

# Journal of Southeast Asian Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/SEA>

Additional services for *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## A traffic in Songket: Translocal Malay identities in Sambas

Wendy Mee

Journal of Southeast Asian Studies / Volume 41 / Issue 02 / June 2010, pp 321 - 339  
DOI: 10.1017/S002246341000007X, Published online: 04 May 2010

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S002246341000007X](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S002246341000007X)

### How to cite this article:

Wendy Mee (2010). A traffic in Songket: Translocal Malay identities in Sambas. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41, pp 321-339 doi:10.1017/S002246341000007X

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

## A traffic in Songket: Translocal Malay identities in Sambas

Wendy Mee

*This paper uses the example of songket to explore translocal Malay cultural processes in Sambas, West Kalimantan. I argue these intra-Malay cultural exchanges reframe selected Sambas Malay cultural forms as Malay 'cultural heritage', making it difficult to view cultural practices in purely localised terms. Consequently, many cultural forms lose their localised normative values and become aspects of a wider cultural heritage to be preserved, performed and consumed. The paper begins with a discussion of the historical, political and social grounds that forge a sense of translocalism amongst many Sambas Malays. Building on this, the more specific interest in participating in intra-regional Malay cultural exchanges is explained with reference to commodification, internationalisation and institutionalisation.*

Until recently, the intra-regional or translocal dimensions of contemporary Malay identity processes seem to have been relatively overlooked in discussions of Malay ethnicity. With the exception of studies linking Malay identity to a global resurgence in Islam, most studies of contemporary Malay identity tend to be framed by the boundaries of a single post-colonial state (most commonly Malaysia and Indonesia). The value of investigating Malay-ness within the horizon of a particular nation-state is, of course, not in question. Such studies have documented how the rather loosely and inconsistently applied definition *melayu* – based on language (Malay or Jawi), religion (Islam) and / or a political system (*kerajaan*) – was transformed into a racial and ethnic category as a result of colonial classificatory systems and post-colonial nation-state processes.<sup>1</sup> Of particular value is how such studies have

Dr Wendy Mee is a lecturer at Latrobe University. Correspondence in connection with this paper should be addressed to: Dr Wendy Mee, School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University, 3086, Australia. Email: w.mee@latrobe.edu.au. The author would like to thank Dr Yekti Maunati (LIPI) and the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Science and Technology for facilitating her research in West Kalimantan in 2008 and 2009. In addition, the author is indebted to Muslimah and Laily Khairnur for their invaluable and generous support. The research was funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Project.

1 See, for example, Syed Husin Alatas, *The myth of the lazy native: A study of the image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th century, and its function in the ideology of colonial capitalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1977); Charles Hirschman, 'The making of race in colonial Malaya: Political economy and racial ideology', *Sociological Forum*, 1, 2 (1986); Anthony C. Milner, *Invention of politics in colonial Malaya: Contesting nationalism and the expansion of the public sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Joel S. Kahn, *Modernity and exclusion* (London: Sage Publications in association with *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2001); Anthony Reid, 'Understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a source of diverse modern identities', in *Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries*, ed. Timothy P.

thus contributed to comparative theories of colonialism, nationalism, ethnicity and race. Acknowledged in such studies is the extent to which understandings of Malay-ness in the pre-colonial and colonial past were indeed strongly translocal and transnational in nature, informed by intra-regional trafficking and Islamic motifs.<sup>2</sup> What is arguably less researched, however, is the extent to which intra-regional processes continue to inform contemporary understandings of Malay-ness. With this research question in mind, this paper considers how contemporary processes of cultural exchange in Sambas, a regency in the Indonesian Province of West Kalimantan, continue to draw upon and shape a supple Malay translocalism. As the paper further documents, this translocalism is an important factor in the processes constructing a 'Sambas Malay cultural heritage' in contemporary Sambas.

