

Identifying The Types and Functions of Iranun Woven Textiles in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

The people of Iranun, who inhabit the river mouths and coastal sections of Sabah, are well-known for the strong sense of family and community that they exhibit within their settlements, which are defined geographically. Their culture draws a lot of its significance from their discipline, especially through their art. As much as Iranun culture is valuable, there have been very few studies about their art and, more specifically, their weaving. Therefore, this is one of the fields that have not been investigated to any great extent, and there is little understanding of the role of this craft in the Iranun community and the surrounding local textile industry. The lack of textile studies only serves the textile industry in Iranun communities and does not serve the field in general. To fill this gap, this present study attempts to investigate and categorise the types and functions of Iranun woven textiles. A qualitative approach is used by means of ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews with 12 respondents, including two master weavers. Results indicate that Iranun weavings are not only infused with symbolism that functions as a marker of identity and history but also community. The study stresses the need for the elements of this heritage to be preserved as they promote the local textile industry and even evoke the interest of scholars. Among the suggestions are those initiatives which are directed to cover the Iranun weaving practice and its art for cultural exhibitions and to excite the younger generation to practice the tradition. This study is part of the more extensive debate on preserving cultures and justifying why much effort is needed to protect the artistry of the Iranun people.

Keywords: *Function, Iranun, Textiles, Types, Woven*

INTRODUCTION

The Iranun people are an ethnic group belonging to Sabah, Malaysia, that shares tight bonds with their families and communities. They have traditionally been long engaged in trade activities and maritime occupations and are a community which takes great pride in preserving their customs (Waren, 2002). In this regard, their social behaviours are part of the larger system of codes and values, which are expressed through art forms such as crafting and especially weaving. Weaving shapes identity, values and ideals within these societies.

As stated in Maxwell (2012), the designs found on traditional textiles are not mere embellishments but rather contain intricate cultural symbols and cosmological meanings. In traditional societies, idealistic and metaphysical concepts, encompassing notions such as unity, fertility, or spiritual harmony, find expression through textile motifs which incorporate cosmological structures and collective belief systems. More recent research reconfirms that textile motifs serve as coded narratives and convey religious beliefs, social customs, and mythological legacies. For example, Nugroho et al. (2020) studied the Batak Toba textiles and noted that certain motifs were representative of ancestral ties and social roles, thereby integrating metaphysical concepts within everyday material culture. Likewise, Dias et al. (2020) document how women of the Ri-Bhoi community in Northeast India deliberately design and incorporate motifs to depict spiritual ideals and strengthen communal identity.

The complexity and meaning in textile design convey social hierarchy as well. Textiles often denote ethnicity, gender, class, or geographical region and are denoted by particular colors, designs, and methods. Darlong (2025) observes that among the Darlong tribe of Tripura, distinct styles of weaving and distinct items of clothing serve to mark tribe identity as well as distinguish different stages of an individual's life. The fabric becomes a visual text, displaying the wearer's social standing and reinforcing the feeling of integration in a group (Davis, 2018). The processes of weaving and cultural reproduction and identity construction go hand in hand. Weaving, described by Inkuer et al. (2024), is a narrative act, a form of textile storytelling where personal memory, history, and shared experience is inscribed into the fabric and becomes "text." It is a craft as well as a practice that reinforces the weaver's sense of self and genealogical ties to society, tradition and community. Weaving thus enables the preservation of identity and transmits it across generations, whereby each thread captures collective community memories and social structure (Hidayah et al., 2021).

In particular, the practice of weaving reflects the values of society. These textiles are also used in ceremonies and rituals, thus strengthening common cultural ideals and signs of life events. The knowledge of doing textile crafts, such as weaving, promotes inter-generational learning and guarantees that social ideals are maintained and preserved (Hasliza et al., 2017).

Weaving is also an important part of Iranun's culture because it binds them to their history. More than an art, the intricate designs and motifs in Iranun textiles encompass symbols of tradition, events, hierarchical structures, and rituals (Ismail & Huminn, 2018). Women practice weaving and specialise in certain techniques and designs so that the craft can be continued for centuries. In the past, woven pieces were not only functional items but also cultural and status symbols through which identity was expressed.

