

## Cultural Innovation of Ulos Pattern Heritage as Creative Campaign to Promote Tourism in Toba Highland

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### ABSTRACT

*Ulos is Batak traditional woven cloth, which has cultural and ritual values as one of Batak heritage. The various values are reflected in the variety of existing Ulos patterns. This study classifies various Ulos patterns and their details which are gathered from the survey conducted to various Ulos weaving centers in around Toba highland. The survey results bring suggestions of how the existing patterns can be modified to generate new patterns using a computer based pattern generator, without reducing the significant and original meaning of Ulos. Next, future usage of Ulos with new creative and innovative ideas of Ulos are presented and discussed in this paper, along with some samples of the designs. They aim to enlarge the popularity of Ulos that will also be able to raise Ulos industrial growth. Ulos is then projected to influence the tourism sector that is to promote the beautiful view of Toba highland. Tourists could feel the real hospitality of Batak people once they are welcomed by the warmth of Ulos. It could be also used as a "new" branding of the region*

**Keywords:** *Ulos; Innovation; Technology; Tourism*

### INTRODUCTION

Ulos is Batak traditional weaving, which means blanket (Panggabean, 2009). It is originally in a form of large scarf, which has cultural and ritual values as one of Batak heritage. The various values are reflected in the variety of existing Ulos patterns.

This study presents the various Ulos patterns and their classifications along with their implicit values. In this study, we conduct a survey to several Ulos weaving centers located around Toba highland region. The survey results are then compiled to find atomic symbols/items shaping Ulos patterns along with their rules and restrictions, if available. The results will guide the further study of generating Ulos pattern using an automatic computer based pattern generator. The new generated

patterns are expected not to reduce the original meaning of Ulos. The new patterns are aimed to be more attractive so that can be used more widely for more purposes, not only in cultural and traditional ceremony. This will enlarge the popularity of Ulos that will also be able to increase the commercialization of Ulos.

Consequently, the tourism sector around Toba highland would also be raised, particularly to promote the beautiful view of the legendary Lake Toba that is surrounded by many Ulos weaving centers. Both the beautiful view of the Lake as well as the beauty of Ulos can be admired by tourists who come to visit Toba highland region. The rising tourism sector will ultimately increase the economic growth of this region.

The next section of this paper will discuss thoroughly about Ulos and its history along with its purposes of use. Then the survey results conducted in this study will be presented. The further study plan to develop an Ulos pattern generator is exposed. Future work and conclusion section will be given at the end of this paper.

## **ABOUT ULOS**

As Batak traditional weaving, Ulos has a significant role in every Batak traditional ceremony. At the beginning, Ulos was used as daily cloth and blanket by Batak people to warm their body. Nowadays, term "mangUlosi" has been introduced to show the meaning of delivering Ulos to somebody to warm their life. Implicitly the term has more significant meanings such as saying prayers, best wishes, love, and care.

According to Sumardjo (2002), Ulos is a large Batak weaving scarf with certain dimensions of length and width. The dimension is adjusted to its placement in the body: wrapped in the head (dililithon), laid on the shoulder (sampe-sampe or dihadang), or wrapped in the waist (diabithon). He classified Ulos as Batak traditional symbol in the form of artefacts (concrete).

Pardosi (2008) defines Ulos as magic religious cloth. Therefore, there are some requirements and restrictions that have to be followed in the process of weaving. Details such as length and width have to be adjusted accordingly to bring peace and blessings; otherwise it might bring to death or bad luck.

According to Sihombing (1997), Ulos contains religious values. Weaving process are begun with prayers, hope, imagination, knowledge, skills, and patience so that Ulos can be used as a medium to deliver prayers and wishes to God.

From those three different perspectives, we can conclude that Ulos has many cultural meanings in Batak tradition, containing ethics, esthetic, and religious values. Ethical values aim to build peace and harmonization among Batak community. Currently, Ulos has been used as gift to special people or guest to show the feelings of respect, care, or love, not restricted to Batak people only but for other ethics in Indonesia and also foreigners. Esthetic values are reflected from the beauty of Ulos patterns. Nowadays, Ulos is not only used for Batak traditional ceremony only but also in many other functions such as dresses, shirts, and accessories.