One of the features of contemporary Sambas is a revival of interest in Malay 'customs and traditions' (*adat*), 'culture' (*budaya*) and 'arts' (*seni*) — although this interest is far from uniform or shared by all strata of Malay society in Sambas. Language and the use of local Sambas Malay is part of this resurgence. For example, a number of recent collections of local fables and myths (*dongéng*), folktales (*céritté rakyat*) and songs (*lagu*) have been published in Sambas Malay (in book and CD format), suggesting that language, and in particular oral traditions, are seen as a central component of Malay identity.<sup>3</sup> Formal instruction in Sambas Malay language at selected junior high schools was also trialled in 2008, in line with a National Education Ministerial Regulation on Local Content in school curricula.<sup>4</sup> One of the Sambas Malay language textbooks developed for this purpose is written entirely in Sambas Malay and has chapters on local fables, folktales and *pantun* (a form of Malay poetry referred to as *pantōun* in Sambas Malay), as well as on other aspects of Malay culture, such as crafts, arts and history.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, however, I focus on the influence of regional, intra-Malay processes of cultural and commercial exchange in the revival of one particular local cultural product, *songket*, which is a locally produced textile commonly seen as an important component of Sambas Malay culture. These cultural and commercial exchanges draw on pre-existing notions of a shared translocal Malay identity (i.e. of a *bangsa Melayu*

Barnard (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006); and Shamsul A.B., 'A history of an identity, an identity of a history: The idea and practice of 'Malayness'', in *Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries*, ed. Timothy P. Barnard (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006).

2 See Michael F. Laffan, *Islamic nationhood and colonial Indonesia: The Umma beneath the winds* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Joel S. Kahn, *Other Malays: Nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the modern Malay world* (ASAA Southeast Asian Publication Series in association with Singapore University Press, 2006); *Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries*, ed. Timothy P. Barnard (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006). Most of the chapters in this edited collection were previously published in a special edition of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32, 3 (2001).

3 See also Will Derks, 'A literary mycelium: Some prolegomena for a project on Indonesian literatures in Malay', in *Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries*, ed. Timothy P. Barnard (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006) and Henk Maier, *We are playing relatives: A survey of Malay writings* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004).

4 Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 22, 2006.

5 Al' Amurzi, *Mahér Bahasé Mélayu Sambas: Pelajaran mulok. bahasé daérah Mélayu Sambas untōuk SMP / M.Ts, kallas VII, sméstér 1 dan 2* (Sambas: DINAS Pendidikan Kabupaten Sambas, 2008).

or *rumpun Melayu*), which is nevertheless internally differentiated and contested along lines of language, culture, historical origins and Malay-Islamic cultural prestige. As I argue in this paper, one of the effects of contemporary intra-Malay translocal cultural exchange is a reframing of *adat* and *budaya* in terms more closely aligned to that of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is here used to refer to a process of abstracting and disembedding cultural practices from their more localised forms and meanings. When viewed from a translocal Malay perspective, however, this reframing is not something that happens to Malay culture, but rather something that occurs within cultural processes in response to particular mechanisms. At the end of the paper, I sketch some of the mechanisms and structures that I see supporting contemporary translocalism in this context. In order to situate the following discussion, however, a few introductory comments are required on the history, geography, socio-economic and political relations informing the intra-regional processes of Malay cultural identity in Sambas.

At the outset, it is important to note the historical links between Sambas, Brunei and Matan Sukadana. These links provide a somewhat different orientation from other Malay sultanates, one that looks northeast to Brunei and southwards to parts of today's West Kalimantan. Not only does this orientation reject the peripheral status given to Borneo in Malay studies,<sup>6</sup> but it also challenges the political presumption that Melaka / Malaysia is at the centre of all things Melayu.<sup>7</sup> If Melaka today seeks to play an enhanced role in the constitution of what is Malay – as argued below – this needs to be seen as an outcome of contemporary Malaysian cultural politics rather than as the expression of a long-standing historical relationship between Melaka, as the seat of Malay civilisation, and Sambas.

The sultanate of Sambas was established by Raden Sulaiman, the son of Rajah Tengah, who was the second son of the ninth Sultan of Brunei (Sultan Hassan, r.1582–1602). On his mother's side, Raden Sulaiman was the grandson of the ruler of the Hindu kingdom of Sepudak (in present day Sambas) and the nephew of the Sultan of Matan Sukadana (today located in the Regency of Ketapang, West Kalimantan). Sambas' dynastic connections to Brunei and to Matan Sukadana are made explicit in two important historical manuscripts: *Asal Raja-Raja Sambas*

6 See also James T. Collins, 'Contesting Straits-Malayness: The fact of Borneo', in *Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries*, ed. Timothy P. Barnard (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006).

