

WOMEN'S OBI BELT DESIGN WITH BOLON TRADITIONAL HOUSE ELEMENT EMBELLISHMENTS

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ABSTRACT

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Indonesia is an archipelago with 34 largest provinces, one of which is North Sumatra. The Batak tribe comes from North Sumatra. The wealth of the Batak tribe in culture is one of the traditional houses, namely ornaments. The Toba Batak Traditional House is one of the legacies of the Batak ethnic tradition which until now still leaves many philosophical and beautiful values. Likewise, the elements attached to the traditional house building are often called gorga. The purpose of the design is to develop the motif of the Bolon traditional house elements, as well as to find out the results of applying the motif of the Bolon traditional house elements to the design work of women's fashion accessory products so as to create a beautiful, modern and meaningful motif renewal. The process of applying the motif of the Bolon traditional house elements is the development of the motif by making an initial design such as a sketch of the shape from the original reference of the gorga ornament then stylizing the elements one by one before being designed to lengthen following the product pattern. The technique used to realize the product is using the digital printing technique. Using 20s Cotton Twill fabric as the main material. The colors applied to the design motifs of the elements of the Bolon house each have a meaning that is interrelated with the philosophy of each element of the Gorga of the Bolon house.

Keywords: Textile design, Bolon house, Obi belt, Digital printing.

1. INTRODUCTION

When women enter early adulthood, they begin to grow into mature and independent individuals, including in fulfilling their needs in fashion and social media content—where nowadays, people compete to attract attention (Mutmainah, 2021). Fashion design needs, however, are often limited or monotonous, and regional motifs are rarely applied to women's fashion products. In terms of social development during adulthood, egocentric perspectives shift toward empathetic attitudes, meaning that consumers begin to understand the value of appreciating cultural symbols embedded in the products they wear (Syukriah Lia, 2011).

Over time, due to the long distance of the Bolon traditional house from urban areas and the need to cross a lake to reach it, some generations have little to no knowledge of Batak Toba traditional houses and their cultural heritage. The preservation of Batak Toba culture

is therefore at risk if knowledge about these traditional houses is not passed down. As a result, cultural preservation must be carried out in various ways. One approach is by creating fashion products that incorporate motifs inspired by the Bolon traditional house.

Common design issues include the repetitive shapes of obi belts and the lack of interest from factories in adopting designs from remote regions that are difficult for urban populations to access. Another problem is sizing, as many obi belt designs fail to accommodate diverse body sizes, making them unsuitable for everyone. By addressing these design challenges, the concept of the obi belt proposed here can offer a combination of traditional beauty and modern comfort, making it more appealing to a wider audience. This forms the background for the creation of this fashion product. Based on this background, the designer identifies the problems as follows: the lack of informational media about the Bolon house and its ornaments, which makes it difficult for women in early adulthood to find interest in products (Limbong Toni & Tarigan Philipus, 2023) that draw from North Sumatran culture, as well as the minimal efforts in preserving the Bolon house through fashion design.

The creation of a design that is able to represent the culture within it is not merely about forming a design but also about the ability to determine its meaning, since fashion products are essentially a manifestation of ideas developed into concepts and then visualized into fashion items. This fashion product is expected to attract both local and international tourists. The inspiration of the Bolon house is applied to the fashion product with a more modern approach in terms of motifs, colors, design, and production processes. Digital printing technology and 2025 color trends are also incorporated in the making of this fashion item.

The design employs several styling approaches, one of which is stylization. Stylized art can often be found in textiles or products with cultural motifs. Designs that use stylization will create a lively and captivating impression. A house is considered a source of blessings and prosperity for its inhabitants. It is also believed to possess a "tondi" (soul). As the Batak Toba saying goes, "*Ai martondi do jabu jala marsahala*" (a house must have a soul for it to feel alive). To maintain this, homeowners must ensure the vitality of the house they occupy. Decorations serve the function of making the house "*asa mangolu idaon*" (appear alive). The sense of being "alive" comes not merely from beauty but from its inherent spiritual power (Hasanuddin et al., 1997).