## SURVEY RESULT

In this study, we conducted a survey to get accurate data about Ulos classification according to the patterns. The survey involved Ulos weavers and Ulos experts in Toba Samosir and North Tapanuli region, using interview approach. The number of weavers are various, showing different efforts of Batak people to earn money from or to keep traditional Batak values in Ulos.

### Various Purposes of Ulos

Followings are some traditional values of Ulos in Batak culture:

- **Birth ceremony: Ulos Ragidup, Bintang Maratur, Mangiring, Sadum.**  
In Batak tradition, a young family that is expecting their first child will have a special ceremony to give Ulos to the expecting mother in her seven months pregnancy, called “mambosuri boru”. This ceremony is a celebration to welcome an upcoming baby and to pray for the health of the mother and the expected child. The name of special Ulos for this occasion is named Ragidup. This Ulos is given by the parents of the expecting mother, together with a special meal called dekke, which is gold fish cooked with special Batak herbs and spices. Within 2 weeks to 2 months period after the baby is born, another ceremony is held to celebrate the coming of the new baby. The family from the mother’s side will prepare Ulos Bintang Maratur (this type of Ulos has a meaning of a steady life). The baby’s parents will be given Ulos Sadum, to carry (raise) the baby.
- **Wedding ceremony: Ragihotang, Ragidup, Sadum**  
In Batak wedding ceremony, Ulos Ragihotang is given by the bride’s parents to the groom, Ulos Ragidup is given to the groom’s parents, Ulos Sadum is given to the older brothers of the groom and also the brother of the groom’s father.
- **Bereavement ceremony: Sibolang, Ragidup**  
In Batak bereavement ceremony, different Ulos is given according to the age of the death. In a young-age death, Ulos “paroling-olangan” is given. In a young-age-married death, Ulos Sibolang is given. In an old-age death, Ulos Ragidup is given.
- **Special celebration ceremony: Sadum**  
In special celebration such as graduation, baptism, and house warming, Batak people are common to held special Batak ceremony. In this kind of ceremony, Ulos Sadum is presented.

### Pattern Classification of Ulos

Ulos has many types of patterns, colors, and meanings. Every pattern in Ulos has special meaning. Followings are types of Ulos based on its pattern classification:

#### 1) Ragidup

This type of Ulos can be used in both happy or mourning occasion. It was used by kings or high class of Batak people long time ago. It is now used to welcome a new born baby, to be worn by the father. This type of ulos is woven in a different approach with other types of Ulos. The weavers can involve more than one people

to weave three different parts: head side, middle side, and bottom side. This Ulos is worn by adult male, not for children. The anatomy of this Ulos can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Ulos Ragidup

#### 2) Harungguan

This type of Ulos has combination of all other types of Ulos. This type of Ulos is to be used by married females only. The price of this type of Ulos is relative higher than other as it has rich of patterns that require more effort of the weavers to produce this type of Ulos. Figure 2 shows the anatomy of this type of Ulos.



Figure 2: Ulos Harungguan

#### 3) Bintang Maratur

This type of Ulos consists of some rows of stars in a regular order. This is a symbol of a steady life of happiness and harmonization. In traditional Batak ceremony, this Ulos is given to an expecting mother by her parents. Figure 3 is the anatomy of Ulos Bintang Maratur.



Figure 3: Ulos Bintang Maratur

#### 4) Sibolang

This type of Ulos only has pattern in black, white, and blue colors. This Ulos is used to wrap the dead body and also by people who attend such mourning occasion. Anatomy of Ulos Sibolang is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Ulos Sibolang

5) Sitolutuho

This Ulos is quite similar with Ulos Sibolang which has blue, black, and white in color. However, this type has more compact patterns which require more effort to weave thus the price is higher. This Ulos has been used widely as accessories, head band, and scarf for ladies. In Batak traditional ceremony, it is given as a gift from parents to their daughter. Anatomy of this Ulos can be found in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Ulos Sitolutuho

6) Sadum

This type of Ulos has many patterns and colors which reflects joy and happiness. This Ulos is commonly worn by females and also used as wedding gift in Batak wedding ceremony. Figure 6 shows the anatomy of this type of Ulos.



