It is the two shaft songket loom which predominates in songket textile making, and one with which the makers are familiar with.

Techniques used within the two textiles produced included loom controlled and hand manipulated structures. A spaced warp was sleyed (threaded) within the reed, where determined dent sections of the reed were left void of warp yarns. This creates spaces between the warp yarns when the cloth is woven, see figure 5.41. When weaving the weft yarns across the

⁵¹ A list which a weaver compiles, documenting which shafts should be lifted to insert weft and supplementary weft yarns.

empty dents of the reed, the yarns will float unsecured until they become secured by the next set of warp yarns, see figure 5.42. Even though the floating weft yarns are unsupported by a warp yarn, they are held at tension by the remaining woven cloth.

In textile one of my studio practice, a further technique used within this spaced warp structure, influenced by hand-weaver Ann Sutton (Sutton and Shehan 1989), was to isolate the sleyed warp yarns from the unsleyed section of the reed. Using three shuttles, weft yarns were passed through the shed of the warped dents only, creating spaces void of floating weft yarns horizontally in the cloth, see figure 5.43.

These techniques were selected for the textiles to make use of the 'active' properties of high-twist yarns. High-twist yarns 'floating' and unsupported by warp yarns, once immersed in water, 'twist and curl' and draw the unsupported sections of cloth toward the supported sections, see figure 5.44. The sections of cloth without the floating weft yarns remain as selected vertical spaces within the finished cloth, see figure 5.45. A further active property of the high-twist weft yarn once immersed in water is its ability to twist even when supported by a warp yarn. This active property drew the warp yarns closer, creating texture within the woven cloth and a narrowing in the width of the woven textile by almost half its original width on the loom.

The technique of incorporating vertical spaces within the finished cloth is a technique which cannot be replicated on a mechanised Jacquard loom as the shuttle of the Jacquard loom passes automatically through the whole shed of the warp. All supplementary weft motifs were woven individually with no excessive floating yarns on the reverse of the cloth.

5.4.7 Colour and Dyeing.

As the completed textiles were to be piece-dyed then dyeing of yarns prior to weaving was limited to a small amount of warp yarn for the second textile. The dyeing of these warp yarns would provide a subtle colour difference in the textile, see figure 5.46. The selection of colours to piece-dye the textiles included the bright hues which are favoured by societies residing near to the equator (Young 2006 citing Gardner 1985:176). The cerise and turquoise colours selected were also reflective of the colours of contemporary

textiles used within Malaysian society. The dyes used were synthetic 'Dylon' reactive dyes, utilising salt as mordant, which are popularly used by the Malaysian National Handicraft Institute, and widely available in Malaysia. A decision not to use the extensive dye range the RCA offers was taken, as it would be easier for the Malay songket textile maker to reproduce this colour by the 'Dylon' dye if they chose to. A decision not to use 'natural' dyes in my practice was taken early in my research. Natural dyes are time consuming to prepare, may not be colourfast, and would not necessarily create the colour hues which would appeal to a society near to the equator.

5.4.8 Resulting Textiles.

The two textiles produced in the studio practice were:

5.4.8.1 Studio Textile One.

Width of textile on loom = 45 centimetres.

Finished width of textile = between 22 and 25 centimetres.

Length of textile on loom (inc. fringe) = 239 centimetres

Finished length of textile (inc. fringe) = 228 centimetres.

Warp ends per inch = 80

Size of reed = 40

Loom = AVL 24 shafts air pressured.

Yarns used and their properties, see table 5.4.

For weft order see appendix figure 5.1

Dye used = 'Dylon' Cerise.

Motifs used:

- Bunga bintang
- Bunga tampuk pedada
- Pucuk rebung janjuk langit with tampuk manggis in centre

The first textile to be woven within my studio practice consisted of an extremely textured surface, and is the more radical of the two selandangs produced, see figure 5.47. Within the materiality of this textile I wanted to challenge the formal appearance of songket textiles by producing a very textural cloth, in which the textural qualities were as decorative as the supplementary weft patterning.

The four 'tram' properties of the silk organzine yarn used in the warp of this textile provided strength and a firm handle to the finished cloth. Though the organzine yarn has firm and 'springy' active properties, this did not affect the active properties of the high-twist weft yarns. The high-twist weft easily manipulated the warp yarn, and weft yarns were 'allowed' to twist and curl. Three panels of vertical cloth were woven, held together by the floating weft yarns within the spaces provided by the spaced reed.

Within the weft of the first textile ten different yarns were used with many different fibre components, both natural and synthetic. Within the finished textile surfaces were sheer, translucent, opaque, textured, matt, and lustrous, see figure 5.48. The many surface properties within the textile provided a cloth with an overall informal aesthetic appearance. The properties of the yarns used produced a medium-weight textile which, with its wool content, also provided insulation. Though the Malaysia's climate is hot and humid with temperatures reaching over forty degrees Celsius during the day time, most buildings are air conditioned and temperatures can be low.

The supplementary weft yarn selected for this textile was a metallic gimp yarn which did not react (shrink or curl) or change colour when the textile was piece-dyed, see figure 5.49. The gimp yarn, in a shade of 'antique gold', was of finer density than current gimp yarns used in songket textile production, and was used two ply in the supplementary weft. The shade of the yarn defined the motifs with a subtle sheen, in comparison to the bold shine of Malaysian songket textile motifs.