Even though such have a lot of importance, the Iranun weaving traditions are relatively less explored in comparison to their language or maritime traditions. Not much has been written about the textiles produced, their motifs and symbols, or their intended use and cultural importance. Such a lack is an indication that research is extensive as it concerns the cultural activities of the Iranun people in general concerning Malaysian textile activities.

This paper, therefore, attempts to fill this gap by investigating the types of Iranun woven textiles in relation to the traditions of the Iranun community in Sabah. In this way, the kinds of textiles made and various techniques applied to this art will be captured through ethnographic observation and interviews with Iranun master weavers. This research, therefore, helps widen the contemporary narrative around

cultural conservation as well as keeping safe intangible cultural heritage by situating the role of weavers in maintaining and adapting these practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The weaving culture of Iranun has been poorly featured in the academic literature, whereas the contribution of the Iranun community in Sabah, Malaysia, to weaving is acknowledged as significant. This article reviews the existing literature with the goal of uncovering the role of weaving in the life and practices of the Iranun as well as the most under-explored aspects, types, and uses of Iranun textiles. The intangible cultural heritage of Southeast Asia is closely tied to weaving and making textiles that symbolise identity, rank, and spirituality (King, 2017).

In the case of Iranun textiles, it integrates a lot with verbal culture and is used to convey morals, ancestry, and belonging to a community (Ismail & Huminn, 2018). Nature, spirituality, and social customs are commonly represented in the motifs and patterns that relate to our environment and ancestry (Ismail & Huminn, 2018). The *songket*, batik and *pua kumbu* embody the various branches of textile art in Malaysia, all of which are distinct and have their traditions, meanings, and uses (Ismail & Huminn, 2018). To date, however, scholarship on Iranun weaving appears to be lacking despite the cultural and historical significance it carries.

As with Ismail and Humin's perspective, Iranun woven works seem to be more attached to particular social and ceremonial events that include, among others, marriage, dowries and rituals, other forms need to be investigated. In most cases of the indigenous people, women are the most prominent custodians of the culture as far as the textile traditions are concerned. This is also true for Iranun weaving because it is women who form most of the practitioners and custodians of weaving techniques. This is especially important in tracing the change processes of weaving practices to current factors like economics and globalisation. Some of the existing literature offers some insights about the Iranun woven textiles which fall under the general classification, but they do not specify all the different types, motifs and techniques employed in weaving them. Also, not much is known regarding the role of Malaysian textiles and 'cultural tourism' and heritage preservation aspects of the Iranun textiles. This review accentuates the significance of filling the existing gaps concerning the documentation and analysis of the types and functions of Iranun woven textiles.

This study aims to discover the types and functions of Iranun woven textiles as they can be the findings for further studies aimed towards the preservation and advancement of this particular art. In addition, knowing the significance of Iranun weaving against the backdrop of Malaysian textiles can improve initiatives on culture preservation and contribute to the sustainable development of local communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research focuses on the various types and functions of Iranun woven textiles in Sabah, Malaysia. The study is qualitative in its approach and uses a combination of semi-structured interviews along with visual analysis to understand the socio-cultural significance of weaving practices. Such research practices help in understanding how the Iranun people view the world and their crafts. The aims of the research are broader than answering research questions as they encourage an understanding of lived realities.

The research is ethnographically oriented and seeks to understand and answer the socio-cultural realities that encompass the Iranun community (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnographic-oriented designs enable the researcher to delve deeper into the Iranun weaving tradition and understand the technical and contextual factors that impact it. Kampung Rampayan Laut, Kampung Rampayan Ulu and Kampung

Marabau are villages in Sabah that practice Iranun weaving traditions and were chosen, where fieldwork was conducted with utmost diligence. Participant observations were used to comprehend rural households and weaving centres that specialise in Iranun textiles. Such a method allowed for an elaborate understanding of how material preparation, loom setting and actual weaving are intertwined and practised (Spradley, 2016). Photographs alongside extensive field notes were collected to build a robust understanding of design intricacies and the methods of production. This method was employed in gaining insights from the master weavers, Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman and Hajjah Arijah Bte Saman, and elder members of the community, such as the late Haji. Masrin Bin Haji Hassin, former Head of Iranun Community in Kampung Rampayan Laut, and younger female weavers Salmiah Bte Uding and Sirongan Bte Sulaiman.

