

THE DESIGN ELEMENTS OF THE JATTI MIRIEK'S HEADDRESSES IN MIRI, SARAWAK

Faridah Sahari¹ and Nashila Japeri

University Malaysia Sarawak

ABSTRACT

JattiMiriek is a minority ethnic group from Miri, Sarawak. This article intends to discuss the principle of design elements of JattiMiriek's headdresses. Their traditional clothing is to match with distinctive headdresses and other accessories. The headdresses worn by the male and female of the JattiMiriek are called *tekulok* and *sikong*, respectively. The design and method of wearing these headdresses are unique, and this heritage needs to be inherited and preserved. Nevertheless, specific research on JattiMiriek headdresses had never been conducted and sources for reference are minimal. Therefore, this research aims to document the uniqueness of the *tekulok* and *sikong*; unravel the historic and aesthetic values of the JattiMiriek headdresses. This study used a qualitative method such as field study, interview, and observation conducted in Miri, Sarawak. Data analysis is based on six elements: the design, form, fabric materials, colours, motifs, and accessories of the headdresses. The finding revealed that the distinctive design features of the headdresses are meant for different purposes and symbols. In conclusion, the JattiMiriek wears their costume that manifests their identity and heritage. It is hoped that the finding from this study will make other people appreciate more about the JattiMiriek ethnic group.

Keywords: JattiMiriek, material culture, headdresses, traditional clothes, heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

Sarawak is known for its diverse culture and multi-ethnicity. This diversity is reflected in many arts and heritage, including traditional indigenous clothing. Traditional clothing is shaped and characterized by the local culture and each has its own meaning (Williams, 2000). In order to understand the JattiMiriek culture, it is important to learn their traditional costumes. Nevertheless, the studies of these people are still sparse; making the documentation to refer as references is very limited (PJMM Committee members, 2020). This article describes the role and function of headdresses in the JattiMiriek culture and reveals the symbolic meaning of the aesthetic elements of traditional costume complementary accessory.

The JattiMiriek is a minority ethnic, believed to be the earliest community living in Miri, a northern part of Sarawak, since the 16th century (Yakup, 2009). (Refer to map in Figure 1). JattiMiriek, with most of them, resided in Miri. Before many of them converted to Islam, JattiMiriek practised animism. Their main socio-economic activities were hunting (*ha'ang/nyammeng, ngawu, mepet*), fishing (*mekat*) and farming (*babun*). From the personal communication with some members of Persatuan JattiMiriek Miri (PJMM) in September 2020, LikohMiriek, Padang Likud, Sungai Taniku, Sungai Maloie, Sungai Adong Kecil dan Besar, Sungai Miri (Miriek) were among the early settlements of JattiMiriek. The tombs found along Sungai Adong Kecil and Besar, Sungai Miri (Miriek), Bukit Kanada, and Pantai Tanjong Lobang were evidence of their early existence in Miri.

Today, majority of the JattiMiriek people are found in Bakam, Siwa Jaya, Luak, Raan, Lambir, Lopeng (Luifeng), Kampung Wireless, Pujut Tanjung Batu (Unan), Pujut Adong (Unan Adong), Kuala Baram and Pengkalan Lutong. They are also found in Bekenu, Niah, Bakong dan Marudi and outside Miri, including Belait and Tutong in Brunei. According to Persatuan JattiMiriek Miri article 15/82 (Sarawak), more than 15,000 JattiMiriek in Sarawak and Brunei are estimated. At present, JattiMiriek has been assimilated in and Malay primarily due to mixed marriages.

¹ Corresponding author: Faculty of Applied & Creative Arts, University Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan.



Figure 1 Map of Sarawak

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. JattiMiriek Culture and Heritage

The JattiMiriek people have gone through assimilation, whereby they are a group of differing ethnic heritage have absorbed into the dominant culture of the Malay society. However, although assimilation did happen, the JattiMiriek still continue and maintain their ancestors’ culture and heritage ultimately, including language, food, and aesthetic preferences.

One of the JattiMiriek unique cultures and heritage is wearing headdresses to complement their traditional costume. The headdresses for the men is called *tekulok*, while the headdresses for the women is called *sikong*. In the past, headdresses were worn by the JattiMirieks as a sunhat in the farm, but now, the JattiMiriek community wearing headdresses when attending ceremonial events and special occasions (Nashila, J., Faridah, S., & Yakup, M. R., 2019). In addition, the *tekulok* and *sikong* are also worn for dancing and music performances. This situation shows that the JattiMiriek still practices this particular traditional culture as one of their continuous effort to preserve the heritage and culture they possess so that the younger generations will continuously inherit and appreciate it.