The supplementary weft patterning within the selendang's structures of punca and badan was sparing, with only a few motifs placed horizontally across the cloth. The sparing use of motifs not only saved time in preparations and weaving, they allowed the ground surface of the cloth to predominate with its active and textured surface. All motifs were doubled in their original scale in order to define and distinguish them within the textured surfaces, see figure 5.38.

By using the piece-dyeing technique the different fibres used in the warp and weft yarns caused a certain amount of shade variation within the cloth. The first cloth was washed after dyeing and no ironing of the textile was required. The high-twist properties of the weft yarns react every time the

cloth is immersed in water, and the cloth when dried, relaxes into regular folds, see figure 5.50.

5.4.8.2 Studio Textile Two.

Width of textile on loom = 52 centimetres.

Finished width of textile = 47 centimetres.

Length of textile on loom (inc. fringe) = 213 centimetres

Finished length of textile (inc. fringe) = 209 centimetres.

Warp ends per inch = 80

Size of reed = 40

Loom = AVL 24 shafts air pressured.

Yarns used and their properties, see table 5.5.

For weft order see appendix figure 5.2

Dye used = 'Dylon' Turquoise.

Motifs used:

- Bunga bintang (versions one and two)
- Tampuk manggis
- Bunga tampuk pedada
- Pucuk rebung janjuk langit with tampuk manggis in centre

The textile challenged the weight and density of current songket textiles as well as its formal appearance. By introducing very fine density and textured yarns, a light-weight textile was woven, with subtle surface texture and patterning, see figure 5.51. The order of the warp for textile two consisted of three 2/200 un-dyed spun silk yarns and one turquoise dyed 2/140 spun silk yarn consecutively. The use of very fine warp yarns along with fine density weft yarns produced a very light-weight cloth, the predominant use of silk also provided insulating properties.

The high-twist silk yarn used for most of the weft caused smooth surfaces to alternate horizontally with textured stripes, see figure 5.52. By using a spaced warp, seven panels of vertical cloth were produced; held together by the floating weft yarns within the spaces, see figure 5.53. Textured yarns were also used regularly in the weft, providing opaque rectangular blocks across the width of the cloth. Within these blocks metallic yarn supplementary weft motifs were centred. Motifs scale was retained in

original size to make its patterning more delicate and less bold. Groups of motifs are divided by sections of texture, created by high twist and textured yarns, see figure 5.54.

The supplementary weft yarn selected for this textile was a two ply polyester supported metallic yarn in shade 'antique silver', and did not change colour when the textile was piece-dyed. The matt metallic yarn was subtle in sheen compared to the supported metallic yarns used recently in Malaysian songket textile making, and was used two ply in the supplementary weft. Post weaving, I saw that the motifs may have been more prominent if I had used this yarn in four ply in the supplementary weft, see figure 5.55.

By using the piece-dyeing technique, the two yarns selected for the warp of the second textile would provide an extremely subtle vertical stripe in two shades of colour. The pre-dyed turquoise yarn became darker in shade when the cloth was piece-dyed. The cloth was washed after piece dyeing to remove any surplus dye. Once dried the cloth was ironed to remove creases within the smooth surfaces of the silk warp and weft yarns. Ironing the cloth also flattened the high-twist yarns floating between the spaces within the weft of the cloth. This did not detract from the texture caused by the high-twist yarns, which were still evident.

5.5 Abstraction and Context.

"...the concern for context varies from situation to situation and from culture to culture, without having any bearing on the thought processes of which an individual or group is capable" (Ascher 1998:191).

Within my field and studio practice I have both abstracted and included myself within the Malay socio-cultural objectification of songket textiles. This objectification is rooted deep within the Malay socio-cultural *habitus*, which embodies the reasoning for the socio-cultural objectification of songket textiles, for their design and production, and determined contextualisation (Bourdieu 1977). The conscious recognition of songket textiles materiality by Malay society is gained through experience, perception, and cognition (Ingold 2005). It is the tangible materiality of the textile which causes these contextual relationships, relationships which change through space and time.

Early in my research I was subsumed into a Malay socio-cultural environment, learning to make songket textiles along side Malay makers. Any preconceived perceptions which may have been permitted by my own socio-cultural *habitus* and creative practice, were soon overwhelmed by the Malay cognitive process of making songket textiles. This experience has permitted me to identify the songket textile two fold; one, as a decorative textile, 'generalised' and void of Malay socio-cultural objectification, and two, as a textile of pre-determined 'contextualised' materiality, consisting of socio-culturally recognised indexes (Gosden 2006).

Both my field and studio practice challenged the collective Malay objectification of materiality within songket textiles. Within this challenging is a practice of abstraction; my abstracting selectively from the socio-cultural influences which are placed upon Malay songket textile makers. This abstraction allowed my creative practice to communicate ideas which extend the material and technological boundaries of Malaysian songket making. The socio-cultural indexes of recognition were reduced and simplified yet still provided representation, as Gell argues in recognition on the basis of under-specified, "*...under-specified is not the same as not specified at all*" (Gell 1998:25).

To conduct this selective abstraction there had to be an experience between myself and the Malay maker. Without knowledge of the socio-cultural *agency* the materiality of the textile placed upon the Malay maker, my practice would not be able to abstract from it. Abstraction, Gosden (2006) argues is a form of decontextualisation. Within my practice I partially decontextualised songket textiles' culturally material context to communicate abstract ideas.