Interviews with the respondents were done, for which 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted. It helps to explore more what the respondent has said, the type of textiles being made, the significance of the weavings and their functions (Bryman, 2016). The interviews were conducted in Malay anticipating the responses to be transcribed and then translated to English for ease of analysis. The repeating patterns, style and structure of the textiles manufactured by Iranun weavers were subjected to visual analysis. In talking to the weavers, however, it is possible to understand the cultural context of the designs and their significance in society for them as well. The thematic analysis method was employed for analysing the qualitative data within the dataset, adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phased process. Textiles produced, techniques used, and the function of weaving in shaping identity were among the topics grouped into primary themes. Interview transcripts, field notes and observations of artefacts were cross-referenced in the study to address this and to improve validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research study was approved by the appropriate reviewing bodies due to its ethical nature. An information sheet containing the objectives of the study was given to each participant. The results were also shared with the participants in the Iranun community, and the participants were asked to affirm the findings, ensuring the truth and sensitivities were considered.



Data Collection of Iranun Woven Textiles




Table 1. The number of Iranun weavings and its source




No.	Types of Woven Textiles	Sources
1	Baraguru 1	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
2.	Baraguru 2	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
3.	Dastar 1	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
4.	Dastar 2	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
5.	Dastar 3	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
6.	Dastar 4	'Warisan Iranun: Corak dan Ragam Hias Objek dan Budaya' by Ismail Ibrahim and Humin Jusilin.
7.	Dastar 5	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
8.	Mugah 1	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
9.	Mugah 2	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
10.	Mugah 3	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
11.	Mugah 4	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
12.	Mugah 5	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
13.	Selendang siambitan 1	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
14.	Selendang siambitan 2	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
15.	Selendang siambitan 3	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
16.	Selendang siambitan 4	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
17.	Siambitan 1	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
18.	Siambitan 2	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
19.	Siambitan 3	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
20.	Siambitan 4	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
21.	Tapsila/Tapk Sila 1	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.




22.	Tapsila/Tapak Sila 2	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
23.	Tapsila/Tapak Sila 3	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
24.	Tapsila/Tapak Sila 4	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
25.	Tubau-a-siambitan 1	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
26.	Tubau-a-siambitan 2	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
27.	Ampik 1	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
28.	Jali-jali 1	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
29.	Jali-jali 2	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
30.	Jali-jali 3	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman

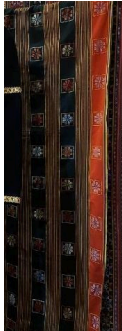
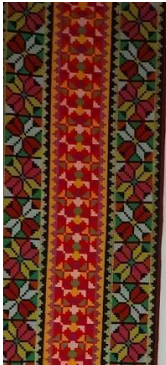

Table 2. The types and functions of Iranun textiles



No.	Types of Woven Textiles	Description of Textiles	Source
BARAGURU			
1	 <p><i>Baraguru 1</i></p>	Shape: Long rectangular cloth. Size: 45 inches x 160 inches Colours: Red, yellow, white, black. Pattern: Vertical stripe in various sizes and colours Motif: Geometric vertical linear motif. Weaving technique: Plain weave.	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
Function: A cloth traditionally used as body coverings for both men and women. For men, it is worn as a sarong and for women worn over the head and the rest of the body, showing only the face and parts of the legs and feet.			
2.	 <p><i>Baraguru 2</i></p>	Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches Colours: Red, yellow, white, black. Pattern: Vertical stripe in various sizes and colours Motif: Geometric vertical linear motif. Weaving technique: Plain weave	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
Function: A cloth traditionally used as body coverings for both men and women. For men, it is worn as a sarong and for women worn over the head and the rest of the body, showing only the face and parts of the legs and feet.			




