

# The Weaving Craftsmen of Songket Batubara: A Study of Local Wisdom for Welfare

Rozanna Mulyani<sup>1</sup>, Mardiah Mawar Kembaren<sup>1</sup>, Irwan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Malay Literature, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatera Utara,  
Jl Universitas No. 19, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Keywords: Weaving Craftsmen, Songket, Local Wisdom

Abstract: This study investigates the welfare of weaving craftsmen of Batubara songket by using the theory of local wisdom for welfare. The method used in this study is qualitative approach by using descriptive analysis method. The data were obtained through interview, observation and documentation. The obtained data from this field research were in the form of writing, recordings, photos and some references from books that support this study. Basically, the role of government institution, social institution, private institution and other forms of institution possess significant role in improving the prosperity of songket weaving craftsmen. In addition, the weaving craftsmen of Malay Songket should implement the local wisdom for welfare theory such as hard work, discipline, education, health, mutual cooperation, gender management, cultural preservation and creativity, and environmental care should be done to achieve prosperity.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Batubara district is one of the districts in North Sumatera Province. The indigenous people of Batubara is Malay people. According to Effendi (2004:3) Malay people are known as the community which are rich in cultural treasures. One of the Malay culture elements is weaving.

Nowadays, People of Batubara district still preserve weaving activity so it is easy for everyone who wants to get woven clothes from Batubara district. In Batubara, this kind of clothes is known as songket.

The preservation of weaving culture is definitely an effort of some elements in society with different roles and functions. The roles and functions of society in preserving this culture comprising of at least four elements namely:

- The owner of Songket business
- The craftsmen of Songket
- The seller of Songket, and
- The buyer of Songket.

From those elements, in the process of weaving culture preservation, it certainly has different role and responsibilities, but if it is investigated more deeply, weaving culture conservation is also included as Local Wisdom in Malay people in Batubara.

Local Wisdom is an indigenous knowledge or local genius of a community which comes from the noble value of cultural traditions to manage the order of community life in order to achieve community progress both in the creation of peace and the improvement of community prosperity (Sibarani, 2012:122).

By preserving local wisdom, the effort of creating harmony and improving the prosperity of community will also run well, yet in the fact, the craftsmen of weaving songket have not gained the prosperity, which can be seen from wages received from songket trading.

Besides minimum wages, apparently, many craftsmen complain about the burden of work that they have to finish since many of them still use traditional weaving tool or Okik. Therefore, many craftsmen choose another job because it is easier to earn money than weaving songket.



Figure.1 Traditional loom (*Okik*)

Many of songket craftsmen are women who are already old because the youths either girls or boys and other people prefer another job than weaving. This condition happens owing to the prosperity issue that is not guaranteed if they select to be craftsmen of songket as a main occupation.

If this condition gradually occurs, it can trigger cultural extinction and local wisdom which had been maintained among Malay people in Batubara district will also vanish.

The efforts to improve the prosperity of songket craftsmen are inseparable from the influence of the owner of songket business, the seller and buyer of songket. This means that there should be efforts to develop the progress of achieving prosperity in the up and down processes of producing songket.

Amrih (2008:72) clarifies that achieving prosperity in the world is the goal of someone's life. This indicates that the prosperity becomes one of the goals that should be obtained including cultural preservation of weaving songket.

According to that situation, then an innovation is needed to overcome that condition such as improving the welfare of songket craftsmen in order to sustain the existence of this culture by maintaining the local wisdom within. Then, the writer is interested in conducting a study entitled "The Craftsmen of Weaving Songket Clothes in Batubara: A Study about Local Wisdom for Welfare".

## 2 THE PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

According to the illustration in advance, the problem of this study is formulated as the following: "what efforts can we do to improve the prosperity of *songket* craftsmen as well as to preserve local wisdom in the culture of *songket* weaving.

## 3 THE OBJECTIVE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

### 3.1 The Objective of the Study

This study is aimed to analyze the process of *songket* weaving started from the initial phase to final phase which are related to the improvement of *songket* craftsmen prosperity by using local wisdom for welfare approach.