5.5.1 Materiality in Context.

In Malaysia, the material form of the textiles my practice produced were consistently compared with the existing material genre of songket textiles, "*...form is the means by which objects relate to each other...so that the forms things have taken constrain and direct the creation of new forms.*" (Gosden 2006:430, citing Gell 1998). Gell names this relationship between forms as the 'inter-artefactual domain', in which 'style' resides,

“the inter-artefactual domain is the one in which artefacts obey rules set up by the style as a whole in some way removed from and different from the intentions of human makers and users” (Gell 1998:215).

The motifs and their compositions used within my practice were not questioned in Malaysia. These were traditional motifs composed, if somewhat diluted, within the structures of the traditional selandang. Their context was not abstracted or generalised; they conformed to the socio-cultural objectification of the textiles materiality. However, the material contexts which my practice was challenging, such as the textual surfaces within ground cloth patterning, were questioned. They were compared with the smooth surfaces of songket textiles current genre, and questions were raised upon the relevance of textural form within a textile of formal use; questioning the socially and culturally objective perception that formality could not be represented by the relaxed textured properties of loosely woven high-twist yarns. The shine and density of current metallic supplementary weft patterning was measured against the matt and sparing metallic yarns used in my practice; questioning the ancient social objectification that the amount of highly visible motifs and patterning within the textile signified a high financial value upon the cloth and its wearer. Within my practice I had challenged and questioned the Malay socio-cultural objectification of songket textiles materiality; highlighting the agency of the material form within socio-cultural objectification.

The three textiles produced within my field and studio practice, due to their indexical representation of motif, composition and technique, were deemed within the material context of songket textiles. However, it was the amount of alternative materiality I introduced which provided more questioning upon songket textiles socio-cultural objectification. The more radical the alternative materiality introduced within the textile, the greater the questioning of the materials context within songket textiles.

Textile one of my studio practice created the greatest challenge for my research and gained the most interest from makers, entrepreneurs and merchants, academic cultural and textile specialists, and museum curators, questioned within my field research. This was the textile which contained the most radical changes in material form; a textile in which my own creative practice took precedence over the agency of its socio-cultural objectivity.

This textile's material agency lies in its ability to challenge Malay objectivity, challenging its formal appearance and use. The textile informed my practice that radical change was more difficult to incorporate into a textile of socially gendered objectivity.

The second textile from my studio practice, though having a large textural content, was considered more representative of the formality within the textiles social objectification. The smooth surface between textured vertical lines had socio-culturally indexed formality. I was beginning to see a pattern of 'least difference', where changes occur "*...through making the least modification that is possible in order to establish something as different*" (Gell 1998:215). The less radical material changes within this second textile permitted a larger context of socio-cultural objectivity to be present.

The final textile, produced within my field practice, was woven within a Malay environment and consisted of less definitive changes in materiality. The textured yarns used were subtle, and though the organzine weft yarns did create a different handle and drape to the cloth, this was not recognised as a challenge to the material objectivity of the textile. Though the textile consisted of alternative materiality, its changes were not so visibly radical in comparison to the current material genre of songket textiles. It promoted less interest from Malay makers as a signifier of change, but provided my research with insight into socio-cultural objectivity and change. Change can be accepted when it has less significant difference, and is of the 'style' of current genre (Gell 1998). Radical change is seen as a challenge upon material objectivity, the radical material form of the object 'shocks' the subject "*...the moment when someone is taken aback by a thing, due to the virtuosity of its making or its originality against a general background of other things*" (Gosden 2006:430 citing Gell 1998).

5.5.2 The Temporality of Context.

The materiality of songket textiles is predisposed to socio-cultural context and objectivity. Yet contextualisation and objectivity are predisposed to time and space. Though the supported metallic yarns I introduced to songket making in 2003 were effective, it is too early to hypothesise what effects, if any, the three textiles produced in my practice will have upon the material objectification of songket textiles in Malaysia. There does not need

to be a great social or political event such as war to influence change. Clarke illustrates change can be just 'thoughts' instigated by the maker, which when repeated can alter thought processes and the object's context, "...*artefacts arose as ideas in the makers' mind which then were substantiated in an object. Giving a degree of autonomy to things acting together in large numbers, which can change the pattern of people's thought*" (Gosden 2006:438 citing Clarke 1978).

The textiles which my practice produced are defined by a set of material and technical properties and socio-cultural relationships. The textiles are embodied with cross-cultural notions of creativity. Within the textiles there is a communication of abstract ideas, with Malay objectivity as their recipient. However, the communication can only be deemed abstract within its current Malay context and temporal location. "*A full view of how the world unfolds needs to take account of both flows and stoppages, a general pattern of action and individual things and people that occasionally stand out and redirect a flow of action*" (Gosden 2006:430 citing Gell 1998).

5.6 Summary.

Within my field and studio practice technical, social and economic challenges have presented themselves whilst incorporating alternative materiality. Throughout this challenging an alternative metallic yarn was successfully incorporated into the material representation of songket textiles. It could be considered it was the 'right time' and the 'right place' for this introduction. The temporality of social objectification permitted the yarns inclusion.

To introduce further alternative materiality I immersed myself within the context of the Malay maker and Malay socio-cultural objectification of the textile. This permitted an appreciation of the amount of labour and time spent in creating songket textiles and the technical environment in which the maker works. I was also able to understand how my creativity was perceived within a socio-cultural context. This practical research has been an experience for the Malay makers and myself, an experience which is now a part of our creative *habitus*.