DASTAR			
3.	 <p><i>Dastar 1</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 45 inches x 45 inches Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, white, black. Pattern: Square design structured composition with a centre design, borders on each side and designs on all four corners of the cloth. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, animal, object and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: Used as headgear by men on special occasions and by the groom at a wedding ceremony.</p>			
4.	 <p><i>Dastar 2</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth. Size: 45 inches x 45 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, white, black. Pattern: Square design structured composition with a centre design, borders on each side and designs on all four corners of the cloth. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, animal, object and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay.</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: Used as headgear by men on special occasions and by the groom at a wedding ceremony.</p>			
5.	 <p><i>Dastar 3</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 45 inches x 45 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, white, black. Pattern: Square design structured composition with a centre design, borders on each side and designs on all four corners of the cloth. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, animal, object and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: Used as headgear by men on special occasions and by the groom at a wedding ceremony.</p>			

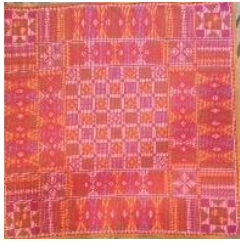


6.	 <p><i>Dastar 4</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 36 inches x 36 inches Colours: Red, orange, green, white. Pattern: Square design structured composition with a centre design, borders on each side and designs on all four corners of the cloth. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, animal, object and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>‘Warisan Iranun: Corak dan Ragam Hias Objek dan Budaya’ by Ismail Ibrahim and Humin Jusilin.</p>
<p>Function: Used as headgear by men on special occasions and by the groom at a wedding ceremony.</p>			
7.	 <p><i>Dastar 5</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 45 inches x 45 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, green, white, black. Pattern: Square design structured composition with a centre design, borders on each side and designs on all four corners of the cloth. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, objects and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: Used as headgear by men on special occasions and by the groom at a wedding ceremony.</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;">MUGAH</p>			
8.	 <p><i>Mugah 1</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, white, black. Pattern: A combination of stripe and singular motifs arranged in a vertical arrangement. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: A cloth with alternate stripes and patterns. Traditionally used as blankets and body coverings by both men and women. Later it was used to wrap around the waist as a <i>samping</i> for men, sewn into garments for both men and women. The Orang Rungus make them into costumes for dancing.</p>			




9.	 <p><i>Mugah 2</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, white, black. Pattern: A combination of stripe and singular motifs arranged in a vertical arrangement. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
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10.	 <p><i>Mugah 3</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, white, black. Pattern: A combination of stripe and singular motifs arranged in a vertical arrangement. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
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11.	 <p><i>Mugah 4</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, white, black. Pattern: A combination of stripe and singular motifs arranged in a vertical arrangement. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: A cloth with alternate stripes and patterns. Traditionally used as blankets and body coverings by both men and women. Later it was used to wrap around the waist as a <i>samping</i> for men, sewn into garments for both men and women. The Orang Rungus make them into costumes for dancing.</p>			




12.	 <p><i>Mugah 5</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, white, black. Pattern: A combination of stripe and singular motifs arranged in a vertical arrangement. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: A cloth with alternate stripes and patterns. Traditionally used as blankets and body coverings by both men and women. Later it was used to wrap around the waist as a <i>samping</i> for men, sewn into garments for both men and women. The Orang Rungus make them into costumes for dancing.</p>			
<p>SELENDANG SIAMBITAN</p>			
13.	 <p><i>Selendang siambitan 1</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long and narrow rectangle cloth Size: 36 inches x 98 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, white, black, green. Pattern: Highly decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three vertical areas. Two of which are the same, mirrored in opposite design directions which act as borders to the cloth. The centre design is brighter and has a smaller-scale pattern arrangement. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: <i>Soumak</i></p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: A shawl used as a head covering or worn over the shoulders as an accessory to complete attire during festivities.</p>			
14.	 <p><i>Selendang siambitan 2</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long and narrow rectangle cloth Size: 36 inches x 98 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, maroon. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. Two on the sides of which are the same act as borders to the cloth. The centre, which is made of several vertical areas, is brightly designed. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: <i>Soumak</i></p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>



Function: A shawl used as a head covering or worn over the shoulders as an accessory to complete attire during festivities.			
15.	 <p><i>Selendang siambitan 3</i></p>	Shape: Long and narrow rectangle cloth Size: 36 inches x 98 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, white, orange, green, black. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. All three areas are decorated in the same patterns, divided by borders of various sizes. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric and object-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: <i>Soumak</i>	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
Function: A shawl used as a head covering or worn over the shoulders as an accessory to complete attire during festivities.			
16.	 <p><i>Selendang siambitan 4</i></p>	Shape: Long and narrow rectangle cloth Size: 36 inches x 98 inches. Colours: Purple, yellow, light blue, green. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. Two on the sides of which are the same act as borders to the cloth. The centre, which is made of several vertical areas, is brightly designed. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: <i>Soumak</i>	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
Function: A shawl used as a head covering or worn over the shoulders as an accessory to complete attire during festivities.			
SIAMBITAN			