### 3.2 The Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study is expected to be useful as a reference for the craftsmen, the entrepreneur of *songket* clothes and local government in developing the prosperity of *songket* craftsmen.

Then, academically, this research is expected to be useful as a reference for further research.

## 4 THE LITERATURE REVIEW

### 4.1 Local Wisdom

The word of wisdom means discretion while local means a particular area or regions. Therefore, local wisdom could be understood as the discretion or wisdom of a particular area or idea, opinion which is wise that belongs to a particular social community or region. In term of type, local wisdom could be classified in two parts; those are Local wisdom for peace and Local wisdom for welfare/prosperity.



Figure 2. Chart types of Local (Sibarani, 2012: 134)

## 4.2 Local Wisdom for Welfare

Morphologically, the word prosperity comes from the word prosperous which means in a secure, safe, welfare, and happy situation. Prosperity means the fulfillment of primary needs of life such as food, clothes, house, education, security and health. But in general, welfare highlights three aspects namely *prosperity, health and peace*. (Sibarani, 2012: 186). Welfare is often connoted with someone's economic condition so the word welfare often refers to wealth, therefore welfare could also mean fulfilled situation of someone's or community's economy either primary or secondary needs.

Welfare does not come by itself but with a real work effort and ethos. Every human has high work ethos. People who dream of achieving prosperity should be able to utilize the natural and cultural resources that exist around it so that the local wisdom for welfare could be materialized.

Then, parts of local wisdom for welfare are hard work, discipline, education, health, mutual cooperation, gender management, cultural preservation and creativity, environmental care should be executed so that the welfare would be able to achieve.

For instance, local wisdom for welfare is an effort to materialize the welfare to individual or community through the utilization of culture, natural resources and the philosophy of life that exist in the area, so that the welfare could be achieved without leaving the aspect of locality or cultural elements that innate in society.

## 5 METHODS

The approach employed in this study is qualitative approach through descriptive analysis (Miles & Huberman; 1994, Moleong, 2014). To know, see and conclude the real condition factually and actually by looking at the problem and purpose of study, hence the research method utilized in this study is qualitative research method. Qualitative research method could be interpreted as a research design that produces descriptive data using words in the presentation of data.

### 5.1 The Location of the Research

The location of this research was Padang Genting village, Talawi sub-district, Batubara district, North Sumatera. This area was selected because there are many weaving clothes craftsmen from generation to

generation so that weaving culture is a notorious culture in that region.

### 5.2 The Informants of the Research

The informants of this research used major informant chosen based on the data needed by the researcher, so the data obtained data are more valid and comprehensive, and the selection was conducted purposively according to certain characteristics based on researcher's needs. The technique of informant selection was developed by using snowball technique in order to get maximum, comprehensive and profound findings.

For that reason, the major informants are experienced people and understand very well about the problem of study. And the major informants are as the followings:

- 1) The owner of Songket business
- 2) The craftsmen
- 3) Local community

### 5.3 The Types and Data Sources

The type and the data sources taken from primary and secondary data. The Primary data of this study were the data obtained directly from the major informants and the parties that has relationship directly to the problem of study. The data were obtained through interview, observation, and documentations during the field research. The data were collected in notes, recordings and photos. Then, the data will be analyzed in order to answer the problem of study.

The Secondary data is supporting data which were gained from outside the informants. These data could be obtained from some references and scientific papers which are related to this research. This secondary data is also a very important supporting data compared with the perceptions of previous related research, so that the researcher knows what things had been concluded and discovered in the previous study. Then, this secondary data also add knowledge and important suggestions in the development of perceptions and analysis the problem of study.

#### 5.3.1 The Data Collection Technique

*First*, the interview. Interview was conducted by researcher through answer and question technique to the informants in order to get data and information about the welfare of the weaving craftsmen.