By conducting practice in the studio, isolated from the Malay making practice, I was able to create textiles which were mostly influenced by my

own creative environment and *habitus*. Though field experience could not be removed from my practice, it was able to be temporarily abstracted. Knowledge of the textiles socio-cultural objectification was considered throughout the practice, as were the technological contexts, but the focus was upon challenging materiality within these contexts. Radical change is much more difficult to incorporate into songket textiles material objectivity, until the changes are seen as acceptable and not radical, which could happen through space and time, then they will continue to be a challenge (Gosden 2006).

The three textiles resulting from my practice identify the constraints upon creativity within consideration of socio-cultural objectification. However, they also signify that the materiality of form can challenge this objectification, allowing people to think differently about the textile. The three textiles in their abstracted form exist as a complex dialogue between the 'concrete and the abstract' (Gosden 2006).

Conclusion

Throughout this project 'local knowledge' has been advocated within the transfer of technology and creativity in the making songket textiles (Schumacher 1993, Chambers 1983, Dennis 1999). By acquiring local knowledge my practice was able to be situated within material, technical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts within the songket textile making environment. Through this I was permitted to "*...engage in the textiles components with more awareness, either by supporting them or attempting to alter or eliminate them*" (Margolin 1995:123). By Knowledge and understanding of the textiles contexts, especially socio-cultural, the challenges which lay ahead for my creative practice were revealed. The conceptions and perceptions (Bourdieu 1977) which Malay society has upon the materiality of the textile form the agency (Gell 1998) of objectivity through representation. This agency was challenged through my autonomy in creative practice as a maker. Through the acquisition of local knowledge, I was able to abstract from the 'boundaries' of the textiles social representation, making informed decisions when creating the textiles alternative materiality. The social relationship which exists in the duality between Malay subject and songket textiles was abstracted and challenged.

Though knowledge upon socio-cultural representation permitted my practice to acknowledge the reasoning of the textiles materiality, it was not allowed to direct the creativity. As the concept of the practice was to expose and influence one creative practice to another, its direction was led through the exposure of alternative yarns and weaving techniques. However, in consideration of socio-cultural representation inferred material indexes were maintained, namely, songket motifs, compositions, and patterning technique. It is Forty (1986) cited by Borgmann (1995) who argues against a maker's excessive emphasis on 'extremely general dominating ideas' at the social and cultural level,

"These broad cultural ideas [are] grounded in the spirit of time, without adequate recognition of the diversity of specific ideas held by designers and entrepreneurs or the variety of desires operating among individuals and groups within society at any moment in history" (Borgmann 1995:49).

Excessive emphasis upon social and cultural concepts and perceptions challenges the maker's 'freedom of choice' (Pye 1978). If material

representation is allowed to totally direct creativity it may curtail the makers practice and the amount of creative exposure she can provide. In order to be truly creative "*...the designer must pull away from the constraints of the world in order to clear a way for free speculative thought*" (Buchanan and Margolin 1995:xxiv citing Mitchum 2005). Though it may not be possible to perceive the songket textile without 'thinking' of its socio-cultural contexts, it is possible when 'looking' at the textile to "*...ignore the perception of it, or exclude that from consciousness*" (Pye 1978:123).

Within the transfer of technology from one society to another it is the wants and needs of the local which should be met (Dormer 1994 and Dennis 1999). Dormer argues practitioners 'seizing upon other peoples' crafts do not take into consideration what the local wants, "*...what they [practitioners] are looking for is what interests them, and not what was necessarily of interest to the native maker or his or her indigenous audience*" (Dormer 1994:95). Yet I argue, what the local wants is restricted by their knowledge of what is available. Attaining local knowledge permitted me to learn what the local has experienced and wants, plus, what the local has not experienced and isn't aware of. Providing further exposure of what is 'available' provides the local maker with more choice. Permitting the local maker to make critical and informed judgement upon what is 'wanted and needed'. Buchanan and Margolin argue,

"...we are surrounded by images and objects produced by designers with deliberate intent to shape our experience and influence our actions" they continue "*a door opening on a new world of curiosity, questions and possibilities*" (Buchanan and Margolin 1995:xii - xiii).

The hypothesis behind the practice in this project was to provide exposure and influence to Malay makers of aspects upon creativity which they may *not* have considered. This lack of consideration may be due as Marchand (1991) explains to 'non-propositional' training, or as Biersack (1982) suggests, the experiential knowledge required of empirical societies. Creativity within songket textiles has been propositioned and experienced by Malay makers and myself within this project, "*...a crucial stage in the introduction of any work is the point at which alternative features and configurations of a device or system exists as abstract possibilities subject to imaginative manipulation*" (Winner 1995:151 citing Arendt 1958).

Challenging the materiality of songket textiles is not a narcissistic attempt to explore creativity, the "...insistence on making...obvious changes for the sake of offering something different" (Pye 1978:150). Material change reveals how local technology can be expanded upon; it produces extremes of creativity, from which small and individual aspects may influence. Dormer (1994) explains "the notion of influence is not that artist x influences artist y but that y finds something of relevance to him in x's work" (Dormer 1994:95 citing Baxandal 1986).

The introduction of 'supported' metallic yarns used for motifs during field practice in 2003, produced a softer handle to the textiles. These yarns were adopted and appropriated by the makers to be used in further alternative ways; a use that is still sustained. The songket textile maker has appropriated and expressed what has been experienced (Pye 1978). A primary feature in this adoption was directing the exposure to the correct recipient (Dennis 1999). By incorporating financial investment and its ability to expose and influence songket textile makers, the National Handicraft Institute, the training division of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, were the 'appropriate' recipients for intermediate technology (Dennis 1999).