17	 <p><i>Siambitan 1</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 45 inches x 45 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, purple, white. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. A centre diamond-shaped medallion, four side borders and four corner designs. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, objects, and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: <i>Soumak</i></p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: A square cloth which is folded in a triangular-shaped structure used as headgear or <i>samping</i> for men on special occasions and as part of wedding attire. It is the most complex Iranun weaving.</p>			
18.	 <p><i>Siambitan 2</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 45 inches x 45 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, purple, blue, white. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. A centre square-shaped area with four side borders. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: <i>Soumak</i></p>	<p>Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.</p>
<p>Function: A square cloth which is folded in a triangular-shaped structure used as headgear or <i>samping</i> for men on special occasions and as part of wedding attire. It is the most complex Iranun weaving.</p>			
19.	 <p><i>Siambitan 3</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 38 inches x 38 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, purple, white. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. A centre square-shaped medallion, four side borders and four corner designs. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, objects, and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: <i>Soumak</i></p>	<p>Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman</p>
<p>Function: A square cloth which is folded in a triangular-shaped structure used as headgear or <i>samping</i> for men on special occasions and as part of wedding attire. It is the most complex Iranun weaving.</p>			

20.	 <p><i>Siambitan 4</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 45 inches x 45 inches Colours: Red, orange, green, purple, white. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. A centre diamond-shaped medallion, four side borders and four corner designs. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, objects, and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: <i>Soumak</i></p>	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
<p>Function: A square cloth which is folded in a triangular-shaped structure used as headgear or <i>samping</i> for men on special occasions and as part of wedding attire. It is the most complex Iranun weaving.</p>			
TAPSILA/TAPAK SILA			
21.	 <p><i>Tapsila/Tapak Sila 1</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, purple, blue, white. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged in vertical striped areas. Small linear borders separate each area in various colours. Motif: The motifs are a combination of object and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
<p>Function: Traditionally worn as blankets for both men and women, body coverings and head coverings for women. Later, it is sewn into clothes for both men and women and <i>samping</i> for men. Today, it is sewn to make costumes.</p>			
22.	 <p><i>Tapsila/Tapak Sila 2</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches. Colours: Red, orange, green, purple, black, white. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged in vertical striped areas. Small linear borders separate each area in various colours. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, objects, and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
<p>Function: Traditionally worn as blankets for both men and women, body coverings and head coverings for women. Later, it is sewn into clothes for both men and women and <i>samping</i> for men. Today, it is sewn to make costumes.</p>			

23.	 <p><i>Tapsila/Tapak Sila 3</i></p>	<p>Shape: wide rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 120 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, green, dark purple, Light purple. Pattern: A repeat half-drop pattern arrangement in an overall design composition. Minimal decoration using only one motif. Motif: The motif is a woodcut motif inspired by the surrounding natural environment. Weaving technique: Plain weave and inlay</p>	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
<p>Function: Traditionally worn as blankets for both men and women, body coverings and head coverings for women. Later, it is sewn into clothes for both men and women and <i>samping</i> for men. Today, it is sewn to make costumes.</p>			
24.	 <p><i>Tapsila/Tapak Sila 4</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 160 inches. Colours: Red, maroon, orange, white. Pattern: A repeat half-drop pattern arrangement in an overall design composition, which sits between two borders. Minimal decoration using only two motifs. Motif: The motifs used are a woodcut motif inspired by the surrounding natural environment and geometric lines. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay</p>	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
<p>Function: Traditionally worn as blankets for both men and women, body coverings and head coverings for women. Later, it is sewn into clothes for both men and women and <i>samping</i> for men. Today, it is sewn to make costumes.</p>			
TUBAU/TUBAU-A-SIAMBITAN			
25.	 <p><i>Tubau-a-siambitan 1</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 45 inches x 45 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, maroon, black, white. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. A centre, four side borders and four corner designs. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, objects, and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay and <i>soumak</i></p>	Muzium Kraf, Kompleks Kraftangan Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.
<p>Function: Used as headgear by men on special occasions and by the groom at a wedding ceremony</p>			