Figure 6: Ulos Sadum

7) Ragihotang

This type of Ulos consists has pattern of lines in red, black, and white (as shown in Figure 7). Those the colors are indeed the original colors of Ulos. Other colors are the new creation and modification of Ulos according to its usage of purpose. This type of Ulos is used in the Batak wedding ceremony, to be worn by the bride and groom, given by the bride's parents. This reflects the new binding between parents and their son-in-law.



Figure 7: Ulos Ragihotang

### **Restriction Of Ulos Pattern**

From the survey, we identify that the type Ragidup is the only type of Ulos that has a restriction of pattern. The pattern has to be exactly like in Figure 1 otherwise the values will change. Other types can be modified with new composition of ornaments and colors but still keep the basic rule of pattern of each type of Ulos.

### **ULOS PATTERN GENERATION**

After the survey has been conducted, the next phase of this study is to build a computer-based Ulos pattern generation tool. The results from the survey are important input to the tool development. The anatomy of each type of Ulos along with the restrictions will guide the development of the tool. The tool will use the approach of mathematical fractal (Simonyan and Zisserman, 2015) and machine learning (Krizhevsky, et al., 2012) in creating new patterns according to the Ulos pattern rules found from the survey. Detail findings from the survey results such as smallest/atomic items and ornaments of Ulos patterns would be collected and stored in the tool's database. Other important findings which are rules and restrictions (such as in type Ulos of Ragidup) to create Ulos patterns, would also be implanted as the tool's artificial intelligence so that the new generated patterns will still hold the original and authentic meaning of Ulos as Batak cultural heritage.

The tool, in the form of computer application will be shared among the Ulos weavers so that they will be able to generate new and more attractive patterns. As weavers are most likely not common-computer users but mobile/gadget users, the software will be also transformed in the mobile-applications format. The application training modules will be prepared to make sure the weavers are ready to use the pattern generation software.

### **ULOS AS A CREATIVE TOURISM CAMPAIGN**

The main phases of this study in making use Ulos as a creative tourism campaign are as followings:

- i. to identify the existing classification of Ulos patterns
- ii. to build computer based Ulos pattern generator based on the output of previous key task as inputs
- iii. to increase the usage and popularity of Ulos by making use the new pattern of Ulos in various form of usage

- iv. to harness the inherent meaning from its pattern composition. One example is to simplify the Ulos pattern composition to produce a grid system for a printed publication
- v. to emphasize Ulos, as a part of destination branding for the purpose of promoting Toba highland as one of national (and toward international) top tourisms.

Phase (i) to key phase (ii) have been exposed in previous sections. This section will discuss about phase (iii) to phase (v).

#### **Increasing the Usage and Popularity of Ulos**

After developing an Ulos pattern generator, we expect a great number of new and contemporary pattern of Ulos are available and ready to be published and used by the weavers. The new patterns introduces fresh designs of Ulos but still exhibit the basic style of Ulos which differentiate Ulos with traditional weaving from other regions.

Next, as part of our study, we will market Ulos not only in form of traditional clothes. Our study will come out with creative ideas to utilize Ulos for various purposes. such as dresses, skirts, vests, blankets, and beddings. This approach aims to enlarge the popularity of Ulos in national and international market. We intent to attract Ulos users' curiosity of the origin of Ulos. This might influence the tourists to visit Toba highland to see more about Ulos such as how Ulos pattern was generated originally as Ulos history and how Ulos weavers work. This will be further explained in the following sub sections.