The adoption and appropriation of material change is dependent upon the choices presented to the local maker. The makers' selections from these choices are made by considering the duality of the subject and object and their social relationship. It is a collective response by society which permits aspects of creativity to become symbols of materiality, "The purposes of things are the purposes of men and change according to who entertains them" (Pye 1978:16). It is the complexity of culture and society, its system and collective understandings, and its relationship to the subject and object, which will condition which material index of the textile is stable and which is dynamic (Kopytoff 1986).

Further Research

Further research pertaining from this research project is the intermediate technologies of which local makers were already aware and expressed interest. By addressing what the local makers want and ask for, analysis can be conducted upon intermediate technology and creativity in

materiality, which the local maker already perceives will aid their creative practice. Assessing the differences in the reception and adoption of alternative technology which has already been exposed, but not experienced, and that which is new (as in this project). The influence of this requested experience and how the maker addresses its use in creative practice can be established.

The creative practices in which the makers expressed interest in include the use of four shaft weaving techniques and the creation of new motifs and patterns. However, there are complexities within the development of this research. Who the practice and concluding experience and knowledge is directed towards, will form a part of the extent of its exposure. For the most amount of exposure, plus the economic cost, it would be advisable to implement this research within the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, or a high quality commercial work-shop, such as Mahkota Textiles Sdn. Bhd., or Ateequah Songket Sdn. Bhd.

A two shaft songket loom has already been converted into a four shaft loom by the researcher, at the request of one of the trainers at the National Handicraft Institute. The conversion costs little financially and requires the use of six 'pullies' to form a counteractive motion. A simple 3/1 twill weave structure was conducted on the loom which easily permitted the songket technique to be carried out. The use of the four shafts did not incur longer time scales in weaving.

Four shaft weaving techniques provide many more woven structures than the two shaft loom. Further manipulations of the loom can also be conducted such as pointed drafts, mock leno and block effects (Oelsner 1952). However, it is the many weave structures obtainable by a four shaft loom which transforms the weaver's creativity. Techniques derived from twill structures, such as broken and reversed, undulating, offset, interlocking, pointed, and many more can be used, which are all further enhanced by the use of differing colour combinations (Oelsner 1952, Watson 1954).

Similarly, it is the recipient of newly created motifs and patterns who is important in their exposure. Though once exposed in the market place motif and patterns can be copied. This exposure does not add to the long term creativity of the local maker. To enable local makers to create new motifs and patterns, then creation must start at 'grass roots' in the mind of the

maker her/him self. Hence, the makers who are responsive and open to change will be the individuals who are interested in such creativity. As Norwani (2006) points out in this project, many makers in rural villages belonging to small-scale societies are restrained in concepts of creativity by their traditionalist social values. Makers who are open to the influence of radical external creativity, may be further influenced by financial recompense by their employer or the government funded MHDC. Creativity at grass roots will require exposing the maker to the influence of abstraction from design inspirations. This will be a departure away from the representative floral motifs which are often currently used. The agency to be considered within this practice is the social relationship with materiality. Permitting the local maker to appropriate this creativity will incorporate the socio-cultural values and objectification, which are intrinsic to her practice.

Appendix 2.1 Symbolism and Cosmology.

Symbolism within Compositions

There are oral histories which describe the compositional structures used within certain songket textiles, such as samping, sarong and selandang. Bahauddin (1999) explains there is reasoning accredited to the traditional compositional structures, but, as an oral history, it is little known by current songket designers, weavers, and the wearers of songket textiles. He vindicates that these compositions relate to the Malay spiritual belief systems which have been assimilated over a twenty century amalgamation of animist, Hindu-Buddhist, and finally, Islamic ideologies (Azizi 1999). He explains,

"...the structural formation of a kain [cloth] (sarong) displays the touch of a sensitive weaver, for ... [she] is the creator of the special arrangement governed by the rules in arranging motifs. Above all, the arrangement of motifs indicates symbolic meaning in the Malay culture". (Azizi 1999:95).

Malay textile authority Azah Aziz (2006) concurs with the lack of recognition by most Malays, regarding the cultural definition of structural divisions within a songket sarong stating *"People wear sarong but they don't observe such relations"* (Azah Aziz 2006). Azizi (1999:95) continues his explanation of compositional symbolism by quoting a Malay belief *"...bersatu kita teguh, bercerai kita roboh or united we stand, divided we fall"*. He argues the composition of motifs in a songket textile is also influenced by this conceptual belief, he adds *"The motifs always appear in numbers to signify the unity of the community creating the patterns"* (Azizi 1999:95).

From his interview with wood carver Wan Mustafa Wan Su, Azizi describes rules for motif arrangement in wood carving. Azizi explains *"Woodcarving exists in the court circle where rules and motifs are interrelated with other form[s] of Malay art, namely batik, songket, weaponry design, etc."* (Azizi 1999:94). Wan Mustafa, cited by Azizi articulates *"...the arrangement of motifs in Malay art pieces always deals with the appreciation of Malay people of Gods creation"* (Azizi 1999:93). Azizi (1999:94) sets out the 'six rules' for motif arrangement in wood carving, as depicted in oral histories described by Wan Mustafa.