26.	 <p><i>Tubau-a-siambitan 2</i></p>	<p>Shape: Square cloth Size: 45 inches x 45 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, orange, green, maroon, purple, black, white. Pattern: Fully decorated and ornamented patterns arranged within three main areas. A centre square, four side borders and four corner designs. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora, objects, and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave with inlay and <i>soumak</i></p>	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
<p>Function: Used as headgear by men on special occasions and by the groom at a wedding ceremony.</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;">AMPIK</p>			
27.	 <p><i>Ampik 1</i></p>	<p>Shape: Sewn into a woman's blouse. Traditionally woven as a long rectangular cloth. Size: XS (Standard modern women's dress sizing). Colours: Yellow, green, red. Pattern: lightly decorated with a combination of stripe and motif design. Motif: The motifs are a combination of flora and geometric-inspired motifs. Weaving technique: Plain weave</p>	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
<p>Function: A type of woven fabric which has been identified as <i>ampik</i> which is a soft fabric that is regularly used in making garments for blouses and sarongs. The <i>ampik</i> differs from the <i>tapsila</i>. It has a lighter weight in comparison to the <i>tapsila</i> and hence can be used more for clothing in day-to-day activities. In contrast, the motifs are more subtle, with little detail and softer colours, avoiding excess decoration owing to the more practical use of the fabric.</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;">JALI-JALI</p>			
28.	 <p><i>Jali-jali 1</i></p>	<p>Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 196 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, light green, dark green, maroon. Pattern: Vertical stripe in various sizes and colours Motif: Geometric vertical linear motif. Weaving technique: Plain weave</p>	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
<p>Function: A striped long cloth worn indoors daily as headgear and is wrapped in a way known as a <i>dimpau</i>. The name of the headgear changes when the cloth is wrapped in a different style when it is worn out of the house.</p>			

29.	 <p><i>Jali-jali 2</i></p>	Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 196 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, blue. Pattern: Vertical stripe in various sizes and colours Motif: Geometric vertical linear motif. Weaving technique: Plain weave	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
Function: A striped long cloth worn indoors daily as a headgear and is wrapped in such a way known as a <i>dimpau</i> . The name of the headgear changes when the cloth is wrapped in a different style when it is worn out of the house.			
30.	 <p><i>Jali-jali 3</i></p>	Shape: Long rectangle cloth Size: 45 inches x 196 inches. Colours: Red, yellow, green, black. Pattern: Vertical stripe in various sizes and colours Motif: Geometric vertical linear motif. Weaving technique: Plain weave	Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman
Function: A striped long cloth worn indoors daily as a headgear and is wrapped in such a way known as a <i>dimpau</i> . The name of the headgear changes when the cloth is wrapped in a different style when it is worn out of the house.			

(Source: Photographs by Juita Jaafar Manap, 2025)

Note. All images are original photographs taken by Juita Jaafar Manap during museum visits in 2025 including artworks from the personal collection of the master weaver Hajjah Pandian Bte Sulaiman.

FINDINGS

There are thirty pieces of cloth which were used to obtain visual and physical data on the types of Iranun woven textiles. The types of clothes are named according to the category explained by Hajjah Pandian, the master weaver. The thirty pieces are classified under the type of name given to each textile. There are nine types of Iranun woven textiles obtained as data for this research, and they are *baraguru*, *mugah*, *tubau*, *tapsila*, *siambitan*, *selendang siambitan*, *ampik*, *dastar* and *jali-jali*.

The textiles could be seen in different sizes and shapes; such is the case for every type of textile since the proportions relate to the intended function of that specific cloth. More precisely, a cloth can be made for lightweight draping while another offers strength hence the reasons for the variation in the length and shape of each textile. The types of weaving techniques that are included in making each kind of cloth are highlighted in the table above. These methods can be seen to be basic and some relatively advanced, and all these do not just affect the cloth surface texture but its entire structure and utility. It is

clear from the definitions that even if the measurements are identical, different textiles can be woven using different weaving techniques, yielding completely different products and functions.

