

# International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding

http://ijmmu.com editor@ijmmu.com ISSN 2364-5369 Volume 6, Issue 2 April, 2019 Pages: 608-618

# Tappan-Pelepai Woven Fabric, Social Status and Caring for Local Culture in a Multicultural Society at Lampung, Indonesia

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http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v6i2.784

### Abstract

This paper examines the *tappan* and *pelepai* woven fabric, a kind of woven cloth that shows the social status and position of a person in an ethnic group, as well as the preservation of the woven fabric in the Lampung Sanggi Unggak Museum which is now almost extinct. In fact, *tappan* woven fabric is an important symbol of identity for indigenous people of Lampung. Its extraordinary beauty is almost unrecognizable. The research method used is ethnography, by conducting in-depth interviews and engaging observations. The results of the study show that the *tappan* cloth was not known by the people of Lampung in general. However, one of the pioneers of local cultural preservation in the village of Sanggi Unggak Tanggamus, built a museum that collects various kinds of traditional objects, one of which is *tappan* cloth. The effort to preserve local culture is a form of concern of traditional leaders for extinction of Lampung culture, one of which is *tappan* cloth. The symbolic meaning becomes shifted or even extinct. This shows that this fabric attribute is a culture that is easy to change as indicated by Linton (1977) that there is a culture that is easy to change because it is no longer considered effective and efficient.

**Keywords:** Tappan; Woven Fabric; Identity; Caring and Local Culture of Lampung

### Introduction

So far Lampung is only known for its *tapis* cloth, which is the traditional Lampung woven cloth worn usually by Lampung women, which later as the times it develops with various kinds of materials, motifs, forms and even functions. The designers also develop and innovate with the *tapis* cloth. Another traditional cloth originated from indigenous people of lampung is *tappan* and *pelepai* cloth. Tappan woven fabric is one of the typical woven fabrics of the indigenous people of Lampung, namely the Sai Batin indigenous community that lives along the coast of Lampung. The other one is *pelepai* woven fabric. Both are similar clothes but differentiated by their function, in which *tappan* is usually used to cover cakes or *juadah* during traditional ceremonies while *pelepai* functions as a seat for the traditional people in accordance with their social stratification in society. Both types of fabric are only found in Lampung coastal indigenous people.

It is said that because this type of woven fabric is only found in the coastal areas of Lampung and is made by the people of Lampung who are of Sai Batin ethnic group. This cloth is used for various daily purposes such as to cover food trays especially during customary events. This fabric is very unique because it is different from other traditional fabrics weavings, especially the motifs and color which is very natural. However, at present the existence of *tappan* cloth is rarely known by the present generation, or it can be considered almost extinct. Even the technique to produce the cloth is only known by very few of older generations. The extinction of one of these cultural objects is subject to a collective member who is unable to maintain its sustainability so that no young generation is interested in developing it. Whereas, this *tappan* weaving is very beautiful, classic, and has very high economic value. These opportunities are not well seen by either the collective support community or regional government. It can be inferred that the number of extinctions of Lampung culture is inseparable from the increasingly heterogeneous society due to the arrival of other ethnic groups in Lampung.

It was noted that the arrival of Javanese to Lampung has begun since the time of colonization and transmigration in Lampung. Lampung is a destination of people in Java to find a new life. Massive colonization and transmigration have made Lampung "a land of hope" for those who came to it. Even Levang, an expert in transmigration, mentioned that the arrival of Javanese to Lampung indicated how Lampung land became a land of hope, as known with a slogan 'let's go to the land of Sabrang, a dream land for transmigrates" (Levang, 1980). The development of the arrival of this society has made acculturation and assimilation to the people of Lampung, so that many cultural objects are almost extinct and changed including this woven fabric as an attribute of Lampung culture.

Woven fabric is a very important attribute in the life of Lampung community that functions as symbols for the users and gives important and even sacred meanings for the life of a society. One of the important attributes of indigenous people in the *Semaka Keratuan* is *Tappan* and *Peleppai* cloth. Tappan cloth is a kind of traditional fabric made by weaving. It is commonly used for handkerchief to cover *juadah* or cakes during customary events. On the other side, the *peleppai* cloth is used as a shawl for women worn during a traditional ceremony. According to Van der Hoop, Lampung people have weaved brocade fabric called trays and cloth *pelepi* since the 2nd century BC. These fabric motifs are hooks and keys (key and rhomboid shapes), *hayat* tree, and buildings that house for dead human spirits. There are also animal motifs, sun, and moon and jasmine flowers. (http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kain\_tapis).