7 See also Leonard Y. Andaya, 'The search for the "origins" of Melayu', in *Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries*, ed. Timothy P. Barnard (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006). Much of the discussion of the early history of Malayness overlooks Brunei in its focus on Melaka and Palembang. Yet in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, before the decisive blow to the region's sultanates following European conquests, Brunei's power extended over the coastal regions of modern-day Sarawak and Sabah, the Sulu archipelago, and the islands off the northwest tip of Borneo. The reign of the fifth sultan, Bolkiah (1485–1521), is often marked as Brunei's 'golden age'. When the first Europeans visited Brunei in 1521 as part of Ferdinand Magellan's expedition, the navigator Antonio Pigafetta recorded how they rode to visit the sultan on top of 'two elephants covered with silk' and described the 'king's palace' in the following terms: 'we entered a large hall full of barons and lords, where we were seated on carpets ... At the head and end of this hall was another one, higher but not so large, and all hung with silk drapery, and from it two windows with crimson curtains opened, by which light entered the hall. 300 naked men were standing there with swords and sharp stakes poised at their thigh to guard the king'. See Antonia Pigafetta, *Magellan's voyage: A narrative account of the first circumnavigation*, trans. and ed. R.A. Skelton (Courier Dover Publications, 1994), p. 101.

[The origins of the Kings of Sambas] and *Salsilah Kerajaan Sambas* [The genealogy of the Kingdom of Sambas].<sup>8</sup> As with other Malay *kerajaan* genealogies, while there are undoubtedly some historically verifiable facts in these manuscripts, their purpose was less to accurately record history than to legitimate the ruler with reference to a distinguished lineage.

The *Asal Raja-Raja Sambas* was written in Jawi script around 1795, although nobody is sure who wrote it or when exactly. The second genealogy (*Salsilah Kerajaan Sambas*) was dictated by the 13th sultan, Sultan Muhammad Tsafiuddin II (r. 1866–1922) on 4 December 1903. Like the first genealogy, the second concerns the early years surrounding the coming of Raja Tengah to West Kalimantan through to the establishment of the Sambas sultanate by his son, Raden Suliaman. An interesting difference between the two manuscripts is that while *Asal Raja-Raja Sambas* establishes the sultanate of Sambas' legitimacy on the basis of Raden Suliaman's links to the Majapahit Hindu kingdom of Sepuduk (through his mother, Mas Ayu Bungsu), the early twentieth-century manuscript, *Salsilah Kerajaan Melayu*, emphasises Sambas' link to a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through the royal family of Brunei.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on Brunei as a source of dynastic and Islamic legitimacy is reinforced in the *Salisilah Kerajaan Melayu* through the account of how Raden Sulaiman's son travelled to Brunei and was there given the title of sultan (Sultan Muhammad Shafiyud-Din I) by the then Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Muhammad Tajuddin.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of translocal Islamic vectors in colonial understandings of Sambas Malay identity also comes to the fore in recent analyses of two of Sambas' most prominent *ulama* ('religious teacher'), Syekh Ahmad Khatib Sambas (1803–75) and Maharaja Imam Muhammad Basiuni Imran (1885–1976). The charismatic Syekh Ahmad Khatib Sambas spent most of his adult life in Saudi Arabia, from where – as the founder of the influential Qadriyah-Naqsybandiyah order – he encouraged the growth of the *tarekat* (or Sufi orders) in Indonesia in the late nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> As Martin van Bruinessen has noted, from the early nineteenth century several Sufi orders such as the Qodiriyyah and the Rifa'iyya began to find a mass following amongst returning pilgrims and students, who then 'steered the process of

8 The following discussion draws on Pabali Musa, *Sejarah Kesultanan Sambas Kalimantan Barat: Kajian Naskah Asal Raja-Raja dan Salsilah Raja Sambas* (Pontianak: STAIN Press Pontianak, 2003).

9 *Ibid.*, pp.126, 128.

10 Franz Schulze (ch. 3) discusses the five Sambas manuscripts known to be in existence: Brandes 156 (Museum Pusat Jakarta); Von de Wall 198A (Museum Pusat Jakarta); Von de Wall 198B (Museum Pusat Jakarta); Schoemann V.25 (Staatsbibliothek Preußlicher Kulturbesitz Berlin) and Cod.Or. 6762 (Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden). According to Schulze (p. 201), information on the authorship and date of these manuscripts is difficult as only one manuscript provides this, i.e., Br. 156, which was written in 1853 by one H. Khairuddin bin H. Kamaruddin, a resident of Kampung Angus of Bugis descent, in the service of the Sultan AbuBakr Tajuddin. Schulze (p. 202) also discerns a difference between those manuscripts which emphasise links with Brunei over links to the earlier kingdoms of Sambas and Sukadana. See Fritz Schulze, *Die Chroniken von Sambas und Mempawah: Einheimische Quellen zur Geschichte West-Kalimantans* [The chronicles of Sambas and Mempawah: Indigenous sources of the history of West Kalimantan] (Heidelberg: Julius Groos Verlag, 1991).