Additionally, it also employed some instruments in order to obtain data by using question and answer

technique. According to Bungin (2004: 62), interview is divided into two; those are standardized interview and unstandardized interview. The difference is on the preparation of questionnaires while the questions in unstandardized interview are certainly not prepared but depend on the situation and needs in research.

*Second*, the purpose of conducting observation by researcher is to get data based on the results of systematic observation and recording about weaving craftsmen's prosperity. The instruments used were mechanical device which is using mechanical tools such as camera or audio and video recorder (Narboku, Dkk, 2005: 74). In this research, the mechanical tools such as camera and drawing tools are used to document the data about the required information.

*Third*, documentation is a way of collecting documents through pictures or photographs that are considered important to clarify the results, tools and materials, making process and motif types which are described in this study. The documentation tools were camera, stationary, and notebooks to search for the documentations on required data.

### 5.3.2 The Data Analysis Technique

This study is focuses intensively on a particular object that is weaving craftsmen of Batubara Malay *songket* by studying it as a case. In analyzing the data, the researcher used descriptive analysis discussing the phenomenon that had occurred then comparing it to a predetermined criterion or standard that is a destined criterion and then making a conclusion.

## 6 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 The Songket from Malay Batubara

Woven cloth from Batubara district is called *Songket*. Besides Batubara, it could also be found in other regions in Indonesia with different motifs and patterns that have meaning and value from its origin. It is part of culture and it adds cultural values in every region.

Other regions that have woven clothes are Nangroe Aceh Darussalam (Ija Kasab), North Sumatera (Ulos), West Sumatera, Riau, Jambi (Songket), Bengkulu (Songket), South Sumatera (Songket), Bangka Belitung, Lampung, Banten, West Java, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Central Java, East Java, Bali, East Nusa Tenggara, West Nusa Tenggara, East Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, West Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, West Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi,

Southeast Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, Maluku, North Maluku and West Papua (Marianti and Istiharini, 2013: 3). So, it could be concluded that Indonesia has *songket* with various patterns and motifs from different areas and definitely with different names.

*Songket* cloth is a kind of woven traditional Malay clothes in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. *Songket* is woven by hands with gold and silver threads. Metallic thread that is woven on a cloth brings a brilliant shine effect. The word *songket* originates from the term *sungkit* in Malay language and Bahasa means "hook" or "gouging". This related to the way of making *songket*, hooking and taking a little bit of woven cloth and then tucking the gold threads in (Marianti and Istiharini 2013:17).

Weaving *songket* activities in Indonesia has already existed for a long time. According to Effendy (2004:6), on the mainland of Sumatera Island, weaving activity developed in line with the greatness of the Malay kingdoms such as Pelalawan Empire (1530-1879), Inderagiri Empire (1658-1838) and Siak Sri Inderapura Empire (1723-1858). At that time, weaving activities in Malay society occurred lively.

It means that weaving activity had become the culture of Indonesian society which needs to be preserved and also maintained. For that reason, a special action is needed to preserve the songket weaving culture.

Formerly, Malay people using *songket* as clothing material. For Malay people, clothes are not only functioned to cover body from heat and cold but also functioned as identity, beauty of culture, social strata, custom and ideology markers, and it doesn't only possess pragmatics value but also worth of custom, culture and aesthetics.

Besides being used as clothing material, *songket* had developed and innovated with various kinds and functions such as wallet, bag, tablecloth, skullcap and others. It shows that the craftsmen society in Batubara district dares to innovate and improve form of it so that they can produce the new models as well as the functions.



Figure 3. Some innovation of songket

Before Batubara *songket* became a cloth, it apparently passed a very long processes and stages in the process of making such as material selection (yarn). After that, the process of pattern or motif selection is formed, and then continue to the weaving process. Next step is sorting or inspecting wrong motifs. And the final step is marketing the products. These processes took one till two weeks to create a single piece of *songket*. This is because the weaving tools used are still traditional.

Weaving tools are really important in improving the productivity. It needs a significant innovation which is able to simplify, accelerate, and increase the quality of *songket* and as the result, it increases the direct effect to the prosperity of *songket* craftsmen.