Pelepai woven fabric at the two ends will surely be decorated with a tree. The community knows it as a tree of life (hayat tree). The length of pelepai woven fabric is at least 2 meters which is usually used when the traditional ceremony takes place. Pelepai woven fabric serves for seat when the wedding procession takes place. This cloth is usually used in the community of Kota Agung in yellow color which comes from turmeric coloring. This tappan or tray fabric is 150-200 years old. Ships, humans and various animals and plants are an integral part of the woven fabric. The symbols originated from the story of the **Prophet** Noah and his people avoiding the terrible flood. (http://lampungtraveller.blogspot.com/2014/08/wisata-belanja-berburu-aneka-kain.html).

The weaving method of this cloth was very classical. The tool is now almost extinct and no community member produces this cloth. This *tappan* cloth serves to decorate and cover cakes and meals during customary events in Lampung coastal communities. This tappan fabric still can be found in many countries such as the Netherlands and the USA. Unfortunately, in Lampung, this fabric has begun to become extinct, even though Lampung is the original origin of this fabric. This situation makes the research team think that academically and theoretically these woven fabrics need to be saved and preserved and further regenerate the manufacture process. Academically, the study of traditional weaving is very important in terms of its function and role in social structures in society. Therefore, this study examines the identification of attributes of traditional tappan fabrics in the Keratuan Tanggamus Semaka.

The existence of Tappan and Pelepai cloth which are parts of attributes and sacred symbols with its own meaning for the people of Lampung is increasingly endangered. The people of Lampung are influenced by modernism which continues to offer foreign products which tend to turn the people become hedonists and forget to preserve the heritage of their own ancestors. This study examines, analyzes, and identifies the attributes and symbolic meaning of Tappan traditional woven fabric from the Keratuan Semaka Tanggamus as an identity of social status and how to preserve the object.

### Literature Review

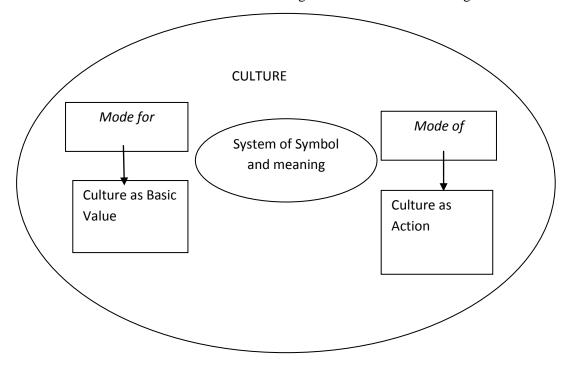
Conceptually, clothes are all things that cover the body, decorate it or protect it from the danger that comes from the atmosphere. Fabrics depend on certain physical conditions such as climate and body health as well as the textile manufacturing (Eicher, 1992). Fabrics are part of cultural objects, both those worn on the body and those used in other equipment. This cultural object occurs because it is cultivated by the community through plans, methods and based on the reasons for formation. Studying cultural objects is not only to learn the generic elements of material, but also to understand the cultural concepts of society that determine its creation. Cultural objects have meaning for their owners.

Theoretically North (1985) explains that meaning is often analogous to the sign (signified) or symbol, and the symbol relates to that associated with the marker (signifier or sign-vehicle). That meaning exists because of a process of interaction among humans when they interact (North.1985: 92). According to Rudito (1996) the meaning itself is a result of the interaction of people with other people, or the community with other communities, where the interaction is a sacred activity, such as traditional ceremonies and so forth. Furthermore, according to Firth in Koentjaraningrat (1987), meaning needs to be displayed through symbols to convey a message, even a sacred message and certain social functions.