11 Julia Day Howell, 'Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 60, 3 (2001): 704.

Islamisation' in Indonesia.<sup>12</sup> After studying for many years in Mecca and Cairo, Muhammad Basiuni Imran spent most of his adult life in Sambas, where he followed his father to become the third *maharaja imam* ('great spiritual leader') in 1913. This position was established by Sultan Muhammad Tsafiuiddin II in 1872 and was itself an indication of the growing interest in more institutionalised forms of Islam at that time. Muhammad Basiuni Imran is remembered for his prolific commentaries on Islam and for his contribution to Islamic education, including the establishment of Sambas' first religious schools.<sup>13</sup> It was largely through the prestige of Syekh Ahmad Khatib Sambas and Muhammad Basiuni Imran that Sambas acquired a reputation as the 'Verandah of Mecca' (*Serambi Makkah*) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>14</sup>

The geography of Sambas as a border zone further shapes the nature of intra-regional Malay connections. Sambas lies on the northwestern edge of West Kalimantan. It shares its northern border with the Malaysian state of Sarawak, and fronts onto the South China Sea in the direction of Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia. Many Sambas Malays have grown up watching Malaysian television and a large number of young people now work in Malaysia and to a lesser extent in Brunei. The relative poverty of Sambas also plays a role here. Sambas is categorised by the central government as *tertinggal*, a status that is applied in Indonesia to areas with the lowest levels of social development.<sup>15</sup> Despite improvements in education and health, Sambas' villages still reveal very low levels of education, a lack of health facilities and limited economic and infrastructural development. This relative poverty in combination with the close cultural and geographic ties between Sambas and East Malaysia has resulted in large numbers of young Sambas Malays migrating over the border for work. Unofficial estimates suggest that between 30,000 and 40,000 women and men from Sambas work as migrant labourers in Malaysia. (Official numbers of workers are much lower as the vast majority of migrant workers work illegally.)

One of the demographic implications of this labour flow is a growing number of intermarriages between Sambas Malays and other Muslims, who have met on the other side of the border. This was a notable feature in a number of villages I visited, where there are a number of Sambas Malay women who have returned to their home village in Sambas from Malaysia in order to raise children. While their Indonesian husbands continued to work in East Malaysia and contribute financially, many women also supported themselves by working on their parents' land. When a Sambas Malay married a Malaysian citizen, it was common for the couple to reside permanently in Malaysia. As a result, many Sambas Malays travel regularly to and

12 Martin van Bruinisse, 'Global and local in Indonesian Islam', *Southeast Asian Studies*, 37, 2 (1999): 160.

13 Erwin Mahrus, *Falsafah dan gerakan pendidikan Islam: Maharaja Imam Sambas, Muhammad Basiuni Imran (1885–1976)* (Pontianak: STAIN Pontianak Press, 2007), p. 3.

14 Erwin Mahrus, 'Islam dan orang Sambas', in *Islam dan etnisitas di Kalimantan Barat*, ed. Yusriadi and Ambaryani (Pontianak: STAIN Pontianak Press, 2008), p. 98.

15 Based on the recent evaluation in the National Mid-Term Development Plan 2004–2009 (Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional 2004–2009), Sambas is one of nine regencies in West Kalimantan identified as 'daerah tertinggal' (or underdeveloped / backward district) (*Pontianak Post*, 3 Apr. 2009), p. 21. See also, Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Sambas, *Kabupaten Sambas dalam angka / Sambas Regency in figures* (Sambas: Pemerintah Kabupaten Sambas, 2007).



from Sarawak, either for purposes of work or to visit relatives who reside there as a result of work and earlier migration.