However, detailed studies on these unique headdresses wearing among the JattiMiriek people are minimal and well-documented. Therefore, in this work, the details mentioned above regarding *tekulok* and *sikong* are obtained and documented, which can be used as a source of reference for the community interested in the specific design and background of these headdresses.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was based on a qualitative approach and applied a variety of methods and tools to collect data including interviews, visual analysis and observation from fieldwork. The interview session was held with some of the prominent PJMM committee members who are also JattiMiriek people. Table 1 shows a list of the respondents, and Figure 2 shows photos of the interview session. Interviews were conducted in groups and the information on each respondent is verified instantly. The interview questions are designed to elucidate key aspects of *tekulok* and *sikong*’s history, their roles and functions, and the evolution of these JattiMiriek’ traditional clothing complementary accessories.

Table 1 Details of Respondents

No	Respondent	Gender	Position
1	KK Usman bin Suleiman	Male	Deputy President
2	Puan Rosiah Hj Ali	Female	Vice President
3	Puan Noor HazwanibtMohdHusli	Female	Honorary secretary
4	HjUjut bin Rahman	Male	Information Officer
5	PuanHajjah binti Junaidi	Female	Committee Member

6	CikRobiah binti Tani	Female	Committee Member
7	Haji Sarkawi bin HjHamzah	Male	Committee Member

Figure 2 Interview Session with Committee Members of the Persatuan Jatti Miriek Miri (PJMM)

In addition, the observation was also done to a PJMM collection of *tekuluk* and *sikong* and Jatti Miriek traditional clothing. The main focus of the observation is on the headdresses' design elements, which include colour, fabric, and embellishment. This study seeks meaning integrated in signs and symbols of these traditional costume



accessories through visual analysis method and semiotic approach. The researchers also obtained secondary data through literature materials related to the more inclusive study despite primary data. Both primary and secondary data gathered were analysed, described and interpreted to a meaningful study. The methodology of this study has been designed as such as it involves different methods and techniques helps to ensure quality, credibility and reliability of data.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Jatti Miriek Traditional Costume: Signifier of Culture and Identity

Jatti Miriek wore and styled their traditional costumes and accessories on special occasions such as gatherings, customs, performances, and fashion shows. However, this ethnic's traditional clothing wearing culture and heritage is almost extinct, less prominent and still unknown to many people even in Sarawak, not to say in Malaysia, because of incomplete and scarce documentation. Therefore, this study was conducted to document a part of Jatti Miriek traditional clothing, focusing on the aesthetic elements in terms of colour, design and stylisation of the headdresses, *tekuluk* and *sikong*. The researchers believed that the traditional ethnic costume of Jatti Miriek has its unique features and uniqueness that has to be preserved and appreciated as the other Sarawak ethnics traditional costumes.

Today, the Jatti Miriek continue their previous cultural practices, ultimately including language, food and aesthetic preferences despite culture assimilation. To the Jatti Miriek, what they wear is more than just a utilitarian object but a signifier of their culture and identity. In the past, the costume represented the community to communicate status, celebrate ceremonial events and symbolise unity as one of the Sarawak unique ethnic groups. This article will discuss essential aesthetic elements of the traditional headdresses of Jatti Miriek, which include the design, fabric materials used, accessories and colours, and the purpose of these headdresses. Before that, it is crucial to understand the definition and cultural background of the *tekuluk* and *sikong*.



Figure 3 Tekulok and Sikong worn on special occasions and performance (Source: PJMM, 2020)

4.2 The Aesthetic Elements of JattiMiriek Headdresses

Some of the early studies focused more on the purpose and design of headdresses. A study by Salina, A. M., Hamdzun, H., Zuliskandar, R., Mohd, J. M. I., Daeng, H. D. J., & Narimah, A. M. in an article titled *Tengkolok as a traditional Malay work of art in Malaysia* in 2020 states that the headdress is part of the costume accessory and is intended for decoration. Another article entitled *Estetika Ragam Tengkulok Pakaian Tradisional Masyarakat Melayu Jambi* written by Hartati, M., Fatonah, F., & Selfi, M. P., in 2020 states that the headdresses could be worn both in everyday life and on certain occasions. The aesthetic value of the JattiMiriek's headdresses in this study focused on four main elements: colour, motif/pattern, fabric and the symbolic meaning attached to this element.

Tekulok and *sikong* had existed since the earliest generations of the JattiMirieks (Rosiah Hj Ali, personal communication, September 19, 2020). In the past, the JattiMirieks wore these headdresses while doing outdoor activities in the paddy farm, functioned as sunhat to protect them from sun and rain. Nevertheless, now, both *tekulok* and *sikong* are worn to complement the traditional costume.

Figure 4 shows *tekulok* and *sikong* wearing styles. The *tekulok* is made of black velvet fabric and adorned with yellow lace. As for a *sikong* can be either a *batik sarung* or *songket*, which also has a black and yellow pattern or motif.