## 6.2 The Weaving Songket Tool

There are some kinds of weaving tool used in Indonesia, those are:

1. *Gedogan* or *Okik*. This is a traditional loom which at the edge of this tool is tied to the tree, mast of house or on a long board with a particular construction and the other edge of this tool is tied to the body of weaving tools that sits on the floor.

2. Not machine looms are the weaving tools moved by foot stamps to adjust the ups and downs of lint threads at the time of entry the yarn. Yet, this tool is still less maximize in the process of importing motifs on *songket*.

3. Not doobby machine loom. Dobby is an additional mechanical tool above the traditional looms. Dobby is functioned to control weaving yarn on the loom so the motifs are fit to the planned pattern. (Marianti and Istiharini 2013:4).

4. Machine looms. This tool is more sophisticated than the three looms above.

The looms of *songket* in Batubara also called as *Okik*. Besides it, there is also another loom used by Batubara community namely not machine loom, but it is still a little bit used by craftsmen because it is quite expensive. Beside it is more expensive than *Okik*, apparently, it has weakness in the process of importing the motifs in *songket* so that the craftsmen use *okik* again as a tool to weave *songket*.



Figure 4. *Okik* tool

Compared to other looms in Wajo district, actually the craftsmen in Wajo district in the production activity utilize three kinds of loom, those are *Gedogan*, not machine looms, and machine looms.

In 1951, there was a revolution in the use of weaving tools among Bugis society in general and in Wajo community particularly. It is signed by the use of not machine loom in weaving activity. Wajo is one of the regions in South Sulawesi province which firstly used not machine loom. Not machine loom entered Wajo because it was brought by two best friends namely Akil Amin and Ibrahim Daeng Manrapi who were inter-island traders who often had a route Makassar-Surabaya in return (Inanna, 2017:267).

Entering early 2004, modernization of looms happened. It is marked by the entrance of machine looms which was bought by a weaving entrepreneur from Wajo, he is Haji Arifuddin, from a weaving entrepreneur in Majalaya, West Java (Inanna 2017:268).

From the explanation above, actually, Wajo district is more advanced in the use of looms so that the weaver community in Batubara should upgrade and modernize the looms.

The use of modern tools did not necessarily reduce the aesthetical value of a *songket* yet the benefit gained productively and financially will tend to be more effective and efficient because it will simplify the *songket* craftsmen in the production of *songket*.

If they keep using traditional looms then gradually weaving activity will be beaten by the innovation from other areas that also have *songket* weaving culture.

*Modern technology should not be denied because it is part of global life yet modernity must be managed with local touch* (Sibarani 2012:212). It means that if weaver society in Batubara switches to use modern

looms then weavers will be easier and faster in the weaving process.

It is proved by the result felt by weavers that is only able to produce one *songket* in two weeks. The slow weaving process was caused by the *songket* weavers who still used *okik* as loom. Moreover, the other thing that caused the slow process of weaving was the weavers tend put this job as a side or part-time job so that they don't put this as their main job or priority. This fact is also caused by the low wages obtained by the craftsmen so the weavers are not able to fulfill their needs hence the weavers only wave in their spare time or half day.

This is a very serious issue where the weavers who are one of the elements that maintain the weaving culture do not get the economic impact directly due to the low income they receive from weaving *songket* activity.

In average, each craftsman could only earn Rp 500.000,- wages every month. This is far from worthy if we consider from the time they ought to spend to weave *songket*, and then the energy that they waste is not adequate with the wages they receive. Hence, the weaving culture is no longer an interesting thing for public.

Generally, the *songket* craftsmen consist of 40-year-old housewives, while the teenagers both boys and girls prefer other jobs such as being self-employed and work in neighboring country, Malaysia.

### 6.3 Batubara Songket Craftsmen

Craftsman is one of the essential elements in the process of preserving *songket* culture. They have big role in the process of *songket* production and they are human's *songket* resources who are willing to give energy and time to create a beautiful cultural work, has ideological, aesthetical, cultural and economical value.