Based on the above background, Batak Toba culture is deeply intertwined with the people of North Sumatra and holds noble values that must be preserved. Incorporating this culture into a fashion accessory design project allows for the development of motifs while also introducing the wider community to Batak Toba cultural heritage. This process enables the creation of meaningful motif developments without losing the traditional rules and philosophies of Batak Toba *gorga* elements. The purpose of this work is to develop motifs derived from the *gorga* elements of the Bolon house to create a visual representation of their beauty, while preserving the rules and philosophies of the traditional Bolon house of North Sumatra in a visual artwork in the form of women's fashion accessories

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Jakob Sumardjo, in *Estetika Paradoks* (2006), states that the aesthetics of the Nusantara culture are based on the principle of uniting opposing elements, which in his work is described as "the effort to bring together all contradictions into a harmonious whole." This perspective forms an important foundation in the design of the women's obi belt created by the artist, which adapts elements of the Bolon traditional house. The Bolon house, as a

representation of Batak culture, displays ornaments that contain symbolic dualities between strength and softness, structure and freedom. In line with Sumardjo's idea that "a paradox is not resolved by defeating one side, but by acknowledging both as a unity," this obi belt design seeks to preserve the traditional characteristics of the Bolon while transforming them into a new expression through digital printing techniques. This approach not only safeguards the authenticity of cultural values but also provides space for actualization within the context of contemporary fashion. Thus, this design emphasizes that Nusantara aesthetics, as Sumardjo explains, "is not about choosing one of two poles, but about embracing both in a dynamic balance that is constantly in motion." Reading is an interactive activity between the reader and the writer, whose presence is represented by the text (Kusuma Dewi & Agustina, 2023). It is not merely an interpretation of the Batak ancestors toward nature and their surroundings, but the Batak people also applied fractal (geometric) dimensions in the *Gorga* of Batak traditional houses (Indonesian Archipelago Cultural Initiatives; Tambunan H, 2019).

3. METHOD

This research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The type of research applied is research-led practice, in which the creation process is preceded by research that serves as the conceptual foundation for producing the artwork. The findings from this research then form the basis for the creative work.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the object under investigation through descriptive qualitative research. Data collection techniques include literature studies and explorations using the grand tour question approach. The literature study was carried out to gather written data and information by reviewing references from various relevant sources, including books, scholarly journals, historical archives, and cultural literature.

The exploration phase was conducted through the grand tour question technique, focusing on the object of study as a reference for creating textile design motifs inspired by elements of the Bolon traditional house. These motifs were later applied in the digital printing process. The creation of women's fashion accessory products was carried out through both digital and manual design explorations. This process was necessary to produce prototypes before proceeding to mass production.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Design Concept

The design and exploration of motifs from elements of the Bolon traditional house are positioned as cultural icons of the Batak Toba people in North Sumatra. These regional motifs were selected with the aim of creating designs that focus on the exploration and development of motif modifications, adapted to current trends and colors. The modified motifs of the Bolon house are composed in such a way as to produce varied, dynamic, and creative outcomes while maintaining the uniqueness of the original objects. The results of this motif exploration are applied to fashion products for women in early adulthood. The purpose of this creation is to introduce and foster public appreciation for motifs originating from North Sumatra. This appreciation is intended to elevate the existence of regional motifs within urban society, resulting in high-quality and creative women's products that incorporate local cultural identity. The product takes the form of women's obi belts in a

variety of models and styles.

The development of the *gorga Ulu Paung* motif was carried out by making the design denser and adding a distinctive Batak Toba border, then adapting it to the pattern and form of the obi belt to be created. According to *Ornamen Rumah Batak Toba* by Hasanuddin et al. (1997/1998), the *Ulu Paung* ornament takes the form of a giant creature that is half-human and half-animal. This motif is placed at the peak of the front roof. It features an authoritative facial expression, buffalo horns symbolizing strength, and crests above the head as a sign of *hagabeion* (abundance of descendants). Symbolically, *Ulu Paung* represents a protective force that safeguards the entire household from evil spirits entering through the door.