#### **Harnessing the Inherent Meaning of Ulos**

This sub section explains the creative approach of how harnessing the inherent meaning of Ulos can be a strategic media to popularize Ulos and tourism in Toba highland. The familiarity and closeness of Ulos to Batak people could be utilized to build a meaningful brand that are already familiar to the locals, in order to capture the spirit of Batak people as well as to offer relevant value for potential visitors. Batak people have strong value on family relationship. This value is inherited in Batak people, even when they are not in their homeland. A strong family tie is one of the strongest forces that shape Batak culture. Ulos Ragihotang, as one example of onetype of Ulos, symbolizes that value well. Its pattern is inspired by closely tied rattan, which symbolizes the strong bound of family relative.

A strong value on family bound, could be used to be the core of destination branding. By using some variables of the Ragihotang design, a brand that captures this core value could be built. Its familiarity to the Batak people is an advantage to suggest local people to welcome guests as a family. Value of the family is also universal, so it could also be relevant to the potential visitors. Structure design of Ulos Ragihotang produces a pattern composition that could be view as two dimensional image. We could make an analysis of this image and capture the essences to make a grid system.

Ulos Ragihotang pictures a rattan that closely tied together (Figure 8). The rattan has a vertical movement, and repeating rhythmic horizontally, as it is tied with repeating ornaments at both ends of Ragihotang. Each rattan has a white stripe in an

approximately same vertical interval. The rattan and the ties make two distinct sections. While the rattan repeats itself horizontally, the bottom ornamental repeats both vertically and horizontally. The end ornamental has several sections which has its own distinct pattern made from repeating white thread and another ornaments in color red-yellow thread. Each white ornament section is alternated with color ornament section. In every white ornament section there is a distinct red line across the repeating pattern.



Figure 8. Components that Build Ulos Ragihotang

Repeating white stripe ornament in Rattan pattern mimics real rattan nodes, alternately with its internode. The ornaments in both Ragihotang ends imitate rattan ties or weaving. It is this part that symbolizes the closeness and strong family bound. Its white sections are distinctly different from its alternate yellow and red section. This contrasting color immediately attracts eyes into this section and makes a clear separator between white sections. While this contrasting color immediately attracts attention, when to be looked closer, the white ornaments section has a contrasting red line in the middle, runs along repeating “ties” ornament. This centers viewer’s attention in the middle part of white section, and acts like a counterbalance with the contrasting red-yellow part. Repeating “ties” pattern both horizontal and vertical furthermore affirm the strong family bound.

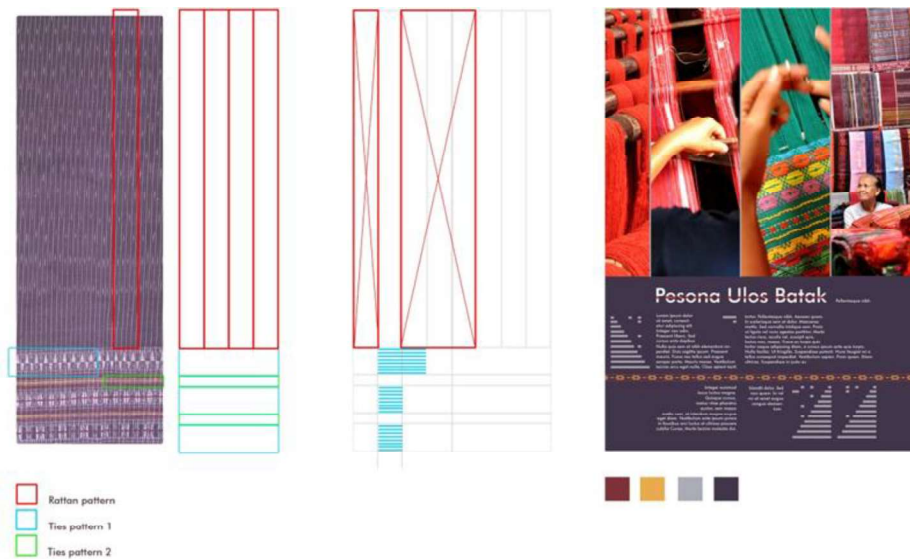


Figure 9. Analysis of Ragihotang and Application in Grid System



Information from the above analysis could guide to simplify the composition of Ragihotang. Its two distinct patterns (the rattan and the ties) could make two distinct sections. It could be simplified to a grid made from a combination of vertical and horizontal line. The Rattan section is repeating itself horizontally at the top of plane. The two (the white and the red-yellow) ornamental ties section spread horizontally and repeating alternately in vertical direction (Fig.9. a)