The function of each type of cloth is specified and explained by Hajjah Pandian and Hajjah Arijah, the master weavers. Some of these textiles are of the same size and have a similar use, as though providing alternatives or options for Iranun wear through the variation of surface design. A combination of fieldwork and interviews revealed that eleven types of woven textiles were commonly made in the past by members of the Iranun community in Sabah. However, unfortunately, two types of woven textiles are extinct, namely the *pajuntai* and *madarisipak*, leaving only nine remaining today. These nine types of textiles differ in the choice of raw materials used, techniques applied, intended purpose, and motifs patterning the textiles, thus extending the range of weaving practices among the Iranun community. Based on the investigation carried out, the nine types of Iranun woven textiles discovered are as follows:

Baraguru: A long-woven cloth worn by both men and women traditionally. For men, it is worn as a sarong, while women wear it over the head and cover the rest of the body, showing only the face and parts of the legs and feet. Influenced by both the Islamic and Iranun traditions, the combination of the peoples' shyness and religious practice may affect the way the cloth is worn. The cloth is adorned in a vertical striped pattern in red, yellow, white and black colours. These colours signify determination and power, kindness and happiness, and authority and seriousness, respectively. Because this cloth is worn out of the house, the colours reflect good energy and, in some ways, enough power to protect its wearer, be it a man or woman. Perhaps the strong lines and meaning behind the colours align exactly for that purpose.

Tubau/Dastar: Square in shape. Men wear them as headgear. The cloth is folded in a triangular-shaped structure and worn over the head. It is used as headgear by men on special occasions and by the groom at a wedding ceremony. The *dastar* is seen as regal and warrior-like attire, where for a day, the groom is styled as the sultan who is brave and strong. Similarly dressed as royalty, The Malays would refer to the bride and groom as '*Raja sehari*', which translates to royals of the day. The colours used mainly in *tubau* weaving are red, yellow, black, white, green and orange. These colours reflect power and energy, richness, authority and seriousness, cleanliness and spirituality, fertility and balance with nature and comfort, respectively. Observing the function of the cloth, the combination of the intricate design and colours is well suited to be worn by a groom. Being the king or sultan for a day, the intricate and strong square design structure with the colour combination sends a positive message to the groom, almost like a prayer that the groom is energised, clean physically and spiritually and fertile in his marriage.

Jali-jali: A striped long cloth worn indoors daily as headgear and is wrapped in a way known as a *dimpau*. The name of the headgear changes when the cloth is wrapped in a different style and worn out of the house. Like the way the Minangkabau women's headdress is worn, the cloth is adorned with a simple vertical, thin, striped pattern in mainly red, green, yellow, and black colours. The less adorned cloth may be specifically designed in a simpler style because it is worn indoors, unlike the *tubau*, which is highly ornamented to adorn the groom on his special day.

Mugah: A long, rectangular woven cloth with alternate stripes and patterns was traditionally used as blankets and body coverings by both men and women and later wrapped around the waist as a *samping* for men and sewn into garments for both men and women. This slightly decorated cloth is usually woven with a black background representing seriousness and authority with stripes and designs in red, yellow and white. The fact that it is worn as body coverings, *samping* and sewn into garments suggests that it was worn out of the house. The design and technique used indicate that it is worn daily by both men and women. The combination of colours also suggests that the cloth is worn by what the colours represent. Red equals determination, power and energy. Yellow refers to kindness, happiness and riches. Meanwhile, white is cleanliness and spirituality. This cloth is also used to generate income since it is also worn by the Orang Rungus, where it is made into costumes for dancing.

Selendang-a-siambitan: Women of Iranun also produce woven accessories like headscarves (*selendang*) and decorative sashes. These textiles are of relatively minor dimensions and have simpler

weave patterns than the *tapsila* and *ampik*. However, owing to their extravagance, they are considered crucial items of the cultural dress of the Iranun people. Women of the Iranun society particularly wear headscarves due to cultural and religious overtones as they claim to be a Muslim community.

Munsalah-a-siambitan/Siambitan: A square cloth that is folded in a triangular-shaped structure used as headgear or *samping* for men on special occasions as part of wedding attire. It is the most complex Iranun weaving due to its intricate application of the *soumak* technique to create a highly ornamented cloth. This special weaving is said to be passed down from a dream to the ancestors who learned to weave this cloth. There are not many weavers today who weave this cloth because it is a sophisticated style of weaving. Adorned in red, yellow, green, purple and white, this cloth sends a message of determination, power, energy, kindness, riches, happiness, cleanliness, spirituality, fertility, advancement, and balance with the natural surroundings. These words that give hope and prayers to the function of the cloth are suited as the *siambitan* is worn on special occasions and is seen as a cloth of high value, which can be interpreted to the social status of the wearer.