The tappan and pelepai cloth is a result or product of culture. Due to the interaction in the use of Tappan and Pelepai fabrics, Tappan and Pelepai fabrics are cultural objects that have meaning. Its primarily meaning is the identity symbolized in the fabric. The identity indicates the identity the Lampung coastal community or the Sai Batin indigenous community. The fabrics are only worn or used during traditional ceremonies - and other sacred ceremonies. Therefore, this tappan and pelepai cloth is not just a cloth but a cultural product which has meaning because it is a symbol of identity. Levis Strauss in Koentjaraningrat (1987), mentioned that this meaning is not only related to daily life but also related to traditional ceremonies, religious and other ritual life, even related to the social status in indigenous people.

Especially regarding to the symbolic meaning of the attributes worn or used by humans in their culture, this can be seen theoretically in the paradigm of symbolic anthropology which comes with three approaches. The first symbolic anthropology is the classical anthropological approach of Victor Turner (1967) explaining that meaning has an influence in every human life. This approach views culture as something holistic which means that whatever objects used by humans which consists of attributes, clothing, food, or even behavior has meaning. This is especially revealed through studies related to the attributes used in traditional activities or traditional ceremonies in the community, for example in traditional Tappan and pelepai woven fabrics used in certain customs ceremony.

The second and the most fundamental approach is from Cliford Geertz (1973) affirming the words symbols and meanings in his interpretation of culture (1973) and local knowledge (Geertz, 1983) that the most basic nature of human beings is how humans define themselves by understanding meaning that exists in them. Geertz defines culture as a human guide and action, where there are guidelines manifested in action, so that in the cultural process there is an interaction between knowledge and action and the media between them is what is called meaning and symbol. Geertz divides the concept of knowledge as a guide and form of action in two patterns in culture and understanding meaning, namely the mode of and mode for. The 'mode for' is the system of value (action), while the 'mode of' is the knowledge system (cognitive). This relates to meaning which is the intermediary of the cognitive of action. Human beings have cognitive aspect which is then manifested in action, and this action can be realized because there is meaning as media, as shown below:



Picture 1. Mode for and Mode of and meaning as intermediaries according to Geertz

The ritual of 'beadok in nayuh balak' uses tappan and pelepai woven cloth. This ritual which is a traditional ceremony to obtain a degree in the custom of Sai Batin Lampung is a pattern of 'mode of' (manifestation of action), while the title / nickname or adok obtained from generation to generation in Sai Batin as believed having a high meaning in life in the Pepadun custom is a pattern of 'mode for' (guidelines).

The third approach is from Talal Asad (1993) which is different from Geertz (1973). According to Geertz, the symbol serves to convey meaning, then from this process comes the belief and thickness of one's or society's belief in something sacred. Even when someone's faith is fading, the symbol can convey meaning, so that the faith can be re-thickened. For example, in Balinese society, when the beginning of the fading of a belief in certain sacred activities a dance is held. The dance serves as a symbol that conveys the meaning to the community to remind and increase the faith in something. In contrast, according to Asad, the meaning is not a reverence to remind people of a belief, but that there is already a belief behind the meaning itself. So, when Geertz states that the symbol comes first to display meaning, Asad explains precisely the meaning is the first to come which then realizes the symbol. According to Asad the meaning has the strength and confidence behind it, then manifested in the form of a symbol of objects or events. This symbol turns as a way of expressing attitudes and beliefs about something.

### **Research Methods**

This study uses qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). This method is chosen in order to understand the various types and patterns of traditional Tappan woven fabrics derived from the Keratuan Tanggamus Semaka and the changes that requires a method of understanding not to be measured or tested with a hypothesis. Understanding the meaning of this traditional attribute requires an in-depth understanding from a researcher of the phenomenon to be studied. Further, as the knowledge of tappan and pelepai fabrics is very rarely owned by the Sai Batin indigenous people, the use of qualitative methods becomes a relevant choice in the implementation of this research.

Besides, the ethnographic approach was chosen because it very concerns with understanding or *verstehen*, so that the meanings and symbols of traditional woven cloths that are increasingly scarce can be explored. Ethnography is a complete picture of a culture, so by using this approach, researchers can understand the meaning of woven fabrics that are nowadays very rare.