1. *There must be a beginning – it is known as 'ibu kalak', a curved shape to symbolise His creation but without the knowledge of His beginning.*

2. *There must be an 'ibu' [parent], the centre of the piece, and the function of 'ibu' is to protect 'ibu kalak', 'ibu' symbolises the birth of natural elements (alam sekeliling) such as mountains, water, sun, etc. Even though it is difficult to figure out the exact date of the beginning of these elements, mankind must have faith (aqidah) in these extraordinary creation [sic] of God.*
3. *There must be an 'awan larat sorok punca' [cloud beginning], holding the same symbolism as 'ibu'.*
4. *The connection of branches to designs to other parts of the design must only begin from the second branch and not from the first design or branch. The action symbolises the respect required of the younger generations towards the older generations. This requirement complies with the cultural and oral traditions of 'siapa makan garam dahulu' or 'who tastes the first salt', which signified the persons of wiser capability. Thus, respect should be given to these people for their knowledge.*
5. *The pointed edge of a leaf or a design must not protrude onto other leaves. The rule symbolises the philosophy of the Malay people of not having bad intensions towards others. The unity of a community is of the utmost importance.*
6. *There must be a balanced design of portraying motifs in a space (penjagaan ruang). Positive and negative spaces and their harmony are vital to bringing out the beauty and the philosophy of a design, especially in various form [sic] of Malay arts. A space (ruang) is the 'nothingness' where human mind can go beyond the 'nothingness' and it is where God is suppose [sic] to be.*

Azizi continues that there is a hierarchy within the compositional divisions of a songket sarong or samping. The head (kapala) being the most important part of the sarong or samping design, followed by the body (badan), foot (tepi or kaki kain), and the head support (pengapit kapala) (Azizi 1999). If this hierarchy is applied to the compositional structure of the selendang, then the punca would have the most importance, followed by the badan, pengapit badan, kaki punca and the kendik. These divisions assert their authority by the motifs which are contained within the structures (Azizi 1999). On the importance of the head within the textile, Malay textile

authority Azah Aziz explains *"There are many theories, mans place in the universe and mans relationship with god"* (Azah Aziz 2006).

Symbolism within Motifs

On the influence of nature within Malay society Azizi explains, *"Nature in the Malay society has always been a reflection of the creation of the Supreme Being (Supreme Being has always been referred to the existence of Divine Power in animism, Hindu-Buddhism, and Islam)"*, he continues *"Traditional flowers in the songket motifs have always been used as a reminder for the Malays to look into nature to comprehend the Supreme Beings limitless resources"* (Azizi 2003:6).

Academics and songket specialists stipulate the traditional motifs used within songket textiles have cultural and religious symbolic meaning (Azizi 1999, Norwani, Selvanayagam 1990, Othman 2005, Siti Zainol 1997). These oral histories of motif symbolism are extensively documented by academic Azizi Bahauddin (1999). He supports these histories by the symbolic comparison of similar motifs used in other Malay crafts such as batik, woodcarving, mat weaving, dances, architecture, music, and weaponry design (Azizi 2003). Azizi explains traditional songket motifs depict the assimilation of animist, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic ideologies (Azizi 2003), generated by the early communities which settled in the archipelago,

"...the beliefs of the Malay people interacted with several religious beliefs before coming to Islamic belief. Myths and superstitious beliefs starting in the animist and Hindu-Buddhist periods became intertwined with the Islamic religious beliefs. Therefore, it is this blend that characterises the Malay people" (Azizi 2003:10).

These oral traditions associate the songket motifs with *"...Malay society's, metaphors, taboos, proverbs, adages and rituals"* (Azizi 1999:80), expressing the songket motifs as a *"concept of growth, sense of unity and human spirituality"* (Azizi 1999:125). Maxwell (1990) also accredits Hindu-Buddhist influences to motifs found on textiles within the Southeast Asian archipelago,

"Elements of Indian cosmology became significant in the belief systems of many Southeast Asian people and ancient notions of cosmic dualism were

often elaborated upon according to these influences. Textile iconography provides many examples of this process, in particular the impact of Indian ideas on the notions of the Upper and Lower Worlds” (Maxwell 1990:198).

Nature, especially flora, fauna, fruits and plants, play a significant role in the formation of songket motifs. Othman (2005), reasons that motifs from nature symbolise the notion of growth both physically and spiritually. On the influence of nature within Malay society Azizi argues,

“Nature in the Malay society has always been a reflection of the creation of the Supreme Being (Supreme Being has always been referred to the existence of Divine Power in animism, Hindu-Buddhism, and Islam). Traditional flowers in the songket motifs have always been used as a reminder for the Malays to look into nature to comprehend the Supreme Beings limitless resources” (Azizi 2003:6).

On nature, Malay cultural specialist Siti Zainol Ismail explains,

“...the bamboo shoot motif was located within folklore long before the coming of Islam. When the Malays converted to Islam, the symbolic meaning of the bamboo shoot was changed to be incorporated with the Islamic teachings leading away from the superstitions and supernatural beliefs” (Azizi 1999:101).