Tapsila: Wearing a *tapsila* is one of the most popular ways to wear the most recognisable types of Iranun woven textiles. In most cases, the skirt or *sarong* is made from a lightweight weaving in either fine cotton or silk materials. The complex designs and bright multi-colours are its standard feature. The use of red, yellow, orange, green, purple, blue and white suggests that the cloth represents power, peace, happiness, riches, fertility, nobility, tradition and spirituality. The *tapsila* weavers interviewed in the study said that these fabrics were only for the elite, which is represented by the colour purple, and were worn during serious events, possibly in a healing ritual which involves metaphysical spirit or during occasions where important decisions are made. Patterns such as geometric and stylised flowers and plants are closely associated with the identity of the Iranun community and their respective cultural values, as described in the works of Khoo (2012) on Southeast Asian textiles.

Tubau-a-siambitan: A square cloth with borders that are folded in a triangular-shaped structure, worn on special occasions as headgear or *samping* for men to emphasise the multidimensional and dynamic nature of Iranun weavings, which respond to practical and ceremonial purposes. This textile is a combination of the *tubau/dastar* and the *munsalah-a-siambitan/siambitan*, where two techniques are applied, namely, *soumak* in the centre part of the square cloth and plain weave on all four sides of cloth as a border. The colours on the *tubau-a-siambitan*, which are red, yellow, orange, green, maroon, purple, black and white, suggest that it is made to reflect power, riches, renewal, harmony, fertility, resilience, mature and refined strength, nobility, authority and spirituality. The wearer may be a wiseman, elderly or perhaps a warrior in the community who is well respected and has a noble status, a key figure in the performance of ritualistic and important ceremonies.

Ampik: This cloth is going extinct as no weaver is continuing to weave it due to the lack of demand, which implies the lack of importance it plays in today's Iranun community. The *ampik* is a non-intricate designed cloth, found only in a green, red and yellow woman's blouse in a stripe and overall pattern, as it is the only evidence found of this type of textile. The simplicity of the design and colours signifies the role of the wearer, who is possibly a healer as the colour green represents spirituality, red symbolising power and energy and yellow indicative of kindness and happiness. The colour green also indicates balance with the natural surroundings.

CONCLUSION

This study tries to shed light on the types and functions of woven fabrics, with special regard to Iranun weaving as a 'living' beacon of the Iranun ethnic identity history, with highly regarded precision. The results show not only a multitude of types of traditional textiles, such as the *siambitan*, *tapsila*, and *tubau* cloths but also their functional and usual role in relation to the weaving culture. As a result of ethnographic research that involved observance and exploration of master weavers, this research has

edged closer to addressing the contests of woven Iranun textiles, concepts of the Iranun community, and cultural aspects of textiles. The crafts of Iranun weaving and specially designed items like textiles exemplify how Iranun's environmental uniqueness complements Iranun's conviction about textiles.

It is crucial to highlight that this research seeks to reiterate and elaborate on the relevance of cultural heritage preservation in light of the increasing external modern forces, such as the loss of traditional practices of weaving. There are many reasons for this, but evolution is partially to blame. The Iranun people have always had to weave as a cultural practice. However, there is now a danger of such practice existing in a benighted community. The younger generation of Iranuns is losing contact with the culture over time, influenced by formal education, which is very dangerous as it abolishes crucial knowledge and skill systems that provide a great function to society.

This research addresses the deficiencies in knowledge related to Iranun weaving by exhibiting collections of types of Iranun weavings and their proposed societal importance. In addition, it will set the basis for other studies to be undertaken on how to protect local craftsmanship in a world obsessed with economic growth and globalisation. There should be some efforts, either through education, proper documentation or community mobilisation, that aid in the conservation of the tapestry of Iranun weavers. These textiles are also significant to the various ethnic communities that exist in Malaysia since they are part of the cultural heritage of the Sabahan people.

The Iranun weaving is not just an art; it depicts the ethos, customs, and vulnerability of a society. The preservation of this form of weaving, as well as understanding, will assist the Iranun people in safeguarding and passing down their traditions in the future and, at the same time, develop the multiethnic fabric of Sabah, Malaysia.

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