The informants for the research are the people of Pekon Sanggi Unggak Kerakus of Semaka. This location was chosen because this area still preserves traditional fabrics found in a mini museum owned by the community. The main informant was Pak Abu, the founder of the Keratun Semaka Tanggamus museum and the people who understood and were able to provide information about the traditional woven fabric. The number of informants is very relative, depending on how the situation in the research field is as commonly done in qualitative research. The research field is the key to observe. However, sometimes what happens in the field is very different from the theories obtained. The informants were chosen purposively, namely the key informant Pak Abu and then continued to other informants who were considered capable of explaining the fabric, including traditional ethnic balancers called *penyimbang* who understood the fabric.

There are three data collection techniques namely in-depth interviews, observations and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with informants who understood very well about the traditional Tappan and Pelepai woven fabrics, namely Mr. Abu as the owner of the Tanggamus Semaka Keratun Museum which has been established since April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 at Pekon Bandar Negeri Semuong District of Tanggamus. The observations were done to obtain information regarding the existence of Tappan's fabric and its changes. Then the documentation was carried out to take photos of the traditional Tappan woven cloth of the community that still exists. Documentation is also done using videos and images. In addition, if the informant provided well documented information, it was also taken for data collection. Data analysis is done in three ways, namely data reduction, data verification and data display. In addition to the three techniques, peer review which is to discuss the results of research with experts in their fields was also carried out. Data reduction is done by classifying and classifying data according to the theme. Verification is done by re-confirming the data obtained to informants who provided information. The data display is to present the data in accordance with the format and class.

# Discussion: History of Lampung Traditional Fabrics

In general, fabrics have a lot of functions in human life. Previously, in prehistoric times humans might have not known cloth as clothing or other attributes. Many use wood, leaves and animal skin to cover their bodies and for other functions. Since humans had known fabrics, they have used it to cover the body and for other functions such as equipment and other attributes.

Lampung has been known for one of its traditional fabric called *tapis*. Tapis in its initial history is not a cloth decorated with gold thread as known in present era, but simply a cloth worn to cover a woman's body.



Figure 2. Lampung Pepadun's Bride Clothing

Source: KITLV httpwww.kaskus.usshowthread.phpt=10304964 Vrouw uit de Lampongse districten in traditionele klederdracht year 1915

Tapis is made by the people of Lampung, both by the Sai Batin and Pepadun indigenous people, with characteristics based on their environment. We can see fabric motifs vary greatly. Usually this is adapted to natural examples around their environment. For example, in coastal areas the design comes up with figures symbolizing ship cloth, in addition to some patterns of plants and flowers.

According to one of the resource persons – Azhari Kadir (a culture observer), the colors of the ancient tapis cloth were originated from the color of nature; the green from leaf, the blue from fruit, or yellow from the color of turmeric. The color depends on what available in the nature and there is no special color. The color in general was white for the king. The application of golden thread (*Benang Mas*) in the cloth has been since the colonization era in Lampung which was around the 15th century. Besides, there was also the pattern of Tapis Jung Galuk (Ship Cloth) which symbolizes a public vehicle in ancient times when people used ship to connect from one area to another. However, since Islam introduced into the community, some motifs of tapis cloth such as pictures of people, the animals are eliminated or prohibited because it was believed that they are required by god to give a life for those animate figures or living object they made. Then the motifs were abandoned by the people of Pepadun.

However, in Lampung, a man wears *sinjang betupal* or *bidak* – (special cloth for men) instead of Tapis. Tapis cloth is heavy because it is made of thick fabric embroidered by hand. Each cloth has its own characteristics. The clothes worn at certain time were classified according to their clan or offspring. For this case, a person wearing clothes not characterizing their trademark can be subject to fines. There is a type of Tapis cloth decorated with ringgit *rente* (coin-chain) which was worn only for *Penyimbang* (leader) position. In addition, rupiah *rente* used to characterize common people of the ethnic.

