

**THE SEMIOTICS ASPECT IN THE DAYAK
MOTIF DESIGN: A VISUAL COMMUNICATION
STUDY OF SIGN SYSTEM, THE
SIGNIFICATION, AND APPLICATION AMONG
THE DAYAK ETHNIC GROUPS IN BORNEO**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

RINGAH ANAK KANYAN

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DEDICATION

To my beloved Mother and Father, my faithful prayers from Heaven.

To my dear wife Freda and children Alysha and Ian, my strength is your unconditional love, support and prayers.

To our dear friends throughout Borneo, Malaysia and Indonesia.

This work is my gift to you.

May God bless you all.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

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**ASPEK SEMIOTIK DALAM REKA BENTUK MOTIF DAYAK: KAJIAN
KOMUNIKASI VISUAL TERHADAP SISTEM TANDA, MAKSUD, DAN
APLIKASI DALAM KALANGAN KUMPULAN ETNIK DAYAK DI
BORNEO**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidiki aspek semiotik motif Dayak dalam sistem komunikasi visual kumpulan etnik Dayak di Borneo. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengkaji kaitan antara makna teori dan makna budaya motif Dayak. Kajian ini mencadangkan model konseptual untuk mentafsir dan mengesahkan makna semiologi motif Dayak sebagai tanda dalam komunikasi visual. Kepentingan kajian ini menonjolkan peranan komunikatif motif Dayak sebagai nilai utama dalam penciptaan motif mengatasi peranan estetika sebagai nilai pelengkap dalam persembahan visual motif Dayak. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran kualitatif dan kuantitatif untuk menjawab objektif kajian. Hasil kajian kualitatif diperoleh melalui kaedah pemerhatian fotografi dan temubual. Analisa kualitatif bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti keaslian ciri reka bentuk motif dan maksud asalnya. Empat kumpulan etnik Dayak terdiri daripada Iban, Apo Kayan atau Orang Ulu, Ngaju, dan Dayak Darat atau Bidayuh, dari empat lokasi geografi berbeza, telah dipilih untuk dianalisa. Keputusan kuantitatif diperoleh dengan artikulasi elemen reka bentuk dan prinsip spesimen motif Dayak yang dikumpul daripada data sekunder. Pengumpulan spesimen rekabentuk motif dalam bentuk gambar ilustrasi dan imej fotografi daripada penyelidikan lepas dikenalpasti, dikuantifikasi dan dianalisa mengikut sampel kejadian, terbitan, ciri reka bentuk, gubahan, dan aplikasi. Hasilnya telah menyokong objektif kajian untuk menyusun rekabentuk dan makna asli motif Dayak. Kajian mendapati bahawa makna

denotasi dan konotasi motif Dayak sebagai tanda komunikasi visual boleh ditafsirkan secara teori menggunakan model semiotik oleh Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sander Peirce, dan Roland Barthes. Penemuan, bagaimanapun, mencadangkan makna teori perlu disahkan oleh konvensyen budaya. Sehubungan itu, kajian mencadangkan kerangka semiologi untuk memahami maksud intrinsik motif Dayak.

**THE SEMIOTICS ASPECT IN THE DAYAK MOTIF DESIGN: A VISUAL
COMMUNICATION STUDY OF SIGN SYSTEM, THE SIGNIFICATION,
AND APPLICATION AMONG THE DAYAK ETHNIC GROUPS IN
BORNEO**

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the semiotics aspect of the Dayak motifs in the visual communication system of the Dayak ethnics groups in Borneo. The aim is to examine the correlation between the theoretical and cultural meaning of the Dayak motif. The study will propose a conceptual model for interpreting and validating the semiological signification of the Dayak motif as a sign in visual communication. The significance of this study highlights the communicative role of Dayak motifs as the principal value in the creation of motifs overcoming the role of aesthetics as a complementary value in the visual presentation of a Dayak motif. This research employs a qualitative and a quantitative mixed-method approach to answer the research objectives. The qualitative research results were obtained by photographic observation and in-depth interview methods. The qualitative analysis aims to identify the authenticity of motif design characteristics and their original meaning. Four Dayak ethnic groups consisting of Iban, Apo Kayan or Orang Ulu, Ngaju, and Dayak Darat or Bidayuh, from four different geographical locations, were selected for analysis. The quantitative results were obtained by articulating the design elements and principles of the Dayak motif specimens collected from secondary data. The collection of motif design specimens in the form of illustrative pictures and photographic images from the past research were identified, quantified and analysed according to a sample of occurrence, derivatives, design characteristics, composition, and application. The results have supported the

research objective to compile the authentic designs and meanings of the Dayak motif. The study finds that denotation and connotation signification of the Dayak motif as a visual communication sign can be interpreted theoretically using semiotic models by Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sander Peirce, and Roland Barthes. The findings, however, suggest the theoretical meaning needs to be validated by cultural conventions. Accordingly, the study proposes a semiological framework for understanding the intrinsic meaning of the Dayak motif.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the topic of study, focusing on the semiological system of ornamental motifs in visual communication within the Dayak community in Borneo. This chapter also provides an overview of the research background problem statement. It states the body of knowledge developed systematically through the order of The Need for Research, Background to the Problems, Problem Statements, Research Objectives, Research Questions, The Significance of Research, The Research Scope and Limitation, and Thesis Structure.