The immigration patterns of today's young workers also underline the fact that intra-regional trade, travel and migration have never been limited to the exploits of an elite or princely class, nor solely driven by the commercial activities or the educational pursuits of the wealthier and better educated strata of society. Rather such translocalism has long been a feature in the lives of many Sambas people, through their varied migration and settlement histories, irrespective of their ethnic, social and economic statuses. Here something of Joel Kahn's insight into the importance of migration and commerce in the making of the Malay world is still to be found amongst Sambas Malays. We can also see evidence of the 'continued salience of trans-"national" loyalties in the Malay world'<sup>16</sup> in that most of my informants did not view Malaysia or Brunei as foreign cultures. For example, when I asked village residents in Sambas if they were concerned that large numbers of their young people were today working in East Malaysia, the general response was that Malaysia was a suitable destination as it is a 'Malay' country, with a similar language and culture.<sup>17</sup> The main difference for many Malays in Sambas apart from Malaysia's relative wealth was that Malays in Malaysia tended to be more religious and that Islam had a more conspicuous presence in the public sphere (for example, a greater visibility of Islam on television).

Finally, the political context of Sambas is important to understanding contemporary intra-regional Malay cultural exchanges. Identity-based politics and distinctions between the three local ethnic groups (Malay, Dayak and Chinese) and between local and transmigrant groups have become more pronounced over the last 10 years. The factors here are complex and include the redrawing of the regency's boundaries in the late 1990s and the ethnic cleansing of Madurese migrants in the final years of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> The former Regency of Sambas included what are now the City of Singkawang (a predominantly 'Chinese' city) and the

16 Kahn, *Other Malays*, p. 82

17 This is not to suggest that people in Malaysia receive Sambas Malays in the same way. On the contrary, there is evidence that there has been a decline in the level of recognition of Indonesian Malays as fellow Malays on the part of Malaysian Malays. Indonesians are increasingly viewed as 'foreign Islamic nationals', thus over-shadowing an earlier post-colonial openness towards Muslim Indonesians as 'Malay co-ethnics'. See Ernst Spaan, Ton van Naerssen and Gerard Kohl, 'Re-imagining borders: Malay identity and Indonesian migrants in Malaysia', *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 93, 2 (2002): 160–72.

18 For more detailed discussions of the causes and chronology of the violence in Sambas see Nancy L. Peluso and E. Harwell, 'Territory, custom and the cultural politics of ethnic war in West Kalimantan', in *Violent environments*, ed. N.L. Peluso and M. Watts (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) and James S. Davidson, 'The politics of violence on an Indonesian periphery', *Southeast Asia Research*, 11, 1 (2003): 59–89. There is not enough space here to discuss the ways in which culture has also been deployed in the aftermath of this conflict. On the one hand, I have observed how reference to Malay culture is used to denounce this violence as not in keeping with the core values of *budaya Melayu* or 'Malay culture'. On the other hand, I have also been told that repeated transgressions against 'Malay culture' by Madurese provoked a form of defensive violence not unknown in Malay history. For a fascinating discussion of how the West Kalimantan Dayak Customary Law Bureau sought to explain Dayak violence in terms of a distinction between *adat* (a tradition of warfare and related supernatural beliefs) and religion (the lack of exposure to Christian beliefs), see Anne Schiller and Bambang Garang, 'Religion and inter-ethnic violence in Indonesia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 32, 2 (2002): 244–54.

Regencies of Sambas (a predominantly 'Malay' region) and Bengkayang (a predominantly 'Dayak' region). The decision to divide the former regency into two regencies (those of Sambas and Bengkayang), and to make the town of Sambas the capital of the new Kabupaten of Sambas, came into effect in 1999. The establishment of Singkawang as an independent self-governing city (or *kotamadya*) occurred in March 2001. The new Regency of Sambas has a population of about half a million people, with roughly 83 per cent of the population Muslim, 10 per cent Buddhist and around 6 per cent Christian / Catholic. Its regent and vice-regent are both Sambas Malays, with the regent a former head of the local Department of Agriculture and the vice-regent, a female medical doctor.

The identification with an earlier Malay Sambas sultanate and the establishment of the new Malay regency appear to be closely interconnected, with several separate yet interrelated processes setting the groundwork for this political outcome. One important factor here was the active role that the only son of the last Pangeran Ratu (or 'prince') of Sambas, Raden Winata Kesuma, began to play in reviving an interest in the culture and royal history of Sambas Malays. This commitment seems to have come about as a result of Raden Winata's participation in the first Nusantara Palace Festival held in Solo in 1995.<sup>19</sup> Raden Winata's efforts to revive the palace (Istana Alwatzikhoebillah Sambas) as a centre and symbol of Malay culture and the role he played during the Malay-Madurese violence in 1999 led to his installation as Pangeran Ratu on 15 July 2001. The choice of date here is highly symbolic as 15 July was the date when the capital of the new regency of Sambas was officially moved from Singkawang to Sambas in 1999. This date also has an earlier historical significance as it was on 15 July 1933 that the completion of the new palace of Sambas was officially celebrated.<sup>20</sup> Since 2004, the new regency has provided limited financial support to cover the operational expenses of the palace in the form of 100 million rupiah per annum (roughly USD 10,000).<sup>21</sup>