Tapis Raja Medal is a type of tapis cloth which is often worn by brides to take a shower in a traditional ceremony. Craftsmen producing this cloth are still can be found in few regions as in *Tegineneng, Natar,* and *Talang Padang*. The term *tapis* itself is used only to name the cloth worn by women in Lampung. So when the cloth is used not for that purpose, then it is no longer called tapis. Tapis was not only functional in traditional events but also in daily uses. In the past, the kinship system in Lampung applied patriarchal and matriarchal systems but nowadays there only are patrilineal and matrilineal systems. The patrilineal system emphasizes the lineage of father side in the clan while patriarchal related to the rights of powers of a son in a clan. The people of Lampung usually do not sell

the inheritance land. Even though a man has migrated out from his clan or family for decades, when he returns he is still recognized as part of their clan because the land is not sold. Women in this community generated only from what their parents give. In making decisions, Lampung people go through deliberation to reach a consensus but women were unable to speak. The idea to dedicate all cloth to women is a way to respect the figure of women in Lampung customs.

Tapis cloth is a symbol which implies that power does not have to exist only in men. Tapis is a women's clothing characterizing Lampung cultural identity as the core of culture. Based on an interview with informant Azhari Kadir (a cultural observer), it is known that all *Lampung Pepadun* regions use *Tapis Dewasano* or *Jung Syarat*. They differ only from the way they are woven. He mentioned that the *jung syarat* type has no *mato kibau* (bull's eyes) motifs as it is originally from *abung sewo mego* and *pubian telu suku* tribes. However, nowadays the *mato kibau* motifs can also be found in *Tulangbawang Mego Pak Tapis Balak*. The informant owns one tapis he got from his grandmother in the year around 1920s which was usually worn for officials or prominent people. He had also been to Japan to pair a filter on the Statue at the Japanese Museum.

One traditional cloth originated from coastal areas, especially West Lampung, South Lampung and Komering is called *Inuh* cloth. The *Inuh* cloth is also considered as a type of *tapis* cloth as it is worn by women. The original fabric has almost disappeared in the society. This date back to 1975 when there was a massive buying from Jakarta as many buildings in Jakarta used this cloth to decorate their walls with this ancient cloth. However, this revived around 1980s.

One of the people who had been to Dutch museum in the 1980s was Siti Zubaidah Maki who is Azhari's nephew. She lived in Rawa Laut near Bandar Lampung Junior High School 2. There is also a Tapis fabric collector or observer, Eli Ayun, whose husband is of Chinese descent and his wife is of Pakistani descent from Teluk Betung and now lives in Jalan Ir. Hi Djuanda Ciputat Jakarta. He owns Lampung Art Indonesian Silk shop to buy and sell antiques located on Jalan S. Parman in Lampung.

Tulang Bawang used to be a port. *Sulam Usus* is originally from Tulang Bawang while the *Raja Medal* is from *Pubian*. The *Pelepai* originated from coastal areas such as Krui, Kalianda, Kota Agung and Pertiwi regions. Pelepai and Tappan are often used at custom parties, births and marriages only.

It is named Tappan cloth due to its function which is for the base of a food place, or a cloth for food cover or for delivery at a wedding or other traditional ritual event. It is a small rectangular cloth with various motifs. The oldest motifs found are the shape of a ship, puppets or leave. The fabrics are woven with natural colored threads such as white, brown, or black, and beige. The colors are available in nature, because the coloring is based on the plants formulated into colors. For example, yellow is taken from turmeric, and red is taken from roses. The shape of the motif is also diverse, usually in accordance with the forms of the surrounding nature. Like the picture below:



Figure 3. Tappan Cloth (Tray)



Research Collections Photo, 2017. The Tappan cloth for pedestal or lid

Below is the remain of a tool to weave tappan cloth, which is not complete anymore as there are no more people weaving this cloth.



Photo: Research Team, 2017

Tools for weaving tappan cloth (trays) found at the Sanggi Unggak Museum

At present in Pekon Sanggi especially at the Sanggi Museum, the pelepai cloth is no longer found. This traditional fabric is usually owned by the local community and preserved by native Lampung families. Every cloth has a function and meaning as well as social status in it, so that there are certain fabrics that can only be used by certain groups and some are not allowed. In accordance with the order of one's social status in the ethnic group.

Besides being owned by the community in their homes, the cloth is also preserved at Pekon Sanggi Unggak. Mr. Abu Sahlan owns a museum which was established with CSR funding from PT. Natara Mining. This museum is built to since Mr. Abu Sahlan has many traditional family relics, ranging

from clothing, cooking utensils, fabrics, and other historical objects. This mini museum has been established since 2015.