1.1 Introduction

Dayaks are a group of indigenous people of Borneo Island who have traditionally lived in the hinterland throughout Borneo. The Dayaks speak various languages and dialects. Despite the diverse nature of their cultures and traditional practices, the Dayaks still have multiple similarities between the many different ethnicities, which can be seen especially in their farming methods, socio-cultural characteristics, and sharing historical backgrounds (Darmadi, 2016, 2017). Traditionally, the Dayaks are mainly an agricultural community with a small minority that still depends on forest resources for their livelihood. In the history of the Dayak civilisation, their ancestors who preceded them had gone through many stages of migration from one place to another throughout Borneo for numerous reasons (Sada et al., 2019). However, constant migration was mainly in search of fertile agricultural land and asylum from enemy threats (G. Abdullah, 2016; Guang, n.d.; Padoch, 1982).

Dayaks are known for being eminently knowledgeable about the intricacies of the forest. Still, they are also notable experts in using raw materials from the forest to make utility equipment for daily use in their household, farming and livestock. The Dayaks are well known for their material culture that contemplates exceptional aesthetics with high economic importance (Sellato, 2017b). Sellato's field observations found that the Dayaks greatly appreciate artistic culture. For example, Sellato observed that Dayaks tend to make beautifully carved utensils, such as finely carved spoons for short-term use, to be discarded immediately after. Besides decorating utility equipment, the traditional Dayak society also loves to decorate their homes and households with specific motifs. The application of ornamental motifs to Dayak materials culture is comprehensive for traditional clothing, textiles, boats, warfare equipment, and even coffins. There are also carvings on their traditional burial structures in some Dayak groups.

In addition, from previous studies on the material culture of Borneo (Durin et al., 2011; Haddon & Star, 1936; Heppell, 2016; Sellato, 1989, 2017; Tugang, 2014), it was found that many types of ornamental motifs of the Dayak community carry implicit meanings. Cultural messages are coded into motifs and translated through visual and verbal cultural expertise. There are gaps pertaining roles of Dayak motifs in visual communication and semiotics studies that yet to be explicitly studied in the past.

1.2 The Need for Research

"... Nowadays, Dayak designs are gaining popularity even though some designs have lost certain elements of their originality and authenticity...many of the designs lack of identity."

(Augustine Anggat Ganjing, 1988)

Scholarly sources specific to Semiotics in Dayak visual communication research are scarce. Thus, the selection of Semiotics as the topic of this research is timely as it is one of the knowledge gaps in Dayak visual communication that has not been examined explicitly by any previous researcher, particularly in Sarawak. The scientific sources of colonial, post-colonial, or even modern Borneo era, anthropologists and ethnographers revolve around socio-cultural topics such as customs, beliefs, material culture, linguistics, and exotic and mystical themes of traditional Borneo societies. The preliminary studies indicate that much scientific research has been conducted within the Borneo culture research. Research on religion (Hobart, 1975; Rousseau, 1998; Thomson, 2000; Verlagsgesellschaft, 2018), on politics (Besar et al., 2017; Davidson, 2003; King et al., 1995; Tanasaldy, 2012), on economic (Berma, 1996; Jawan, 1996) and on history (Sandin, 1968; Kedit, 1963). The selection of semiotics topics is expected to highlight the Dayak visual communication knowledge that has been hidden behind the Dayak ornamental art persona (Sellato, 2018).

This research expands Augustine Anggat Ganjing's (1988, 1991) argument, which characterises the challenges in constraining the continuity of design originality, application suitability, and the role of Dayak motifs. Ganjing (1988, 1991) asserts that the ignorance of these bases in the knowledge of Dayak motifs would affect its role as a sign of effective coded message communication. Rightfully so, given that Any local or international researchers have not even straightened out Ganjing's (1988, 1991) recommendations in the last three decades, it is time to pay attention to his noble recommendations.

Furthermore, this study also recognises the importance of highlighting past literature works on Dayak materials culture (Sellato, 2018). The link between material

cultures in ornamentation and their meanings must be discussed. According to Sellato (2017a), material culture studies are an interdisciplinary discipline that includes anthropology, sociology, art history, and museum studies concerning objects' social, cultural, economic, and symbolic contexts. It results from people's interactions with their physical surroundings and is one method of storing and transmitting culture (Sellato, 2017a). They also use constitutive elements of social life (Lemonnier, 1992, cited in Sellato, 2017a). Material culture must be analysed to understand the society that produced it. Thus, in this study, material culture is the object through which the historical and more extensive idea of "cultural heritage", as defined by UNESCO (1972) cited in Sellato (2017a), is encoded. Several recent studies by Dayak academics such as Anna Durin, Noria Tugang, and Ngumbang Sultan illustrate the importance of ornamental artefacts to the Dayak culture. Durin's (2004, 2014) studies focus on the mat weaving motif, particularly the Saribas Iban *bemban* (*Donax arundastrum*) mats weavings. Durin extends her studies with her students on the cultural influence of headhunting past on pua textile motif design (Durin et al., 2011).

On the other hand, Tugang more focuses on material culture research. Her PhD thesis topic was ceramic in the Iban social culture (Tugang, 2004). She extends her study on the same subject and published "*Tikar Dalam Masyarakat Iban di Sarawak*"; Tugang, (2011), where she discusses the cultural roles and value of a series of martaban jars on Iban in Sarawak. Tugang shares similar interests with Anna Durin and Ngumbang Sultan, studying the Pua Kumbu weaving. As the daughter of the skilled weaver of the Undop Iban, Noria Tugang took her mother's masterpieces of Pua Kumbu as her subject and other subjects within the Undop style of Pua weaving (Tugang, 2014). As mentioned earlier, Sultan also studied pua. In (Sultan & Jusilin, 2018), Sultan revisits Haddon and Start (1936) and Gavin (2004), discussing Iban

ritual fabrics (*pua*) classification based on the derivatives of the motifs. Similarly, this study aims to extend further the discussion of ornamental motifs from Dayak material culture, relating to its reference as a visual communication code.

Finally, this research will aid future researchers and academicians in highlighting and defining the terms "motif" and "Dayak motif" to study their meaning-making or semiotics. According to Selatto (2013), there is often confusion and general inconsistencies occurring in the literature, old and recent, regarding the use of the terms "motif," "pattern," and "design". In this study, "motif" refers to the most basic unit in the Dayak ornamental designs. In the Iban language, the motif relates to "*buah*", or the direct translation means "the fruit of ... (carving)". According to Anna Durin (2014), the "*buah*" applies to all forms of Iban traditional art motifs, such as "*buah anyam*", which refers to types of motifs used on plaiting or basket weaving, "*buah ukir*" as in carving and mural drawing (Ganjing, 1988), and "*buah pua*" (Haddon and Starts, 1936) as on *pua kumbu* weaving or textiles motifs. While other Dayak groups also use specific terms to refer to their motifs. In this regard, the Apo Kayan or Orang Ulu sub-ethnic use their standard terms "*ekeng*" and "*kalong*" in the Kayan and Kenyah languages, respectively (Jeffrey Jalong, 2001). In general, those standard terms are crucial for us to comprehend the specific traits of motifs among the Dayak ethnic groups that are diverse. However, further discussion of this topic will be continued in Chapter 2.

1.3 Background to the Problem

Previous studies have recorded descriptive and photographic visual depictions of the subject of cultural material objects from the socio-cultural spectrums of the Dayak community. These subjects are often used as cultural markers in classifying

ethnic groups and identifying their character traits (Gavin, 2004; Haddon & Star, 1936; King, 1976; Sellato, 2017). Unfortunately, not all of the younger generation, particularly the urban Dayaks, have access to these cultural markers. Far from the traditional way of life, the knowledge of the urban age about Dayak motifs has been gained from scholarly reading materials, new media, exhibitions and museums, and cultural conferences. Simultaneously, only a portion of the younger generation of urban Dayaks is heavily invested in preserving their roots or culture. These small group of urban Dayaks focuses on the conservation of Dayak culture. It produces more young artists and designers, especially tattoo artists, mat and basket weavers, traditional musicians, fashion designers and traditional fine art artists.

The appreciation of traditional art and the euphoria of Dayak culture among the younger generation of Dayaks, including non-Dayaks, has produced many artists, cultural enthusiasts, and academics. It may seem paradoxical that despite the lack of access and minimal absence of genuine interaction with material culture and traditional life, especially in urban areas, they can still produce Dayak visual arts. They characterise their artwork based on their understanding and aesthetic expression, with no further reference to cultural conventions. As a result, according to Ganjing (1988, 1991), a contemporary design was created that, although resemble the essence of Dayak, is not the result of the fundamental arrangement of distinctive Dayak motifs. Contemporary designs, warns Ganjing, may confuse the originality of the design and the use of Dayak motifs in the future if not rectified. Ganjing's comment in his manuscript "Iban Basic Design: An Introduction" (1988), *"to the people who do not understand much about design, the design is a unique piece of Dayak design. It is not an authentic Dayak."*

1.4 Problem Statement

This study is ignited by the diminishing local knowledge in the Dayak community that concerns the Dayak semiotic aspects (Ganjing, 1988; Sellato, 1992). Therefore, several issues related to the Dayaks that affect the understanding of transcribing its motif designs' meaning are identified.

a. Lack of Knowledge about the Elements and Principles of Dayak Motif Design.

The background reference of knowledge and expertise for an artisan and designer regarding the elements and principles of Dayak motifs is still vague. This ambiguity is because no standard reference outlines a specific order in using Dayak motifs either in general or according to the specific rules of a particular Dayak group.

Dayak motifs have evolved in line with their socio-cultural changes and beliefs. The interpretation and meaning of Dayak motifs have traditionally been shaped by contemporary cultural conventions and Dayak cosmological concepts. Only specific individuals traditionally have the knowledge and expertise to interpret these motifs. References to knowledge and expertise in finding, memorising, selecting, and assembling Dayak ornamental motifs are only passed down into the lineage or to students participating in hands-on apprenticeship training. The traditional Dayak people believe in a guardian spirit in every motif. It is even more difficult for the Dayak ethnic culture, whose social position is determined by the stratification system. This system only allows specific motifs employed by those from a predetermined social stratum.

Traditionally Dayak materials culture is not made for exhibition purposes or to last long but for the daily use of the Dayak people. Even so, the Dayaks are very fond

of decorating their daily use items (Sellato, 1992). The ornamental functions of everyday use items, for farming equipment (machetes, sunhat, baskets, mats etc.), transport tools (boats, paddles), and house decorations, are varied and described in Chapter 4. Many of these traditional everyday items have lost relevance in Dayak social culture as machine-made objects have taken over their responsibilities. The disappearance of these stock items suggests the demise of the Dayak ornamentation motif, which is one of the elements of Dayak material culture.

Visual references to Dayak ornamental motifs in the city are limited to printed and online sources, museums or visuals from applications of ornamental motifs on public buildings, and family heritage artefacts. Sources for cultural materials and ornamental Dayak motifs are abundant in traditional Dayak settlements far inland. Ironically, materials cultures that were once abundant in rural areas have also experienced a state of extinction due to various factors. The materials utilised to create and work on Dayak motifs were not long-lasting, such as stone or concrete. Ornamented Dayak materials culture is usually embedded in wood (refer to Figure 1.1), fabric, clay, ivory, bone, and animal skin, except for boulder-stone carving by the Murutic-Kelabitic group of Dayaks. Although artefacts and structures decorated with local-styled Dayak motifs can still be found in their original locations, many are imperfect due to weather and natural elements. Evidence of photographic records from the fieldwork of anthropologists and ethnologists in the late 19th and 20th centuries can certainly no longer be found.



Figure 1-1 Carved Burial Structure, or Salong to Preserve the Bones of Nobles and Chiefs Sekapan Dayak in Belaga, Sarawak (Ringah Kanyan, 2018)

Figure 1.1 is an example of a burial building in Belaga, Sarawak, ornamented and carved for Dayak dignitaries and dignitaries. This secondary burial building is constructed and raised on single or double iron timber poles known as Kayu Belian or Tebalian in the local community. Due to the weather of Borneo, this delicate structure and ornamentation will ultimately weather and be damaged if not properly maintained. As a result of the destruction of such ornate design, another primary reference to the original Dayak motif style has eventually disappeared.

b. Limitations of Semiological Reference of Dayak Motifs

Unlike linguistic or verbal communication, using motifs as communicative meanings is more susceptible to misunderstandings if the speaker generation cannot interpret the meaning of symbolic forms of motifs into understandable communication. Even within the diversity of the Dayak ethnic group, interpretations of the same type

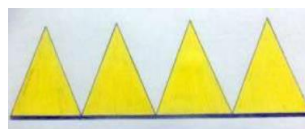
of motifs by different Dayak groups may not always be the same in terms of meaning, perception and context of their use.

There is still lacking semiological and visual communicative research on Dayak ornamental motifs. Despite this constraint, ethnologists have been interested in studying Dayak artefacts and artwork from the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Eghenter et al., 2003a; V. T. King, 2013). Records and descriptions of such research work are still relevant for this study even though the focus is more on material, aesthetic, enigmatic and exotic cultural subjects in Dayak art, such as spiritual elements and Dayak art from a social context. This reference lays the foundation for arguments on interpreting meaning discussed in chapter 2.

This research focuses on the semiotics study of Dayak motifs. It begins with empirical studies that discuss the topic of symbolic meaning and representative concepts. Stellato's (1989, 2012, 2019) on carving and plaiting motifs of Dragon, Hornbill, and Tiger of the Apo Kayan. The demonic mask designs of the Borneo people (Gill, 2019; Heppell, 1992) and the ritual and death monumental structures (Atkinson & Metcalf, 1984; Metcalf, 1976; Peter, 1982). Sarawak writers and scholars such as Anna Durin (2014); Noria Tugang (2014) Noria; Margaret Linggi (2001); Augustine Anggat Ganjing (1988); Janet Rata Noel (2016); Heidi Munan (1995); and Edric Ong (1996) also published Dayak visual artistic study materials.



(a) *Pakis* (Fern)



(b) *Pucuk Rebung*
(Bamboo
Shoots),



(d) *Mata Punai*
(Eyes of a
Pigeon/Dove)

Figure 1-2 Motifs on Kondan Dance Costume, Dayak Pompakng in Sanggau Regency (Lestari et al., 2015)

In Kalimantan, Indonesia, the semiotic study of the Dayak ornamental motif is more prevalent among the Dayak graduates and academics of higher education. Topics related to semiotics and interpretation of the meaning of motifs in general and the study of Dayak tattoo motifs are the two most frequently discussed subjects. In Sanggau Regency, West Kalimantan Lestari (2015), studies the ornamental motif on the Kondan dance costumes of Pompakng Dayak (Figure 1.2). In this study, Lestari et al. (2015) discovered Pakis (fern) motif, the Pucuk Rebung (Bamboo shoots) motif, and the Mata Punai (Eyes of a Pigeon). Meanwhile, on the design motif of West Kalimantan, Pranoto et al. (2020) describes the details and meaning of each part of the Hornbill motif on the traditional Kanayatn Dayak costume (see Figure 1.3).

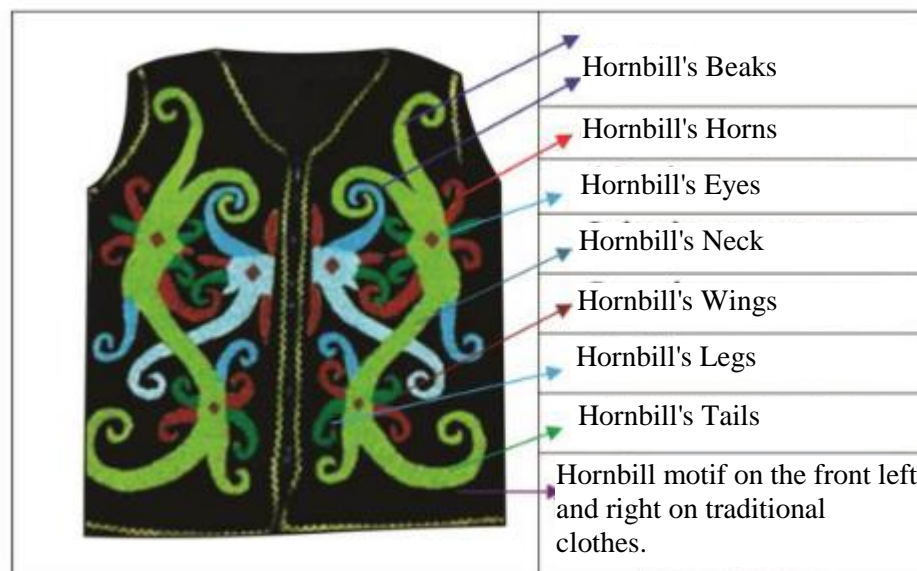


Figure 1-3 Hornbill Motif on Dayak Traditional Costume of the Kanayatn of West Kalimantan (Pranoto et al., 2020)

Pradita (2013) and Belawing (2013), on the other hand, choose the Bahau Dayak tattoo motifs at the headwaters of the Mahakam River for their respective semiotics studies (Figure 1.4).

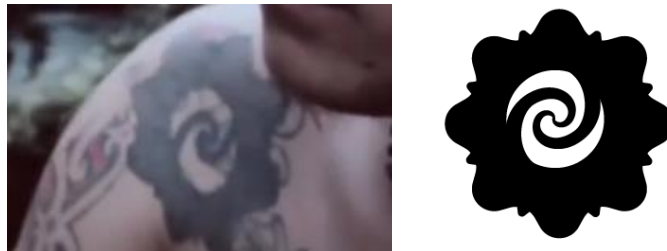


Figure 1-4 *Bungai Terung* Tattoo Motif in Bahau Dayak, Mahakam Hulu Regency (Belawing, 2013)

In Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Marlina (2019), Ngau (2015) and Mayasari et al. (2014) chose Kenyah Dayak village of Pampang for their semiotic study on the subject of custom costume decoration motifs. Respectively, they study the meaning of Kenyah tattoos and the semiotics of Lamin Kenyah interior decoration motifs (Figure 1.5 and Figure 1.6).



(a) *Naga* (Dragon)



(b) *Harimau* (Tiger)



(c) *Burung Enggang* (Hornbill)



(d) *Aso/Asoq* (Dog/Dog-
Dragon)



(e) *Manusia* (Human)



(f) *Motif Kawang*
(*Shorea macrophylla*)

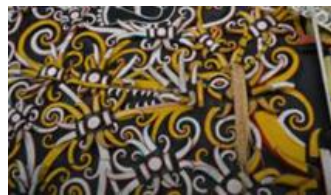
Figure 1-5 Motif on Dayak Kenyah Traditional Costume In Pampang Village

Samarinda (Marlina, 2019)

Marlina (2019) highlighted six motifs commonly used in the decoration of the Dayak dance costumes from the Pampakng Tourism Village as follows; (a) Dragon motifs, (b) tiger motifs, (c) hornbill motifs, (d) Aso motifs, (e) human motifs. Four of the five motifs studied by Marlina are particular motifs for aristocrats (the PAREN), and the rest (e) and (f) Kawang are allowed to be used by commoners (the Panyin) (see Figure 1.5). The discussion and describe the denotations and connotations of these motifs will be discussed further in Chapter 2.



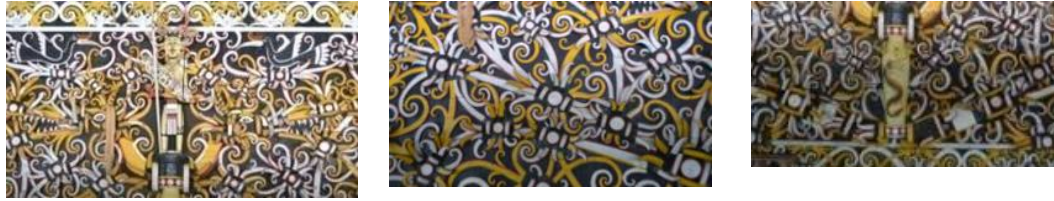
(a) Variety of motifs on
wall panel
compositions



(b) *Buaya* (Crocodile)



(c) *Harimau*
(Tiger/Leopards)



(d) *Manusia* (Human)

(e) *Tumbuhan* (Plants or
Tendrils)

(f) *Gong and Guci*
(Gong and Jar)

Figure 1-6 Dayak Kenyah Ornamental Motifs In Lamin Interiors, Pampakng Village, Samarinda (Mayasari et al., 2014)

c. The Diminishing of the Significance of Dayak Material Culture as a Cultural Marker in Interpreting the Cultural Meaning of Dayak Motifs.

Barthes (Barthes & Lavers, 1993) suggests every item has a meaning in the semiotic view. Similarly, every Dayak motif encompasses an implicit meaning or coded message. These meanings exist from the subconscious mind formed by cultural conventions or experiences (Nöth, 1995). The basis of knowledge of Dayak motifs and their philosophical meanings or interpretations is absorbed from various sources, religion, folklore, local knowledge, rituals, literature, geography, etcetera.

Regretfully, much of the intangible knowledge of Dayak traditions has been lost along with the extinction of their material culture related to standard practices and culture in the Dayak community. Using the Dayak ornamental motif in their visual communication will also eventually disappear. The decline of indigenous knowledge about this intangible cultural heritage can be attributed to many factors such as religion, education, economic tradition and urbanisation (Noel, 2016).

The number of cultural practices and experts has eventually diminished as the Dayaks have increasingly detached from the traditional way of life and adopted modern culture. Although some of their local knowledge is still preserved, the belief

shifts change their view of divinity, which directly constitutes the dwindling in many aspects of Dayak cultures. Believers abandon many elements related to old thinking to make room for the new cultures and live according to the mould of religious beliefs today. Dayak motifs whose nature and implicit meaning are contrary to new beliefs will either be transformed into an accepted version or simply forgotten. In many of these Dayak motifs, new interpretations are given according to the cosmological context of the new beliefs. In semiotic studies, we see the process (semiosis) of reinterpreting motifs from the original version to the updated version.

The Dayaks gradually adopted the new thinking pattern and view of modern life like many other ethnicities on Borneo Island in response to political opinions and administration policies, cultural cultivation, religious shifting, education and modernism, and adopting world views (Maunati, 2003). The advancing information technology communications since the 1960s have opened the door wide to socio-cultural and economic interactions between Borneo's inhabitants and the rest of the world. As a result, the Bornean and Dayak peoples, in particular, no longer dwell in isolation in what pre-colonial European researchers referred to as "the dark jungle of Borneo." Even now has to pay for the loss of its cultural heritage. They diminish the intangible legacies of knowledge that can be re-learned from past literary works.

d. Ambiguity in Standard and Authenticity of Dayak Design

Identifying the originality of Dayak motif designs is comparatively more complicated. Each Dayak sub-ethnic produces a variety of motifs exclusive to the group. These motifs are developed and passed down from generation to generation, from a maestro to an apprentice in a trusted family or community member. However, Dayak motif design has evolved according to modern tastes and trends in the current development of Dayak culture and lifestyle. The aesthetic importance of Dayak motifs

has a high commercial demand, especially from the tourism industry and related sectors. Incorporating Dayak motifs beyond their traditional use has become the norm. Advances in visual and design technology in graphic production and printing have enabled Dayak motifs to be digitally manipulated and used in various media.

A sample visual image of Dayak motifs is available for download from various websites on the Internet, such as Pinterest.com (collection of Dayak motifs and design ideas), Shutterstock.com (Dayak pattern images, photo stocks and vectors), Vecteezy.com (Dayak motifs vector art), Dreamstime.com (Dayak motif illustrations and vectors), and Freepik.com (Dayak ornaments premium vector). The problem arises if the photo image is used as a sign of understanding the motif's background. It is feared that the usage will invite incompetence, triggering an inaccurate perception of Dayak ornamental motifs.

1.5 Research Objectives (RO)

- a. To investigate Dayak ethnographic research in the context of semiotic signs and visual communication with a focus on Borneo Dayak motifs.
- b. To determine the application of the semiotic theory models by Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Peirce Sanders and Roland Barthes to extract the theoretical meaning of Dayak motifs.
- c. To assess cultural markers contributing to the interpretation of meaning in Dayak motifs.
- d. To compile Dayak Motifs for the preservation of Borneo Dayak visual culture.

1.6 Research Questions (RQ)

- a. Why is an extended investigation of Dayak motifs' original features, design, style and application important in studying semiotic signs and visual communication?
- b. How is the implicit meaning of Dayak motifs extracted and interpreted theoretically appropriately in the context of Dayak visual communication?
- c. How to assess the reference points to determine the cultural markers that link the interpretation of the Dayak Motif?
- d. How is the visual data related to Dayak motif design compiled?

1.7 Significance of Research

This study will be a significant effort in disseminating cultural foundations on design awareness and the fundamental role of Dayak motifs as signs or symbols in visual communication.

The importance of this study is to emphasize to the public and Dayak artisans the originality and originality of the basic elements and principles of Dayak motif design related to basic patterns, design features, colours, and applications. Its communicative importance must be defended and refined with dignity (Ganjing 1992). This study is also sincere to reinstate Dayak motifs in their rightful and highly respected position.

The contribution of this study is expected to rationalise the method of selecting Dayak motif types according to specific categories appropriate for the intended application. Understanding the rationale pertinent to traditional procedures in using

Dayak motifs is expected to make it easier for inexperienced and novice artisans to select and apply motifs according to the suitability of the venue, media, users, events, and rituals.

The core significance of this study is to obtain as much as possible information related to the implicit meaning or communicative value of the Dayak motif based on semiotic theories and the Dayak cultural convention and share those findings with the Dayak art enthusiasts, local craftsmen and artisans, art students, art researchers, anthropologists. This study's description of communication theory is expected to trigger and increase public understanding of Dayak motifs and positively impact the use of Dayak motifs as a sign of more meaningful and accurate visual communication.

1.8 Research Scope, Limitation and Delimitation

The socio-cultural study of Dayak Borneo is a broad subject. Various socio-cultural aspects of the Dayak community have been highlighted and discussed by foreign and local scholars. Unlike previous studies, which have frequently concentrated on features enigmatic of Dayak culture rather than practical issues, this research is concerned with the semiotic aspect of the Dayak motif within their role in visual communication. Aside from aesthetics, the Dayak motif plays an important role in nonverbal communication, encoding implicit messages that may be interpreted using semiotic theory and cultural study methodologies. The conceptual framework (see section 1.10) of this study has set appropriate parameters to ensure that this research is conducted in a manageable manner. The definition of terminology in section 1.9 has reached a certain extent to clarify this scope, especially in terms related to the concept of communication. Thus, the scopes of this study are outlined as follows:

1.8.1 Periodical Scope

This research selects the period between the 19th century to the 21st century as the periodic scope that focuses on the history and background of visual communication of the Dayak people on Borneo Island. Periodically, it is essential to identify cultural markers of Dayak motifs on the historical development of design, role, and application of Dayak motifs over the three eras, namely:

1. Pre-Colonial and Colonial Borneo Era in the 19th century
2. Colonial and National Identity Era in the 20th century
3. Digital and Globalisation Era in the 21st century

Studies in the colonial era are essential for this study. Descriptions and ethnographic photographs of past literature work on Dayaks motifs provide original and historical visual descriptions and references on the development of design, motif styling, application, application, and the role of motifs in various Dayak ethnic groups of different regions in chronological order. Physical and tangible reference materials for Dayak motif design samples from the period before the 19th century is scarce. The reason is that Dayak material culture is mainly made of non-durable and easily weathered materials such as rattan, wood, roots, foliage, and animal materials, with only a small number of samples made with clay, stones, and metals.

However, visual data and written descriptions from 19th to 21st century Borneo from colonial administrative records and anthropological and ethnographic research findings in Borneo provided plenty of information on Dayak motifs in the past. This information will be helpful in comparative design analysis. The opening of Borneo to foreign powers has unveiled a new enigma and mysteries about Borneo. Bock (2009) mentioned that his mission searching for Borneo's headhunters and medicinal plants

led him into Upper Mahakam only to encounter the tribal culture of the Tring and the Modang of Long Wai. He likewise experiences hunting activities in the black forests, discovering Dayak art and craft (intricate tattoo and carving motifs), death rituals and elaborate funeral structure of the Modang's aristocrats, which he describes and sketches in his book. Many Borneo research has been studied by pioneers (travellers and colonial administrators) and scholars in the quarter of the 19th century, as mentioned in Sellato (1994), such on unexplored regions: the upper Rejang in the 1880s by Hugh Low (Roth, 1896a), the earliest record on upper Baram between 1884 and 1907 (Hose & McDougall, 1912; Hose & Shelford, n.d.), and expedition into Central Borneo in 1893 by Nieuwenhuis (1900). Similarly, essential entries from H.F. Tillema (1933) on ethnographic photography of Upper Mahakam Dayaks, naturalist Beccari (1904), and Haddon (1896); (1905); Haddon & Star (1936) interests in Dayak art motifs. Another example, Austrian scholar Alois Hein (Hein, 2017) published *Die bildende Künste bei den Dayaks auf Borneo*, subtitled *Ein Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kunstgeschichte*, original version of 1890, 'A Contribution to the General History of Art.' Hein begins with a review of Dayak architecture and three-dimensional figurative sculpture, based on museum collections and ethnographic literature, before moving on to what could be called Dayak ornamental arts. The subject of Dayak and its culture is increasingly gaining attention with the influx of scholarly researchers sponsored by universities in Europe, Borneo expeditions sponsored by international foundations (V. T. King & Wilder, 2020; Sellato, 2017a), and the excavation of Dayak cultural sites by colonial governments in both Sarawak and Kalimantan. Such past reference materials are important in visually capturing Dayak cultural material's knowledge.

1.8.2 Geographic Constraints

The geographical scope is imperative to this research in comparing characteristics of Dayak motif designs geographically and administratively. The separated regions expose the impact of geographical isolation on the authenticity of Dayak motif designs and communicative meanings. The geographical scope of this study was at first overly broad. The geographical distribution of Dayak's dwelling in vast areas all over Borneo Island covers three separate political territories comprising the Malaysian state of Sarawak and Sabah, Brunei, and five, respectively (refer to Figure 1.7) and provinces in Kalimantan, Indonesia.

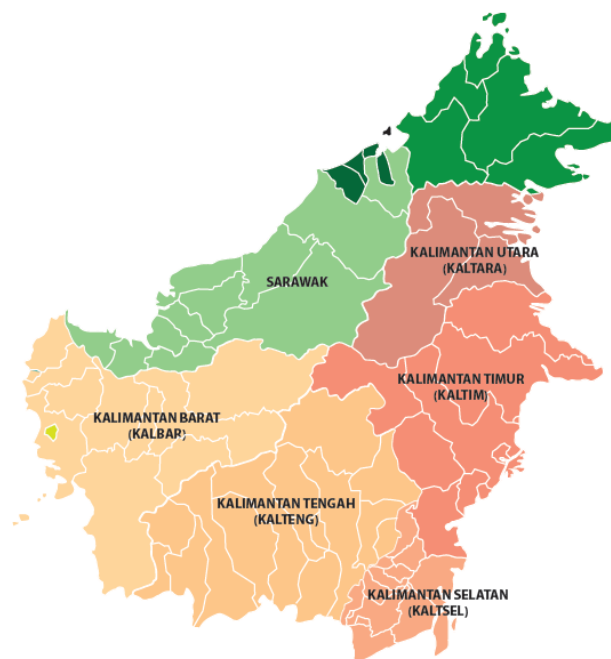


Figure 1-7 Map of Borneo Geographical Scopes

Therefore, the geographical scope of this study has been narrowed only to a sample of Dayak motifs sectioned off into four regions which are dominant for the distribution of Dayaks populations, with each region displaying unique cultural and linguistic aspects. The territories that meet this category are the State of Sarawak in

Malaysia, the Indonesian Province of West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, and East Kalimantan, including North Kalimantan or KALTARA. This new province was once part of East Kalimantan.

1.8.3 Racial and Ethnic Scope

The scope of race and ethnicity is grouped according to the common descent and cultural background (King, 2017; Nagaraj et al., 2015), language group similarity and cultural similarities (Sada et al., 2019), the geographical proximity of residence (Alloy et al., 2008). Dayak settlements are spread throughout Borneo's coastal to the hinterland extending beyond the borderline of three neighbouring countries, comprising five provinces of Kalimantan in Indonesia, two states of Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. The Dayak live in *six stammenras* or races (Mallinckrodt 1928, cited in Ananta et al., 2015). *Stammenras* is a term used by Mallinckrodt to classify Dayak groups according to the geography of residence, cultural similarities, and similarity in the language group. In previous studies on Dayak classification, both Mallinckrodt (1928) and Stohr (1959) have grouped Dayak by six *stammenras* or races. Meanwhile, Riwut (1958), as a Dayak himself, divides Borneo's 406 Dayak sub-ethnics into seven *stammenras* comprising Iban/Ibanic (Sarawak and West Kalimantan), Land Dayak/Klematan (Sarawak and West Kalimantan), Ot Danum/Ngaju (Central Kalimantan), and Orang Ulu/Apo Kayan (Sarawak and East Kalimantan). This study used the same categorisation and adopted Sellato's map of Borneo's major ethnicities. The racial and ethnic scope map below is an adaptation of Bernard Sellato, *Hornbill and Dragon*. Kalimantan, Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei. Jakarta: Elf Aquitaine, 1989 (Figure 1.8)

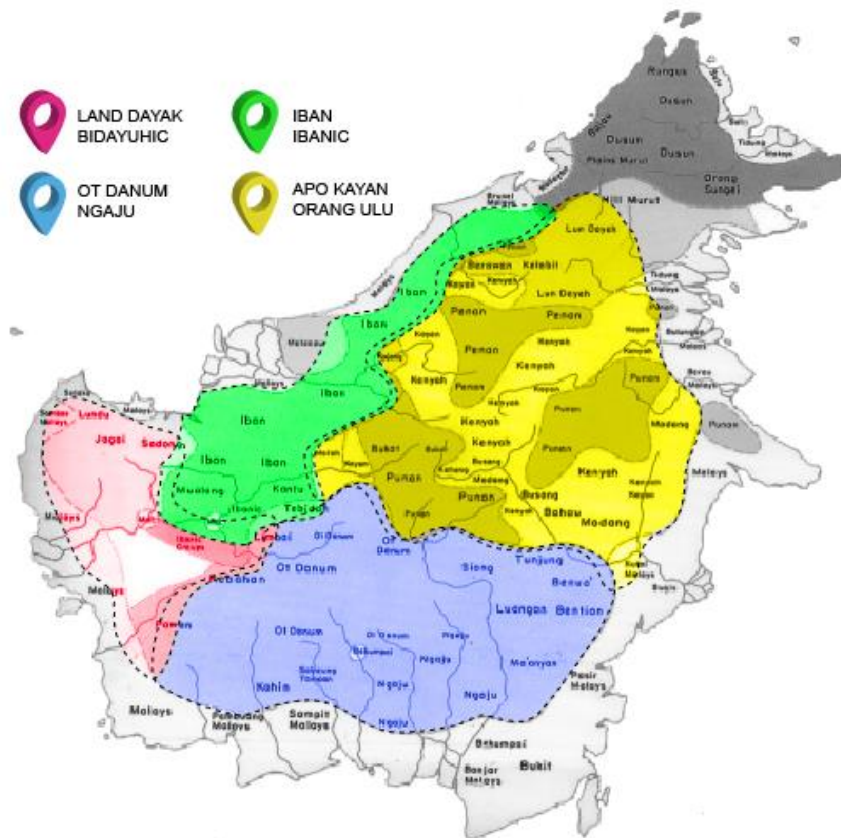


Figure 1-8 Map of Borneo Shows the Scope of Research of Four Dayak Ethnic Groups

This study only focuses on four main groups of Dayak comprising the Iban Group (Iban and Ibanic) of Sarawak and Upper Kapuas regions in West Kalimantan; the Land Dayak Groups (Kanayatn and Bidayuh) of West Kalimantan and Kuching.Samarahan Division in Sarawak; the Apo Kayan (including Orang Ulu) Groups of Sarawak, East, and North Kalimantan; and the Ngaju (including Ot Danum and the Barito) Groups of Central, South and East Kalimantan.

In the context of the ethnic selection of this study, these four Dayak ethnicities inherited distinct motif designs from each other; unique derivatives, styles, colour conventions and applications. Yet they are all tied together regarding basic patterns, design elements and principles, and cultural philosophies.

1.8.4 Racial and Ethnic Delimitation

However, the Borneo natives from the Northern part of Borneo comprising the Kadazan, Dusun and Murut of Sabah; and the Muslim-Dayaks such as the Banjarese of South Kalimantan, the Urang Kutai of East Kalimantan, the Senganan of Kapuas River in West Kalimantan, the Tidung of North Kalimantan, and Brunei Dayaks are not included in this study. In many works of literature, Dayak Punan is categorised as a separate ethnic group referring to the unclassified nomadic groups in the heart of Borneo, also known as a hunter-gatherer of the Muller Mountains (King et al., 1995; Sellato & Soriente, 2015). Punan, as nomads in Kalimantan, and Penan as they are called in Sarawak, is a culturally related group. Nor should it be confused with the Punan of Sarawak, whose part of Kajang, a sub-group of Orang Ulu from Balui, Belaga. Still, in the context of Sarawak, the Penan are grouped under the generic term Orang Ulu because of their cultural ties, which are more interrelated and culturally assimilated with the Orang Ulu compared to other dominant ethnic groupings such as the Iban and Bidayuh.

Although Brunei, Sabah and South Kalimantan are known to have Dayaks and other Borneo natives, they are not included in this study because they are considered less significant to the topic and subject of research. Brunei is a country ruled by the Islamic Shariah Laws (Abd. Latif in Siti Norkhalbi, 2005) and the dominant Malay-Muslim national identity and the national ideology of the Malay Islamic Monarchy (Maxwell, 2001 as cited in King and Knudsen, 2021). According to some estimates, roughly 50% of Brunei's indigenous population is Muslim, 15% is Christian, and the rest practises various religions such as animism and ancestor worship (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). In the case of the Iban in Brunei, many are converted to