Oral histories and historical Malay texts indicate the importance of the bamboo plant within Malay life, and the growth of the plant is associated with human development (Azizi 1999). This is compliant with oral explanations provided to the researcher by Abd Aziz Rashid, curator of the Museum of Asian Art, University of Malaya, in Kuala Lumpur, who explained that the bamboo shoot motif signifies ‘a child’s growth into adulthood’ (Abd Aziz 2006). The importance of the bamboo shoot motif to Malay material culture is demonstrated by the use of this motif in other Malay art forms such as, batik, wood carving, mat weaving, metal work, and weaponry design, (Azizi 2003). The symbolism of this motif has been extensively researched by Azizi Bahauddin. He explains the importance of the bamboo plant within Malay life as a provider of food, building materials, and water channelling equipment (Azizi 1999).

On the structural form of the motif which is an isosceles triangle of varying scales incorporating connected motifs, Azizi (1999) defines the representation of the motif as Gunung Sari or the universe. This triangle or

universe is divided into four sections: the lowest section is the 'physicality of the world'; the middle section is the unseen and less understood world/universe; the third section is the spiritual world; the fourth and final section is a small dot which is Divine Essence and the place for Divine Power and Supreme Being (Azizi 1999:103) (show diagram).

Further songket motifs are regarded as having symbolic concepts within their form including the lotus flower (teratai), mangosteen (tampuk manggis), cockeral's tail (lawi ayam), sea-horse (unduk-unduk), mountains (pergunungan), glutinous rice sweet cake (potong wajik), and many more (Azizi 1999). Though this symbolism of traditional songket motifs is well known in academic and songket weaving circles, most Malays, including younger weavers, are not aware of the representative and allegorical concepts which are attributed to the motifs. Azizi discovered as much in his research when he commented,

"Malaysians take less interest in the motifs today especially in the processes, oral traditions and symbolic meaning that embraced this form of Malay art, the songket is known to the majority of people only in Malaysia and south-east Asian region as costumes meant for ceremonies and official occasions" (Azizi 1999:7).

Appendix 2.2 Songket Technique

Once the warp yarns have been tied onto the loom the preliminary steps towards making the patterning leashes can commence. The first stage is to divide the warp yarns into ratios of 5/1 or 3/1 at the front of the reed. This is conducted starting at the selvedge and counting either three or five warp yarns and placing a bamboo stick underneath the counted yarns. The stick is then placed over the next warp yarn, see appendix figure 2.1. This procedure is conducted until all warp ends are counted, and the bamboo stick is in place across the whole warp (the warp yarns used for the selvedge are omitted from this procedure, as there are no motifs placed at the selvedge).

Once completed, a shed stick is inserted in place of the pliable bamboo stick. The shed stick is then raised on its side to lift the selected warp yarns at the front of the reed. To transfer the selected warp yarns to behind the reed, a further shed stick is inserted underneath the raised warp yarns behind the reed. This shed stick is then pushed and secured to the back of the exposed warp. These selected yarns, in position at the back of the warp, will be used when conducting the next stage of the technique to transfer the textiles patterning into patterning leashes.

Previously drawn charted designs are used, either hand or computer documented, see appendix figure 2.2. One shaded square on the chart represents either five or three warp ends. Starting at the lower right hand side of the chart, the maker brings forward and raises the previously placed shed stick from the back of the warp. She then uses a thin bamboo stick to count and select the yarns represented by the shaded squares, see appendix figure 2.3. The bamboo stick is then replaced by a wide shed stick and turned on its side to create a shed in front of the reed. This shed is then transferred behind the reed by the use of a further shed stick, see appendix figure 2.4.

With the shed stick in place behind in reed the leashes can now start to be created. The leashes are created by using one continuous line of nylon cord. The leashes are wrapped around the raised warp yarns produced by the shed stick and made into loops, see appendix figure 2.5. These loops are then tied with knots, with a smaller loop at the top for the maker to lift the leashes whilst weaving, see appendix figure 2.6. This process is conducted for every row of the design on the charted design, see appendix figure 2.7.

Very intricate designs will necessitate this process to be conducted countless times, even hundreds of times for very detailed designs. Once the leashes are complete they are gently pushed to the back of the loom. When weaving commences, each corresponding row of leashes is drawn forward and a shed stick inserted at the back of the heddles, to create a shed for the row of supplementary weft thread. Each row of leashes is lifted twice, with two picks (rows) of plain weave woven in between each lift. This is continued (except where patterns express more lifts) until the design is half way woven, and all leashes have been lifted (most songket designs are symmetrical reflective images). Then the leashes will be lifted again, but in the reverse order. The supplementary weft threads can be inserted by individual lengths of yarn, or as a continuous weft thread, see appendix figure 2.8.

Appendix 5.1 Unstructured Interviews and Informed Consent.

As documented in the methodology section of this thesis, participatory observation included unstructured interviews which consist of unplanned conversations between the researcher and the people who are studied. By being open-minded about the structure of these conversations “...*true accounts of social phenomena*” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2006:263) can be acquired by the researcher.

To document and utilise the data gathered in these conversations, informed consent (Kvale 1996) is verbally obtained from the people studied. Tape recordings and signed documentation⁵² of conversations are not normally obtained as these do not aid the rapport and trust required in forming relationships with informants (Hammersley and Atkinson 2006). Informed consent requires that the people to be studied are informed of the research in a comprehensive and accurate account. The informants should not be coerced or forced, and the consent gained can be withdrawn at any time by the informant (Hammersley and Atkinson 2006).

Ethics in informed consent are considerations of the informant’s privacy, and decisions are made by the researcher upon what should be private or public knowledge. Furthermore, documentation of conversations should not cause harm to, or exploitation of the informant. For further documentation on ethics in social research see Beals 1969; Diener and Crandall 1978; Barnes 1979; Punch 1986; Homan 1991.