At the same time as Raden Winata Kesuma was seeking to revive royal patronage of Sambas Malay culture, a number of Malay community and political leaders were involved in a long-standing struggle to make the town of Sambas rather than Singkawang the capital of the regency.<sup>22</sup> While seemingly separate issues, the close connection between these cultural and political processes becomes evident when we consider two key figures in this struggle: H. Djuhardi H. Alwi and H. Darwis Mochtar. Djuhardi Alwi is a respected teacher of *pencak silat* (a form of martial arts), who was instrumental in spreading Sambas-style *silat* to other areas of West Kalimantan, Kuching (Malaysia), Singapore and Brunei through the organisation he helped to found, Kijang Berantai. Djuhardi Alwi's links with the royal family of Sambas are also strong as his father, H. Alwi Bakran, held the position of *panglima*

19 Urai Riza Fahmi, *Selayang pandang: Kerajaan Islam Sambas* (Sambas: Istana Alwatzikhoebillah Sambas, 2008, 6<sup>th</sup> edn), p. 54.

20 Kabupaten Sambas, *Serajah kesultanan dan pemerintahan daerah* (Sambas: DINAS Parawisata Pemerintah Kabupaten Sambas, 2001), p. 199.

21 Urai Riza Fahmi, *Selayang pandang*, p. 57.

22 Singkawang became the capital of the Regency of Sambas in 1953 and remained so until 1999 despite many attempts to have this decision reversed (Kabupaten Sambas, *Serajah kesultanan dan pemerintahan daerah*, pp. 193–99).



(military commander) in the former royal court of Sambas. While respected as a *silat* expert and patron of Sambas Malay arts (including dancing and religious practices), he is also acknowledged as an early political agitator for a new Sambas Regency. Twice, in 1991 and 1992, Djuhardi Alwi publicly proclaimed to the regency-level parliament (DPRD) that there was overwhelming popular support for the town of Sambas to be made the capital of the regency.<sup>23</sup> In a similar move, Darwis Mochtar, who was at that time a member of the regional parliament (DPRD) delivered a recommendation to the leader of the DPRD that the regency be divided into two regencies, i.e., into Sambas North (with its capital in the town of Sambas) and Sambas South.<sup>24</sup> Having achieved this political goal, both men continue to play an active role in promoting Sambas Malay culture in and outside of Sambas today: Djuhardi through the organisation of Kijang Berantai and Darwis Mochtar in his role as the head of the Sambas-based Majlis Adat Melayu (Council of Malay Customs and Traditions), which is discussed further below. In addition, both of their organisations receive a level of political patronage. The current regent, Ir. H. Burhanuddin A. Rasyid, is the chairman of the board of management of Kijang Berantai and the local government (Pemda) assists in funding the activities of the Majlis Adat Melayu.

The new Sambas government is now firmly seen as a Malay government, representing a majority Malay electorate; identity politics are clearly tilted in favour of the Malays. This has had some positive spin-offs for a number of Malay cultural organisations, such as Kijang Berantai and the Majlis Adat Melayu. As discussed below, some of the leaders of these organisations – including Darwis Mochtar – have also become important mediators of a regionally based set of translocal Malay cultural exchanges.

### **A translocal cultural heritage**

Intra-regional cultural exchanges no doubt have different effects at different times. One of the effects of contemporary cultural exchanges, however, is to reframe *adat* and *budaya* in terms more closely aligned to that of cultural heritage. The term cultural heritage is used here to emphasise how cultural elements become abstracted and disembedded from local practices and understandings. Consequently, I use the term cultural heritage to emphasise those processes which disembed or weaken the association between particular cultural forms and specific locales.<sup>25</sup> As I argue in this paper, this is not something that necessarily happens *to* Sambas Malay culture, but rather something that can occur *within* cultural processes. This disembedding of culture is not at all a new process, and as discussed below, *songket* is itself a product of such disembedding / re-embedding processes. Islamic reform and educational processes have also played a role here in that certain cultural practices have been modified or even side-lined out of a concern that they are *syirik* (or ‘worshipping other gods’). That this process has its own history and dynamics is apparent in the fact there are now performances of Sambas Malay dances in which the role of men is performed by