Configuration resulted from Ragihotang translates well into grid system for a printed publication. The repeating rattan could be made into image box, while the white ties ornaments could be made into text box. Engaging image or illustration could be arranged on top of the plane, mimicking the repetition of the rattan. (Fig. 9 .b)

### Ulos as Destination Branding to Promote Tourism in Toba Highland

How destination branding will promote tourism in Toba Highland is presented in this sub section. Destination branding itself could be defined as a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination [8]. In building a destination branding, it is important to consider local people as a stakeholder, due to strong relationship between consumer (visitor) and local people [9]. Moreover, it is vital to put emphasize on capturing the spirit of people in the branding [10].



Figure 10. Sample of Decorative Illustration

Text could be arranged following the structure of the thread in the ornamental ties section. Since the white thread that makes the ornaments is already line up like a text, it could open the possibility to treat the text itself as ornaments. Flow of the text follows the repetition of the ornament, which is horizontal, left to right, and top to bottom. Ties ornamentation could transfer well into decorative illustration (Fig.10). Arranging both the body text and text ornamentation in such a way, could furthermore affirm text playfulness that treated as an ornaments. Each text section is divided by contrasting red-yellow ornaments to make clear distinction between each section, thus guide the eyes into the text.

For example, the typeface used in this grid system is Futura Md Bt (Fig. 11) to suggest friendliness as well as to mimic the thread in ties pattern. Sans serif font suggests modern and clean look. The body text and the title use the same typeface. The title is distinguished by a horizontal red line in the middle of the text. This mimics the red line of white section in ties ornament. Combination between size and this red line sets hierarchy that attracts viewer's eyes to the title.

ABCDEFGHIJKLM  
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
0123456789,.,!?  
abcdefghijklm  
nopqrstuvwxyz  
0123456789,.,!?

Futura Md Bt

Figure 11. Sample Typeface

This grid system should be viewed as a flexible guideline. The proportion of the text and image could be manipulated as needed, as long as it follows the same hierarchy. The image box could be altered when needed, using more than one repetitive section when using larger picture.

Framework to build this grid system could be furthermore developed into full destination branding for Toba region. However, more research should be conducted to make a fully ripe concept that satisfies all the stakeholders of Toba as a destination while capturing the spirit of the local.

Using this creative idea of making Ulos as a new branding destination is expected to increase the popularity of Toba highland as the birth place of Ulos. Weaving regions of Ulos also need to be exposed. As Ulos popularity is raised, people might be attracted to visit the origin place of Ulos. People might be curious to find all historical places of Ulos at the earlier centuries, see how people works to weave Ulos, as well as how Ulos is used in traditional ceremony. Unique particular Ulos might also be a reason for tourist to see, enjoy, and buy in Toba highland region. The beauty of Lake Toba and it is surroundings then might be exposed highly by the number of tourists that increasingly visit Toba highland.

## CONCLUSION

This paper presented the study of Ulos classifications and their main purposes, based on a survey conducted among Ulos weavers in Toba highland areas. Detail anatomies of each type of Ulos along with some restrictions were also presented. Further plan of developing a pattern generation tools were also shared in this paper. The new patterns are expected to be more attractive so that can be also widely used for many purposes, not only in cultural and traditional ceremony. New creative and innovative ideas of Ulos usage for many purposes were exposed in this study, along with some samples of the designs. These are expected to enlarge the popularity of Ulos that will also be able to rise Ulos industrial growth. As a consequent, Ulos high popularity is also projected to influence the tourism sector around Toba highland, particularly to promote the beautiful view of the legendary Lake Toba that is surrounded by many Ulos small textile industries. Both the beautiful view of the Lake as well as the beauty of Ulos can be admired by tourists who come to visit Toba highland region. The rising tourism sector will ultimately increase the economic growth of this region.

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