Figure 4 Tekulok and Sikong (Source: PJMM, 2020)





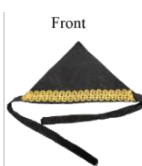



4.3 Sign & Symbol of JattiMiriek Headdresses

Semiotics is the theoretical accounting for signs, what they do and derive meaning only from those who use it in a cultural sense understand its meaning or implication regardless of how it is portrayed (Williams, 2000). A sign and symbol can communicate and transfer the meaning to others (WarismanSinaga and RamlanDamanik, 2020).

In this study, the semiotic approach was applied, and the focus is given to the symbol portrayed physically on the JattiMiriek headdresses' aesthetic elements to seek understanding of the meaning of these symbols. Black fabric, yellow lace and floral motif are common elements found on *tekulok* and *sikong*. These elements are represented in an abstract, organic form, and simplified style symbols derived directly from nature and relate closely to JattiMiriek main subsistence activity, paddy farming. Black symbolises soil, and yellow represents ripen paddy grains. The symbols are used for a specific reason and are associated with lifestyle, livelihood, unity, and prosperity, representing the JattiMiriek unique identity.


4.4 Aesthetic Elements of Tekulok

The following visuals describe the aesthetic elements and stylisation of *tekulok* and *sikong*.

<p>Design</p>	<p><i>Tekulok</i> has two designs, differentiated by way of wearing it.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Design 1</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Front</p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Back</p>  </div> </div> <p>Triangular-shaped <i>tekulok</i> design where the top corner is folded forward. This type of <i>tekulok</i> can be worn directly on the head.</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Design 2</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Front</p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Back</p>  </div> </div> <p>Triangular-shaped <i>tekulok</i> design with lace decoration needs to be tied around the head.</p> </div> </div>
<p>Fabric</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Design 1</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Design 2</p> </div> </div> <p>Velvet is the fabric material used for <i>tekulok</i>. The decorations made of lace and sequins are</p>

	in gold colour to represent the ripe paddy grain.	
Motif	Sequins is used to form a simple and organic motif such as flowers and leaves. The yellow or golden lace is attached around the circumference of the <i>tekulok</i> for decoration.	The motif is characterised by the pattern of yellow or golden lace.
Function	<i>Tekulok</i> will be matched with JattiMiriek men traditional costumes during special events and occasions.	
Stylisation	Design 1 <i>tekulok</i> is made as such to be ready to wear. Design 2 <i>tekulok</i> needs to be fastened or pinned to secure it on bearer's head.	

4.5Aesthetic Elements of Sikong

Design	 <p><i>Sikong</i> is made of a <i>batik sarong</i> or <i>songket</i>. It is rectangular. The application of <i>sikong</i> is based on the process and formation set by the JattiMirieks.</p>	
Fabric	Depending on the fabric of the <i>sarong</i> . A mixture of polyester and cotton is the standard fabric material used for <i>batik sarong</i> .	
Motif	The fabric motif is characterised by the pattern of the <i>batik sarong</i> or <i>songket</i> selected.	
Function	<i>Sikong</i> will be matched with JattiMiriek women traditional clothing worn for special events and occasions.	



5. CONCLUSION

Based on the study of the headdresses of the JattiMiriek ethnic, it can be concluded that the uniqueness of *tekulok* and *sikong* aesthetic elements is found in the term of the design, colours, motifs and stylisation. All these aesthetic elements and characteristics have to be captured and well documented to preserve the originality of the design. More than that, JattiMiriek uses these aesthetic elements to symbolise significant aspects of their culture. Black and yellow represent the colour of soil and ripen paddy grain that relates closely to paddy farming which had been the source of their life in the past. Although *tekulok* and *sikong* are no longer use as it is intended for; function as a sun hat, it is now more as a signifier of their unique culture and identity. They are wearing headdresses to complement the traditional costume to celebrate ceremonial events and symbolise unity and prosperity.

The findings in this work are expected to be a good source of reference for researchers and scholars on the JattiMiriek ethnic headdresses. Additionally, this work can also be used as a form of reference for those interested in studying or developing cultural objects in the fashion industry. Finally, although the findings are preserved and maintain the traditional aspects of the JattiMiriek material culture, these headdresses should showcase to the public to expose their unique design features. The design mainly attracts the younger generations in appreciating and inheriting the precious tradition of the JattiMiriek ethnic.

Continuous production of these headdresses also should be maintained as the materials needed for the production of *tekulok* and *sikong* are readily available in the market. Furthermore, these headdresses' plain and simple design

has a great potential to be further developed to be modernised and attract the younger generation to wear them on any informal and formal occasions.

PJMM can play a significant role and responsibility to preserve this culture and heritage of their people. In order to ensure the sustainability of material cultures such as *tekulok* and *sikong*, continuous study and documentation are critically required.

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