23 Kabupaten Sambas, *Serajah kesultanan dan pemerintahan daerah*, p. 196.

24 Ibid.

25 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

women and where headscarves have replaced ornate head dresses. However, similar to Michel Picard's analysis of the touristification of culture in Bali, disembedding processes have become more pronounced and more encompassing in the contexts of migrant labour and the transnational marketing of Sambas culture.<sup>26</sup>

As a result of these various factors, an array of cultural practices in Sambas is no longer judged solely or primarily in terms of spiritual efficacy, ceremonial obligation or possible social sanction.<sup>27</sup> Rather, for many people, these practices are increasingly performed and valued as heritage — something which needs to be preserved precisely because it no longer holds direct social sway, spiritual efficacy or cultural power. This is not to say that cultural practices have no value or retain no relevance, only that their value and relevance shifts from being embedded (and often embodied in specific individuals), to ones that are increasingly articulated through specially designed and framed performances. In the case of *songket* discussed below, its value and relevance have shifted from being embedded in particular normatively defined contexts, to more generalised, often transnational contexts, which are primarily commercial and political. Paradoxically, this reframing of *songket* has helped to revive and foster this cultural form, even if at the expense of more localised sets of meanings and normative values.

There are many processes, which support and shape the reframing of *adat* and *budaya* as cultural heritage. Some frequently identified processes in similar discussions are international tourism, local government efforts to market and commercialise local handicraft production, as well as state cultural policies. As Michael Hitchcock and Victor King have noted, the state is important to the conceptualisation and display of cultural heritage, particularly in the relationship between tourism and ethnicity: both of which are seen as 'subjects requiring political action'.<sup>28</sup> The role played by Indonesia's own middle and elite classes has also been considered here, particularly as they seek to combine a display of their material success and their cultural identification through the purchase of cultural heritage. For example, there has been a revival of interest in *songket* in parts of Sumatra in response to a growing demand for this 'heritage textile' by more affluent Indonesians.<sup>29</sup> The level of attention given to *adat* and other cultural elements within local identity politics in Sambas, as elsewhere, has also clearly increased in recent years in tandem with a politics of regional / cultural autonomy.<sup>30</sup>

26 Michel Picard, 'Touristification and Balinization in a time of *reformasi*', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 31, 89 (2003): 108–18.

27 Rituals and practices here would include those associated with the agricultural calendar (e.g., *antar ajung* and *bangas tahun*), rituals performed following a period of danger or bad luck (e.g., *tulak bala*), *sampian bedar* (rowing boat) regattas to mark important festival days such as Aidi Fitri, and ceremonies associated with the life-cycle such as *mandi buang-buang*. This is not to deny that for some people many of these rituals and cultural practices still retain great spiritual and cultural legitimacy. Also, it is important to note that not all Sambas Malays necessarily practised such rites in the past, as there is considerable diversity of practice and belief across Sambas Malays — something that the notion of cultural heritage tends to elide.

28 Michael Hitchcock and Victor T. King, 'Discourses with the past: Tourism and heritage in Southeast Asia', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 31, 89 (2003): 5.

29 As discussed by Susan Rodgers, Anne Summerfield and John Summerfield, *Gold cloths of Sumatra: Indonesia's songkets from ceremony to commodity* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007).

30 For a discussion of other Indonesian examples see *Revival of tradition in Indonesian politics: The*

Yet we should not overlook the fact that many less well-known Sambas Malays, who travel in search of work and economic opportunity, are also part of this process of reframing *adat* and *budaya* in terms of cultural heritage. Indeed, the following discussion of *songket* suggests that such reframing is never exclusively the consequence of national economic and cultural politics, or determined solely by the consumption patterns of the new middle classes and elites. Rather this reframing is closely connected to translocal exchanges of Malay culture at many levels, and with a number of effects. One outcome of contemporary translocal cultural heritage flows has been the establishment of new transnational spaces for the production, display and distribution of so-called Sambas Malay culture heritage. As a result, there has been a strengthening of many people's association with other parts of the Malay world, such as Brunei and Malaysia, along with a resurgence of identification with a translocal Malay-Islamic civilisation.