The development of the *gorga Hoda-Hoda* motif was carried out by simplifying the figures of the horse and human through the technique of stylization, transforming the motif into a more minimal form. The motif was then adapted to follow the pattern and structure of the obi belt to be created. According to *Ornamen Rumah Batak Toba* by Hasanuddin et al. (1997/1998), the *Hoda-Hoda* ornament or carving depicts a horse being ridden by a figure, accompanied by another person standing beside the horse holding its reins. These decorations were either painted or carved on the front and side walls of the house (*sopo*), illustrating the atmosphere of a traditional ceremony known as *Mangaliat Horbo* (a grand ritual feast). The presence of this ornament signified that the homeowner was entitled to host such an important event. Symbolically, this decorative motif represents a symbol of grandeur.

The development of the *gorga Gaja Dompok* motif was carried out by simplifying its original form and enhancing it with the addition of the *mata niari* motif. The design was then adapted to follow the pattern and structure of the obi belt, and further enriched with a continuous cloud motif as a background pattern. According to *Ornamen Rumah Batak Toba* by Hasanuddin et al. (1997/1998), the *Gaja Dompok* ornament is a stylized carving resembling the head of a buffalo, typically suspended at the tip of the *Dilapaung*. The *Gaja Dompok* motif symbolizes truth, meaning that humankind must understand and uphold the true law—the divine law bestowed by God Almighty. It also represents the upholding of justice and truth for all humanity.

The development of the *gorga Hariara Sundung Dilangit* motif was carried out by simplifying the tree element through stylization, transforming the chicken motif into the form of flying birds, in accordance with the philosophy of the *Hariara Sundung Dilangit*. The motif was then arranged to follow the pattern and structure of the obi belt to be designed. According to *Ornamen Rumah Batak Toba* by Hasanuddin et al. (1997/1998), this motif depicts a tree resembling a banyan tree, inhabited by various types of birds. In the upper and middle parts of the tree are birds, while a snake coils around its trunk. The birds at the top are called *Manuk-manuk Hulambujati*, white in color and regarded as bearers of blessings. The birds at the lower part are called *Manuk-manuk Imbulubuntal*, red in color, carrying rice and cotton in their beaks. The snake at the base symbolizes the origin story of humanity's descent into the world. Overall, the *Hariara Sundung Dilangit* represents the birth of humankind into this world as beings blessed by God, reminding humans of their Creator as the Maker of heaven and earth. This ornament was traditionally placed in the *halangulu* (the central room where the head of the household sleeps).

The development of the *gorga Simarta Ri Horan* motif was carried out by simplifying its original form and adapting it to the pattern and structure of the obi belt to be created. The design was further enriched by adding a pattern that combines the *gorga Boraspati* and *Ulu Paung* elements. According to *Ornamen Rumah Batak Toba* by Hasanuddin et al. (1997/1998), *Simartarihoran* is the name of a type of large fish known for its strength and cunning. Legend has it that this fish was once the king of all fish in Lake Toba. With its sharp

wit, it was even capable of catching an eagle with a strike of its tail. Unfortunately, this species is now extinct. Visually, the *gorga Simarta Ri Horan* resembles two giant freshwater prawns (*udang galah*) facing each other. Symbolically, this *gorga* represents power and heroism. Traditionally, it was only used for the houses of kings and those who had rendered great service to the king (heroes). The *Simarta Ri Horan* motif was placed above the central part of the *loting-loting* (roof structure).