Their role is sine qua non and fundamental in the process of conserving the weaving *songket* culture but the dedication they give is not in line with the wages they receive so that economically, they do not feel a significant impact. This becomes a very miserable reality amidst the necessities of life is quite large. It could be concluded that *songket* craftsmen are far from welfare community.

Sibarani (2012:193) explained that there are several things needed to be considered and done to increase the welfare, such as:

1. *Empirical problem* or *Empirical fact* which is faced by public should be known and analyzed

to get a solution as answer to overcome welfare problems.

2. *Legal Basis* or Legal Rule is an important thing because it could be made as legality to build connection with several institutions that can give benefit and improve welfare, the creation of legal basis such as laws or particular rules which could be the basis for deciding, conducting, and helping in improving the welfare. Additionally, the construction of connection or relation could be done by several institutions such as government institutions, private agencies as well as individuals after the legal basis already exists.
3. *The socio-cultural research*. This is one thing that could measure and explain factually about the conditions, developments, and issues that are new or old which becomes the challenge of realizing the welfare of *songket* weavers. The result of this study will be used as reference to develop a new empowerment model to achieve prosperity.
4. *Organizing*. It is to make the concept of welfare improvement based on the finding of research and planning the cooperation among institutions.
5. *Planning*. It is the preparation of plans and schedule activities systematically started from the beginning to ending, anyone who will involve, person in charge, and targets to be achieved.
6. *Implementation* is an empowerment activity in the field that should pay attention properly to the target of welfare improvement and in the right target.

The six points above should be considered, thought, and realized effectively and efficiently so that the implementation of empowerment activity of *songket* craftsmen could be achieved.

The welfare issue of *songket* weavers is a problem to solve. For that reason, according to previous illustration, researcher used local wisdom theory in solving this problem.

Local wisdom for welfare by Robert Sibarani (2012) has been divided into some points, those are: hard work, discipline, education, health, mutual cooperation, gender management, cultural preservation and creativity, and environmental care. Those are expected to produce prosperity which later by Robert Sibarani (2012) is divided into several parts as well. The purposes and functions of local wisdom for welfare are: *Prosperity, source of creativity, cultural industry deposit, motivation of success, and poverty alleviation*. If this is made into diagram, then it will be understood easier. This is the diagram of

local wisdom for welfare below as well as the purposes and functions:



Figure 5. Local wisdom of welfare

From the diagram above, local wisdom for welfare are:

1.) *Hard work*. Hard work is the intensity of work or working hours for a job. Hard work done by songket weaver actually is still not maximal because in weaving *songket* they place it as a part time activity so that the received wages are quite minimal. Besides the timing, apparently, market influence also affects their activity because when someone orders *songket* in a large scale the weavers will pursue the target and work hard but if there is no order in large scale, they will do it in their spare time.

Based on the interview, it shows that if they wove songket with hard work they would get satisfied result but it usually happens if they get large scale order and should be finished in "*kejar-target*" or "in hurry" system.

2.) *Discipline*. Discipline is an attitude that affects the activity of business. By discipline, maximal result would be achieved. Based on observation, the craftsmen of songket are not bound by the standard regulations and procedures. Thus, the working hours

and off-work hours are not ruled officially whereas it is very important thing.

3.) *Education*. The majority of formal education passed by *songket* craftsmen is Senior High School graduate, but for the development and improvement of Human's songket resources, non-formal training is required which is held by government or private agencies. These non-formal trainings are expected to stimulate the creativity and increase knowledge for them.

4.) *Health*. Health is also something that should be noticed. The difficulty in weaving *songket* causes the majority weavers feel tired easily, except the age factor of craftsmen who is about 40 years old. The traditional looms also become one of the factors which makes weaving process seems to be very hard and it impacts on the energy that must be spent. Moreover, health insurance for *songket* entrepreneurs becomes a serious issue that need to be noticed by government.