Usually each motifs of the cloth represents certain meanings. For example, the pelepai cloth is to describe the human life cycle from birth to death. Besides, there are stories in originated form people's daily life. As can be observed the picture above, the cloth shows the ship which is an important symbol for the coastal people who live with fishing in the sea and in the river. Ships are important means of transportation for the people of the past with various functions as to transport the products of their garden to certain destination place.

# Analysis: Peleppai and Tappan cloth as Social Status Attributes and Symbols

From the results of the research above, it can be analyzed that cloth not only serves to protect the body but also has social functions and symbolic functions. The Pelepai cloth has a social status symbol. It is not to wear by ordinary people. From the results of Vivit's previous research (2011), there are two expert thoughts about attributes. Cloth is seen as a human attribute which has meaning and symbol. The tappan and pelepai cloths also have meanings and symbols. The two expert thoughts are Geertz (1973) and Talal Asad (1993)

Symbol (objects or events)
Kain Tappan dan Pelepai

A Symbol as an object or an event that convey a meaning

Creating certain faith and attitude towards an object

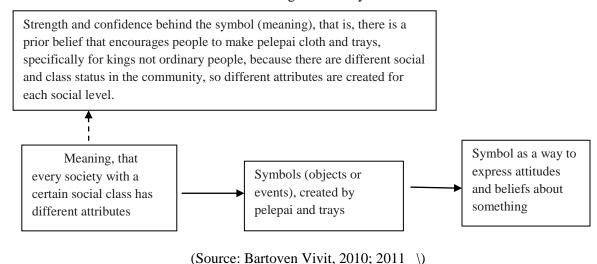
Chart. 1. Geertz's thinking about Attributes as a meaningful symbol

(Source: processed from Bartoven Vivit, 2011\_\)

In the chart above it can be seen that cloth is an attribute. The pelepai cloth and tappan cloth are attributes of the Sai Batin Lampung coastal community that has existed since their ancestors. The cloth has a motif that also has value and meaning. The symbol and attributes of the tappan cloth with this motif give a message that there is a meaning related to social status and position in the ethnic life. Shippatterned cloth has the highest status in society as well as trays or tappan. With the establishment of meaning, it creates confidence in the community.

This idea is in contrast with what described by Talal Asad who explained that it was actually not a symbol that was born first but the belief and trust in the community. It is not a symbol that remind beliefs, but beliefs that built symbols. The meaning is when the community already has a social structure, such as the Sai Batin indigenous people who adhere to the belief in the existence of hierarchy and social status in society, then they build or construct a symbol, for example the cloth used by the kings is different from the cloth used by his men, or the subordinates. This can be seen in the chart below:

Chart. 2. Talal Asad's thoughts about symbols and attributes



### **Conclusion**

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that:

- 1. Pelepai and tappan are traditional fabrics used by the Sai Batin indigenous people by characterizing the social status in them.
- 2. The meaning of cloth is an attribute that embodies a symbol for society, that attribute signifies a person's social status in society.
- 3. Tappan and pelepai traditional cloth are made using hand woven and coloring from plants around the community.
- 4. Tappan and pelepai are two fabrics that are very difficult to find, especially those with ancient motifs, such as ship motifs and life cycle motifs.
- 5. Motifs also signify the life situation of people at the time of making it; there are periods of ship motifs and other motifs.
- 6. The fabric is already hard to find and has become a rare item. Socio-cultural changes in society have given many changes in the disappearance of these fabrics.
- 7. There are no more people who weave this cloth as they mostly don't understand the meaning of this cloth. It has been considered useless so it might have been lost or even disposed away.
- 8. The tools for weaving the fabric are also rare, even if they can be found; usually they are broken and/or incomplete.
- 9. There is no effort in the traditional family to preserve the inheritance process in weaving. The young generation has no knowledge of weaving this cloth. Nevertheless, there is the Sanggi Unggak museum that belongs to Pak Abu that comes as a pioneer to revive the tappan cloth.
- 10. To maintain the sustainability of the tappan and pelepai fabrics, the owner of the Sanggi Unggak museum tries to gather mothers who are still able to weave and then gather young people to learn to weave. This is an attempt to preserve for the woven fabric.

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