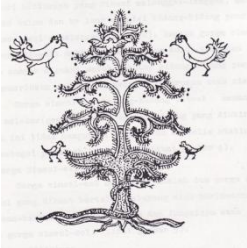
The development of the *Singa-Singa* motif was carried out by simplifying its original form into a more minimal design. The motif was modified by adding the image of the Batak Toba traditional house (*Rumah Adat Bolon*) on both the left and right sides of the *gorga Singa-Singa*. The adapted motif was then aligned with the pattern and shape of the obi belt to be created. According to *Ornamen Rumah Batak Toba* by Hasanuddin et al. (1997/1998), the *Singa-Singa* motif depicts a giant creature resembling a human face, with its tongue sticking out almost to the chin. Its head is wrapped in a three-bolit cloth (*kain tiga bolit*), with its legs shown kneeling below the cheeks on both sides, and its eyes bulging. Symbolically, *Singa-Singa* represents justice in law and truth. Traditionally, this motif was placed on the left and right front pillars of the house..

The colors applied in the design of the women's fashion accessory, the obi belt, are black, gold, orange, red, blue, cream, and light brown. This selection was based on colors that are currently popular while maintaining continuity with Batak Toba cultural traditions. The color principles reflect energy, strength, and vitality, highlighting values of nobility, the brightness of spiritual energy, and a deep connection to cultural roots. These colors were tested in various combinations through a process of color swatching and test printing to ensure the accuracy of the printed results on 20s cotton fabric.

The technique used is Digital Printing. Digital Printing is a modern printing method that processes designs in the form of images, illustrations, text, and colors on a computer, which are then transferred onto the surface of the material through a printing machine (printer). The material used is fabric made of 20s Cotton Twill. Cotton Twill 20s is a type of cotton fabric produced from cotton yarn with a count of 20, meaning the yarn consists of 20 strands per inch. Compared to 24s or 30s cotton, 20s cotton is generally thicker, coarser, and heavier.

Table 1. Motif Testing

Source of Ideas	Picture	Visual Experimentation	Result
Gorga Ulu Paung			

Gorga Hoda- hoda			
Gorga Gajah Dompok			
Gorga Hariara Sundung Dilangit			

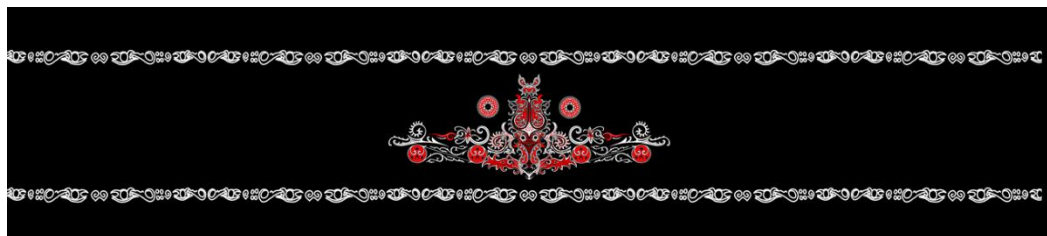




Figure 1. Processed motif applied to women's fashion obi belt

Design Results

Design 1

Ulu Paung: Threads of Ancestry is the name of the visualized design of the obi belt that incorporates the *gorga ulu paung* element, symbolizing strength to protect the household from evil spirits entering through the doorway. The motif visualization features the characteristic Batak Toba border against a black background, a color regarded as the strongest and known as the "king of colors" for symbolizing power, protection, and fair wisdom. This is why the headband of Batak kings has always been black. In Batak Toba *gorga*, black is traditionally applied to the *andor* field, outlined with bold white lines. Other design elements embedded in the motif include lines (straight, curved, circular) and shapes derived from the original elements of the traditional *bolon* house. The rectangular shape of the obi belt represents an adaptive blend of traditional culture with modern fashion style. By combining visual elements of cultural heritage with contemporary production techniques, this work aims to present a visual narrative of ancestral identity and values carried into daily life, while serving as a form of preservation and cultural innovation within modern textile design. This women's obi belt adopts the Japanese form, functioning to fasten the waist for a neat and slender impression. It is suitable for both formal and non-formal occasions because of its naturally dark color—black—giving it a simple, neat, and elegant look. The textile used for this obi belt is 20s cotton twill, a sturdy and stiff fabric that strengthens its bold impression when worn.