5.) *Mutual cooperation* Mutual cooperation is one of the local wisdoms in Indonesia which also becomes the culture of Indonesian society in general. The activity of *songket* business was built with mutual cooperation spirit. This is proved that if there was a large scale order of *songket* from someone to then the entrepreneurs will share the work to other entrepreneurs so that the target of the order can be achieved.

This way is one of the *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) cultures that has been innate in the weaving process, however this tends to be not worth compared with the results they did specifically unfair and less transparent in profit sharing. The result is still focused on individuals so that the financial impact doesn't have direct impact to them.

The dominant profit is usually played by *tauke* (distributor or even big seller). It would be better if the orientation of work is to foster the spirit of tolerance and fairness so that the benefits could be felt together by each element involved in the process of weaving songket.

Keeping a good relationship among working partners by putting respect and tolerance without reducing the elements of mutual benefit and empowerment is the most important thing in maintaining business conduciveness.

#### 1. Gender management

The craftsmen of *songket* generally are housewives. The gender management is an important thing in developing human resources. The existence of well gender management is expected to help the weavers to become more tolerant and solid among them.

### 2. Cultural Preservation and Creativity

Cultural preservation and creativity is a socio-cultural resource that must be developed, revitalized, modified so that it could get bigger benefits. *Songket* is a socio-cultural resource which could be utilized for the welfare of the owners of the culture. By conserving weaving *songket* activity, then the cultural creativity will still alive but we also want it has major impact to life of the actors of preservation and cultural creativity.

### 3. Environmental care

Environment is important to be protected besides the environmental conduciveness has a role of embodying society prosperity. Good social environment will create good social condition as well. On the other hand, bad social surroundings will result bad social surroundings.

Protecting environment is not only maintaining cleanliness and no littering, but also other things beyond that, which is the social environment of society.

People who care about the environment will keep the reputation of their environment, keep the conduciveness, embody the new innovations which could increase the society's welfare, and stimulate people to involve in protecting the environment and caring for the surroundings. For instance, the development of *songket* business adapted with the time, without reducing the local elements, the local wisdom is maintained. It is one way to care for the social environment of community. It indicates it will add innovations, simplify and increase the productivity which can support the welfare of *songket* craftsmen.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The *songket* craftsmen is a human resource investment which have significant role in preserving weaving *songket* culture in Batubara district. This could be vanished regarding to the minimal received wages from that activity. And it is considered as a factor that could erode the culture of weaving *songket* in Batubara.

Special attention from social institutions, government agencies and private institute is necessary to give programs which aims to increase knowledge, quality and professionalism of the *songket* craftsmen to achieve prosperity in life.

The implementation of local wisdom for welfare is the best solution to be implemented by the businessmen and other institutions which has an aim to improve the welfare of *songket* craftsmen so that

*songket* as cultural creativity can still be maintained and preserved.

## REFERENCES

- Amrih, Pitoyo. (2008). *Ilmu Kearifan Jawa*. Yogyakarta, Pinus Book Publisher.
- Bungin Burhan. (2004). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Jakarta, PT Rajagrafindo Persada.
- Effendy, Tenas. (2014). *Etika Berpakaian Melayu dalam Busana Melaka*. Institut Seni Malaysia Melaka.
- Inanna. (2017). *Kearifan Lokal Pada Industry Kerajinan Kain Tenun Sutera Kabupaten Wajo* Prosiding Pluralisme Dalam Ekonomi Dan Pendidikan ISSN 2407-4268.
- Marianti, Maria Merry, Dr. dan Istiharini, SE., MM (2013) *Analisa Karakteristik Dan Perilaku Konsumen Tenun Songket Palembang*. Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat. Universitas Katolik Prahyanan.
- Miles, B. Mattew dan A. Michael Huberman. (1994). *Analisis Data Kualitatif*. Jakarta, UI Press.
- Moleong, Lexy J. (2014). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Narboku, Cholid. (2005). *Metodelogi Penelitian*. Jakarta, PT Bumi Aksara.
- Sibarani, Robert. (2012). *Kearifan Lokal Hakikat, Peran, dan Metode Tradisi Lisan*. Jakata, Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan.