

FABRICS IN PALEMBANG COMMUNITY LIFE^o

FARIDA & ROSMAIDA SINAGA

*Study Program History Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Sriwijaya University*

*Department of History Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Medan Univesity
nasya.afif@gmail.com*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe the role of the fabric community in Palembang from time to time. Fabric is a vital necessity that can not be separated from daily life of Palembang community. At the beginning, this vital need only be met by using wood as a raw material. On the development, the processing of wood fiber materials was growing. In addition the use of cotton fabrics from India and China silk is also increasingly becoming an integral part in the life of the archipelago. Palembang occupied a special position in the cloth trade, especially as most potential fabric lovers in Southeast Asia, together with Jambi. Both of the regions known as the Southeast Sumatra. The function of fabric for Palembang society is very diverse, ranging from meeting the needs of body armor consisting of fabric, and scarves, to other functions. These functions among others, as a symbol of one's status, prizes, a medium of exchange, pay fines, media peace, a symbol of the bond, the means of diplomacy, prestige and heritage, thus, the position of Palembang as a connoisseur and developer of cloth until now continues. So normal that until now Palembang is famous as the sole producer of the most beautiful fabric known as the Queen of fabric which is Songket Fabric.

Keywords; fabric, Palembang, function.

1. Introduction

Regarding to its natural use, human beings need body armor to cover the body as well as part of the aesthetic. Thus, the body armor has existed since the growing of humans since thousands of years ago. The need is increasingly urgent with the rapid improvement of human civilization. In early day the "protector" of the body is quite simply consist of rough bark which is pounded with certain tools be wide and thin, and can be used as a body cover. This simply armor grows increasingly complex by adding color, shape, size, pattern, and smoothness level. This is the beginning of human history using body armor in its development known as the fabric.

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The development of fabric in the archipelago can not be separated from the influence of the outside area, which stretches from Sumatra to Papua. There are two dominant nations in the field of fabrics. History mentioned that the relationship with China had been grown since the reign of the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). The nation's trade in silk, ceramics, tea and others stuff had reached the stage of a certain quality. The relationship was known as "Ceramic Line", which lasted until the VII century, precisely during the reign of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The relationship continued and developed further during the tenth century to the fourteenth century¹, in the Song Dynasty and the Yuan Dynasty. The Relationship with China was well maintained, it was done by traders who specifically carry merchandise to be exchanged in ports in Southeast Asia / Nusantara, also the relationship "seigniorial" between the various Chinese dynasties with the local authorities as a form of "tribute or offering" (Tribute missions), As a result of various commodities, mainly silk and ceramics, more intense to be traded and also was known as "Maritime Silk Road". The term appeared in the sixteenth century / XVII (Ta Sen, 2010). Thus, silk to be the main composition of fabric or even silk fabric became potential merchandise between China and port authorities or kingdoms in the archipelago.

In the early of XV century, the relationship between China and Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia had a different phase with their colossal expedition to the south under the leadership of Admiral ChengHo (1405-1433). The expedition involved dozens of large ships, and tens of thousands of sailors, with a variety of high-value items. Based on the name of the voyage track with valuable objects such as silk and ceramics. These objects had given to the rulers of the archipelago. As a form of relationship that existed, then surely the party receiving the prize would be in return reward with various value objects as well. (Dahana, 2007). Thus, we can conclude that the relationship between China and the archipelago in general continue to move forward, by exchanging a variety of high-value commodities in each party (Nusantara and China).

¹ According to van leur, XIII century in Indonesia had been passing various commodities world, including silk, silver, ceramic, pewter, ivory, shell, silver, aloes wood, sugar, iron, sandalwood, rose water, and spices (2015)

And also India was also a "player" in the rise of the cloth trade. If China is famous for its silk fabric, then India had a role as a maker and trader of cotton cloth. Indian fabric export to the archipelago is said to occur prior to the fifteenth century, but even more in that time and continued to move forward until the XVII² century (Reid, 2011).

In the trading, Indonesia and other Southeast Asia countries were not only as a passive party, but also actively participated. Proven by authority of Melaka, Aceh and Banten also sent envoys to India to order and buy the fabric according to taste. The forms of clothes at that time generally were the wrapped sarong. In addition, also used scarves placed over the chest, and the edges placed on the shoulders. Clothing was more complete with the incoming and the growing influence of Islam or Christianity, in the form of clothing or *kebaya*, as a complement of fabrics and scarf that already existed for women, and for the men provided clothes and cloth headband.

Were the people of the archipelago only as a consumer of those fabric? What people afforded not only as objects but instead became a subject in the cloth trade. It turned out that the local population also made and cloth trade. In XVI and XVII century, cotton fabrics used by the majority of the population of Southeast Asia (in Sumatra, first produced by Pasai, followed by Padang, Indrapura, even Java has been producing fabrics since the fifteenth century), the fabrics had been successfully exported to China and India. However, the fact that the fabric was generally consumed by the common people, while the upper class still used exclusive fabrics imported from China or India. Fabrics imported from both countries had vibrant colors with interesting patterns. Indian fabrics commonly used by people of authority centered power and rural elite (Reid, 2011). People chose cotton and silk become a very attractive alternative choice at that time. Thus, the presence of both types of fabrics enriched the taste of choice, and the "status" of urban residents who had a

² In 1619 merchants from Masulipatam India could sale raw cotton cloth of a thousand scores (Laur, 2015: 94). According to Anthony Reid fashion style was retained, and developed to form a national fashion styles of today, (2011).

high "taste" of choice. The rapid improvement of the fabric in the XVII century also marked by increasing the good quality of the tools used, which was followed by the increasing expertise of the weavers, as well as their creativity. The trade was more intense with the presence of the Dutch trade organization in the archipelago that was Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC) in 1602. This organization enlivens the cloth trade by bringing fabrics from Europe to be traded here. (Portuguese had already been a pioneer in the cloth trade since the beginning of the sixteenth century with the conquest of Melaka in 1511). For the people of Southeast Asia³, the fabrics were milling about at that time attracted their attention, because it was more varied than the local product, both varied in color and pattern. (Reid, 2011). Definately, this contributed to the taste of the local peopele, the emergence and development of a desire to emulate and to be famous as an aggressive fabric "connoisseur", furthermore, the producers diversified their products more affordable (Reid, 2011).

2. Palembang and Fabrics

As part of the world and regional trade, the Palembang became an integral part in the "arena" in the race for the fabric. Weather they were become high "taste" consumers or producers. The oldest evidence of the existence of fabrics used as clothing, was the clothing worn by the largest Buddhist statue found in Bukit Siguntang (now posted on Museum Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II). Such a Smooth and transparent fashion, a very beautiful work ever existed in that time. As the oldest and the largest statue (nearly three meters high) remains of Buddhism from the era of Sriwijaya, show that clothing worn statues were very beautiful with very high manufacturing techniques. Further research is needed to find out more related to this Buddha statue, including the clothing he wore, for the ancient age of the statue.

The other important oldest evidences are the clothing / fabrics worn by three statues feaured Sriwijaya arts found in the temple complex Bumiayu at PALI District

³ Among the population of Southeast Asia at the time, then Palembang and Jambi known as the Southeast Sumatra in fact have the highest interest when compared to Java, the Maluku, Malaka and its surroundings (Andaya, 1989), which in the language of Anthony Reid is known by the term "The Malays "(Reid, 2011).

in South Sumatra (IX-XIII century). The three of them are the Mahadeva Shiva statue, statue Figure 1 and statue Figure 2.



Siva Mahadewa Statue



Statue Figure 1



Statue Figure 2

The three statues are worn clothes. Mahadeva Shiva statue was worn a long wrapped cloth around his waist and hung down to the ankle. Statue figure 1 is a statue of a woman with a remarkable art. This statue was worn a cloth until its ankle, and a vest with a very beautiful motif. The third statue wearing *uncal* placed in the center of the fabric. (Purwanti, 1996). Of the three fashion shows that in around centuries IX to XIII, was worn clothes from beautiful fabrics. This evidence was incredible, but how was it made? So far there is no evidence found to track the sustainability of fabrics that have been imposed since twelve centuries ago.

How about Palembang as part of Sriwijaya was well known for its a crowded port city, as the intersection of traders from the world. At the beginning, the same as other areas in the archipelago, Palembang also recognized and developed the fabric of bark fibers. The bark was used for fabric derived from several types of wood⁴. In addition, the people also developed a woven fabric with a simple tool. Furthermore, according to the times, the Palembang was also active in the fabric "competition" in the archipelago. The function of fabric penetrated into many areas of life. Every

⁴ This type of fabric is still being used, especially in the area *Uluan* until the nineteenth century, the technique used is the bark of wood and pounded until blended, to be good enough to be a fabric

important moment in life, such as birth celebration, circumcision ceremony, marriage ceremonial, designation of the sultan and his officials or empire, gifts, either to be given to delegates from other kingdoms (Nusantara or the world), the prize for the local elite (*Pasirah / depati* and *proatin* of *Uluan*) which *milir sebo*⁵, fines pay, and also as a means of reconciling the warring factions. Fabrics were also given by the men to the women as a precious gift, which was a symbol of the bond that the two would soon be married. At the time of adversities such as death or the affected populations, the fabric becomes an integral part.

Similarly, in wartime, the fabrics had been "charged" with a prayer by an Islam leader or wise man, serves as a conduit force on an object wrapped in cloth or attached on it⁶. For example, when the war broke out between Palembang and VOC in 1659, in order to function properly and well Palembang cannons, then the cannon wrapped with red⁷cloth. In Palembang people's belief at the time, that the fabric of "sacred" that would protect them in battle. (Andaya, 1989; Farida, 2012; Reid, 2011).

Long before the events above, Queen Sinuhun who was the wife of King Sido Ing Kenayan (1629-1636) made the fabric as "special bond" between the Queen as the giver and the *Kubu*⁸ as a receiver. Since then, the *Kubu* community became part of the Palembang Kingdom, marked by the *Piagem* (charter) made of copper from

⁵ *Milir Sebo* was traveling from Palembang *Uluan* toward the capital as a center of government both during the kingdom and the Sultanate of Palembang. On arrival at the palace, their tribute and honor the Sultan will reply with gifts as a symbol of the close ties between the center and *Uluan* (ANRI, Bundles Palembang No. 47.6; No. 62.6; Stibbe, 1932)

⁶ This tradition continues in Indonesia, can be seen from the young people who are members of various units (paramilitary) physical revolution era utilizing cloth or paper written and prayed by a leader of Islam. With this they defend the homeland more fiery. Until now, this tradition still exists in certain societies in Indonesia, generally people residing in rural areas (Interview with Ms. Maimunah, July 20, 2016).

⁷ The red color of its own position, because the fabric of the wood is colored black. Thus, the red color has been the growing use shows their skills in weaving and dyeing

⁸ *Kubu* is also called *Suku Anak Dalam* is a tribe that settled in various districts in South Sumatra (Bayung Lencir, Babat Toman District, Jatimulya District, Muara Lakitan, Rawas Ulu District, Rawas Ilir District, and the District of Bangka Hulu in Musi Rawas). Most of them are still nomaden, and gathering forest products, hunting and fishing. Most of them had worked as a farmer fields or chop wood. (Hidayah, 1996: 140).

the Queen Sinuhun for chief of *Kubu* tribe called Dipati⁹. This gift to be a sacred object to them and passed down from generation to generation. The effect of the provision was that they knew the fabric, and made the fabric as precious objects. The owner of the fabric meant that people who had a high social status. (Andaya, 1989). Based on that, it is clear that Palembang had became one of the important city when it became an integral part of the rampant trade of fabrics in the XVII century.

For the people of Palembang who glorify the fabrics as a symbol of status, fabric is appreciated well weather it is high-quality fabric or even abrasive fabric from Java, still regarded as a valuable treasure though. That is why, the import fabrics from different nationalities are more intense (European, Indian, Arabic, and Chinese). Palembangneses are famous for their tough bargaining, and experts in assessing the quality of the fabric. Precious fabrics can be marked out of fashion, paintings contained in a piece of fabric.

The exciting of buying fabric is very high, and the lust slightly lower if the economy more sluggish, but quickly rise back if economy condition has improved. For example, at the beginning of the reign of Sultan Abdurakman (XVII century) pepper prices rose sharply up to four Real per bear, so the Sultan ordered *depati* in *Uluan* for comprehensive plant pepper (ANRI, Bundles Palembang No. 15.7; Andaya, 1989). The high price of pepper, bring in prosperity, then the spirit of buying cloth and fabric increasing.

In XVIII century Palembang economy was enhanced by the development of lead as a superior¹⁰ product, so that the Sultanate of Palembang were in prosperity, and became one of the most important kingdoms at that time. Prosperity was positively correlated with the purchase of fabric clothes. The very prestigious fabrics at the time was fine fabrics, woven and silk, knitted with gold lace, gold cloth with fine threads, and Chintz soft, sheer fabric with gold and silk yarn, fabrics for silk

⁹ *Depati / Pasirah* is the head of *Marga* or clan in South Sumatra, while the clan is a combination of several villages. Initial formation for genealogical factors (ANRI, Bundles Palembang No. 62.2).

¹⁰ According Stapel (1940) and the discovery of tin mining occurred at the beginning of the XVIII century on the island of Bangka. Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I developed the production of tin to bring in many workers in mining which originated in China. Tremendous advantages as a result of tin mining gained.

Netherlands, for yellow fabric Kalikut and green smooth, fabrics for gold lace and chintz printed gold (Andaya, 1989). Various precious fabrics were being special products for the nobility at the time.

Over time, the daughters of the nobility of the Palembang Sultanate began to study and develop the skills of weaving. The products they resulted in the form of a sarong, headcloth (Arab fez with gold thread), *pelet* (prada). In addition, they also made clothes from European cotton with floral decoration. Palembang weavers were famous for their ability to produce a high quality product with a high taste. Their well known Embroidery products were *trawangan* embroidery, and hooked embroidery. Their products spread in Sumatra (Veth, 1869).

Dominance fabric in Palembang Sultanate can also be seen from the events of the resignation of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II to *Uluan* in 1812 after England reign under the command of Colonel Gielespie¹¹. In order to win the hearts of his people, the Sultan gave a fabric (*pesalin*) in the form of clothing with all its attributes as a status symbol of a person or group. Sultan's coat of arms was given to the commanders who recently were sworn in by the Sultan, in order to form a government in *Uluan*. Meanwhile, his brother was named Prince Dipati who succeeded him as sultan of the Sultanate of Palembang was inaugurated in May 1812 with the title of Sultan Ahmad Najamuddin II. In the sacred event Sultan Ahmad Najamuddin wearing eminent clothes, seated in a place covered with red bedspreads, and nearby there was a yellow silk umbrella (ANRI, Palembang Bundle No. 67; Woelders, 1975: 93; Java Gouvernement Gazette, July 4, 1812) , it was obviously that the fabric was very important in the Sultanate of Palembang.

Palembang as the city and the metropolis develop trade, made the cloth into something exclusive to developed and commercialized. In the ups and downs of the history of Palembang and South Sumatera, the fabric became as an integral part of experiencing the same thing. In difficult times under the control of colonialism and

¹¹ Colonel Gillespie attacked Palembang Sultanate since Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II refused to hand over the island of Bangka which was rich in tin, and put Palembang as a royal sovereign loose from the Netherlands and rejected the British presence that positions itself as being substitutes Netherlands with the signing of the Tuntang 18 September 1811 (ANRI, Bundles Palembang N0. 67; Java Gouvernement Gazette, May 2, 1812 No. 10)

war, it is difficult to develop the fabric as a reliable product. However, along with the more advanced and lackluster trading, and then took fabrics spread out, especially since the 1990s. The Palembangnese fabrics developed, until present days, Palembang becomes famous as the producer of the high quality fabrics especially Songket cloth, known as the "Queen of cloth".

3. Conclusion

Evidence shows that the existence of the fabrics in the capital city of Palembang and South Sumatra region was ancient aged. The oldest findings are cloth worn on the Buddha statue from Bukit Siguntang Sriwijaya in Palembang remnants of the past. The fabrics used by three statues from the temple area of Bumiayu also during the Sriwijaya kingdom (IX-XIII century). Both the evidences indicate that the fabric has a very long well known by the people.

At the beginning of its existency the fabrics, it was only a linen cloth and shawl to cover the body, growing with additional loops in the chest. Furthermore it became the form of an outfit like Kebaya. The functions are very diverse in the form of cloth fabric, such as a symbol of one's status. The better of the quality, variety of shapes, patterns and colors, and the numbers of fabrics owned, the higher of "high status" of a person who owns and wears it. So it was natural if the beautiful and nice fabrics are only owned by nobility. Fabrics also became a symbol of the bond between the rulers and the people, between the youth and their lovers. Fabrics also serves as a medium of exchange, a gift that is highly coveted by the recipient, fines pay, media peace for the warring parties, as well as fabrics are precious objects that can be inherited. Thus, regarding to its natural history particularly in Palembang and South Sumatra the fabrics are generally very highly praised, and the spirit of developing the fabrics kept preserved until now.

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