Design 2

Warm Hues of Hoda-Hoda is the name of the visualized design of the obi belt that incorporates the *gorga hoda-hoda* element. The motif visualization uses the *piso gaja dompak* pattern with a dark orange background, a color symbolizing spirit, vitality, and enthusiasm in life. This tone enlivens the motif and draws visual attention. The model of this fashion accessory is a Japanese obi belt with a half-oval center. The obi belt, known for its simplicity and neatness, is commonly worn by young adult women on formal occasions. Traditionally, it is a long accessory without darts on the sides, originating from Japanese culture. The half-oval cut accent appears on the front when worn, creating a graceful silhouette that follows the waistline, with the front wider than the back. The material chosen for this obi belt is 20s cotton twill, suitable for obi making due to its sturdy and rigid texture, reinforcing the bold impression when worn.

Design 3

Gold Heritage of Gaja Dompok is the name of the visualized design of the obi belt that incorporates the *gorga Gaja Dompok* element. The motif visualization features a cloudy grey background overlaid with black, a color symbolizing truth—the divine law given by God

Almighty and the guiding principle of justice for all humankind. This color enlivens the motif and draws visual attention. The model of this fashion accessory is a Japanese obi belt with a square form. The obi belt, simple and neat, is often worn by young adult women on formal occasions. Traditionally, it is a rectangular accessory without darts on the sides, originating from Japanese culture. A triangular ribbon-like accent is added at the back, while the front features an oval silhouette. The design follows the natural waist shape, with a wider front than back. The textile used is 20s cotton twill, a strong and rigid fabric that enhances the bold impression when worn.

Design 4

Golden Roots of Hariara is the name of the visualized design of the obi belt that incorporates the *gorga Hariara Sundung Dilangit* element. The motif visualization is a stylized pattern of *gorga singa-singa* in brown, layered over a cream blush background. This background symbolizes the birth of humankind blessed by God, reminding humans of their Creator as the maker of heaven and earth. Cream as the base color creates a neutral, warm impression while offering a soft contrast that highlights the main motif. The lines and root structures are visualized in olive brown, gold, and bright yellow, reinforcing impressions of depth, foundational strength, and nobility as the essence of the tree of life. The redesigned *hariara sundung di langit* motif is presented in bright, expressive colors—sky blue, navy blue, orange, and red. Sky and navy blue represent celestial and spiritual elements, while orange and red infuse spirit, energy, and dynamic life. This color combination creates a striking yet balanced harmony, strengthening cultural identity with a modern aesthetic nuance. The model of this accessory is a Japanese obi belt with a wavy shape. The obi belt, simple and neat, is often worn by young adult women on formal occasions. It is a traditional fashion accessory that follows body curves when worn, originating from Japanese culture (Weva Textile, 2015). The wave accent is visible at the front when worn, with the silhouette naturally adapting to the waistline, the front wider than the back. The textile used for this obi belt is 20s cotton twill, a strong and stiff fabric that reinforces a bold and assertive look when worn.

Product Photo Results



Figure 2. Product Photo 1



Figure 3. Product Photo 2



Figure 4. Product Photo 3



Figure 5. Product Photo 4

5. CONCLUSION

Inspiration from external sources is useful in generating ideas and improving the quality of the final product. One such inspiration is the design elements of the Bolon traditional house from the Batak Toba of North Sumatra, applied to women's obi belts. Cotton 20s fabric provides a sturdy and neat impression when worn around the waist of young adult women, making the product suitable for both slim and fuller body types. The use of digital printing techniques in making the obi belt allows designers to create patterns directly on the Cotton 20s fabric according to the desired shape and size. Rulers and chalk are used to draw the outlines of the obi model on the fabric. The visual design process modifies elements of the Bolon house motifs without removing their traditional principles, while adjusting them through variations in patterns and trending color schemes. This approach fosters public appreciation and promotes greater recognition of Bolon traditional house designs. This study is limited to describing how Bolon house elements have been used as decorative sources of inspiration for fashion accessory products. Future studies may further explore the application.

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