Unstructured Interviews and Malaysia

Past researchers in Malaysia have used unstructured interviews and informed consent in their field research. Malaysians’ Mohammad Najib Ahmad Dawa (1997) and Azizi Bahauddin (2003) argue obtaining data through verbal conversation is the most respectful way of communication, based upon “...*respect to the elders and the wiser ones*” (Azizi 2003:2).

Example of Conversations

Whilst conducting field research during 2003 and 2006, several words were repeated again and again in conversations with the songket textile

⁵² In illiterate societies informants can not read or sign consent forms.

student makers' and trainers' at the National Handicraft Institute, and culture specialists' including Azah Aziz. These include the words 'flora and fauna' in reference to the influences used when creating new motif design. At the MHDC offices in Terengganu, songket textile designer Siti Halimah (2006) advised regarding her teams design practice "...we only use flora and fauna". In reflecting upon my own creative practice, I realised that unlike songket textile makers', there are few boundaries upon the influences I am able use in my practice as a textile designer.

Influences from flora and fauna appear to be paramount in today's creative influences of songket textile makers'. Most of the recently produced modern songket textiles referenced in the illustrations volume of this thesis depict motifs derived only from flora and fauna. Yet, this is a recent variation from other past influences which were used by songket textile makers. It is documented in past songket motif design, influences to creativity were taken from nature and the social and cultural surroundings of the songket textile makers' in east coast Terengganu and Kelantan (Mohammad Najib 1997, Azizi 1999, Siti Zainol 1997, Selvanayagam 1990). Due to Islam and the limitation of using influences which may construe deity worship, influences were taken from the social and cultural environment, but were abstracted. Mohammad Najib argues "...motifs [are] unrecognisable due to stylisation...the abstraction by the layman is difficult". He adds, "...rejection of animal motifs is not associated with the Islamic prohibition of using human form in art it is only the orthodox [Islamic] believers who accept and believe that" (Mohammad Najib 1997:154-5). Norwani (2005) advises the traditional motifs and patterns "...relate [to] the form and function of the Malay social and cultural heritage" (Norwani 2005:121). Of traditional motif design Azah Aziz argues "...the air muli, swirling water, it's very ancient, it's universal, there is this Japanese painting which has swirling water" (Azah Aziz 2006). Traditional songket motifs were usually named after their initial influences, see list below for examples other than flora and fauna (Source: Norwani 1989):

Lawi Ayam – cockerel's tail feathers.

Awan Larat - swirling cloud.

Air Muli – swirling water.

Gigi Yu – shark’s teeth.
Tampuk Manggis – mangosteen fruit.
Kupu-kupu – butterfly.
Buah Nenas – pineapple.
Unduk-unduk Laut – sea-horses.
Tepung Talam – type of Malay cake.
Potong Serikaya – type of Malay cake.
Mahkota Raja – king’s crown.
Pagar Istana – palace fence.
Keris Bersapir – name of small ceremonial sword.
Keris Parung Sari – name of small ceremonial sword.
Pitis – coin from Kelantan.
Perunungan – mountains.

From my conversations with current makers it would appear ‘flora and fauna’ are being elevated as the main influences for songket motifs, deferring from other influences used in the past. Student designers from disciplines other than textile design are taking a more explorative role in their creative practice. Influenced by their tutors many of whom have formal university training in visual arts, design students are turning to a wide range of influences in their practice. These include bicycle chains, as Azah Aziz explained to me,

“I once was asked to be one of the judges of a songket competition, a sarong. Everyone was [a] student who participated ... the...sarongs were displayed and we were told to look around and stop and talk the student themselves. [they] were men and women, and I...[met] up with a young man who was very eager to explain to me how he derived that pattern of songket and so I said what inspired you, tell me? And he said ‘oh it was a bicycle chain, which if you slice it you get this pattern’, a bicycle chain, actually, a bicycle chain. So I was quite aghast you know...because I think that in Malay culture all the patterns are derived from the world of nature and there’s so much of it all over the place why would you want to go and look at a bicycle chain I thought to myself. So there you are, I think that there is a tendency amongst his teachers also, his lecturers, that you have to create something

new and different and you have to really create something out of the way" (Azah Aziz 2006).

As a traditionalist, Azah Aziz did not approve of using alternative influences for songket motifs, preferring the use of influences from nature, particularly flora and fauna, "*I think they [flora and fauna] are beautiful and should be exploited, you know, made use of"* (Azah Aziz 2006).

This recent shift from the use of objects and nature for creative influence constrains the songket textile designer in the creativity of motifs. The preferred use of flora and fauna may be further reasoning for why songket designer Izan was hesitant in using influences from 'Kinetic' style art in her creative practice (see page 112). In utilising only flora and fauna as influence songket designers are diluting the traditional symbolism of the songket motifs, which traditionally represent the Malay environment both natural and man-made. Mohammad Najib (1997) argues "*...cultural values are being replaced by modern thinking"* (Mohammad Najib 1997:43). By challenging the influences to creativity by using only flora and fauna, newly created motifs are not symbolically representative of Malay culture, but are simply floral decorative designs.

If creative influences are reverted and allowed to encompass their traditional stature, then newly created motifs could represent a modern Malay cultural environment and society. This would provide current and future songket textile designers with a wider scope in which to use their knowledge and experience in their creative practice.

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