### ***Songket*: Disembedding and embedding culture**

*Songket* is a woven cloth that includes in the weave fine gold or silver metal threads. The most expensive *songket* is that made from silk thread and fine gold wire. These days, however, *songket* is mostly made from a cotton-synthetic yarn, and the pure gold (or sometimes silver) thread has been replaced by other less expensive metal alloys. *Songket* has always been considered an expensive and prestige item. People in the past and, to an extent today, were reluctant to cut the fabric in order to sew a skirt, for example, precisely because this made it difficult to share the cloth among family members or to pass it down in the family. Arguably, the most conspicuous use of *songket* is at marriages when brides and grooms wear suits made from the fabric. The most common wearers of *songket* are probably Malay men, who still wear *songket* in the form of a knee-length piece of cloth worn folded over their trousers, as part of Malay formal attire.

*Songket* in Sambas is also referred to as *kain tenun adat Sambas* ('Sambas customary weaving') and in Sambas Malay as *kain lunggi*. *Songket* came to Sambas sometime in the early 1600s brought by migrants from Sulawesi and Sumatra already skilled in its weaving.<sup>31</sup> Over time, I was told, weavers developed their craft until – at least according to people from Sambas – *kain tenun adat Sambas* became more refined and technically distinctive from the weaving methods of Sulawesi and Sumatra. From Sambas, *songket* spread to other parts of West Kalimantan and, over time, regional differences in design also became apparent. In Sambas, *songket* production is highly localised with particular villages having a strong association with the craft and most villages having no association at all. This is in part related to the settlement patterns of earlier migrants, who were given permission to settle in particular villages in the vicinity of the current town of Sambas, which was also the seat of Sambas royal power for around 300 years. In one *songket*-making village on the Sambas River, I was told that 20 years ago just about every house in the village

*deployment of adat from colonialism to indigenism*, ed. Jamie Davidson and David Henley (New York and London: Routledge Press, 2007).

31 Surahman, 'Pengaruh pemberian kredit PT. Bank Negara Indonesia (PERSERO) terhadap produk pengrajin kain tenun adat Sambas di Kecamatan Sambas' (M.A. Thesis, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Tanjungpura, Pontianak, 2000).

had a *songket* loom in the front room or in the attic, which in the older houses has a front window to let in the daylight. I was also told that learning how to weave *songket* was something that all children – boys as well as girls – learnt at home, and to an extent still learn. For this reason, while most *songket* weavers in this village are now women, some older children and men in this village help out with large and pressing orders.

While *songket* weaving is concentrated in particular areas of Sambas, the fabric has long been widespread across all Malay groups in Sambas. It is still claimed that as part of being Sambas Malay, every household has to have at least one set of *songket* — a large unsewn piece of material (or *kain*) to make a skirt and a narrower piece for a shawl (or *selendang*). *Songket* has also been part of the *hantaran* (the wedding gifts sent to the bride by the groom's family) and was always worn at weddings by the bride, groom and guests who could afford it. Although I have not had this confirmed, it is probable that as in other parts of the Malay world, in an earlier period *songket* weaving survived largely on royal patronage as the wearing of *songket* and / or of particular designs was restricted to the sultan and members of the aristocracy.<sup>32</sup> If this was the case in the past, such distinctions and privileges no longer hold today and, as Fiona Kerlogue found in contemporary Jambi, individual preferences now determine the colour and motif of *songket* worn.<sup>33</sup>

Nowadays, however, the production and consumption of *songket* in Sambas is in decline. Other materials and outfits are replacing *songket* on more formal occasions, and even brides and grooms are increasingly favouring other materials. When asked, many people now say that *songket* is too expensive, too hot and too troublesome. For example, the material shouldn't get wet or the metal thread will rust, and when not sewn, it requires a belt to keep the skirt in place thus restricting movement. Young and older Malay women alike seem to be giving up on *songket* in favour of new materials and trousers, which are seen as more convenient when riding on a motor bike. The material itself is seen as unsuitable for modern designs, which are inspired by more floating and covered modes of Islamic fashion. The general preference of women now to both formal and informal gatherings seem to be loose, heavily embroidered blouses over long trousers, rather than the heavy, stiffness of *songket*. For less traditionally oriented Malay women, that is those who prefer more casual attire such as jeans and tee-shirts, *songket* is simply old-fashioned and uninteresting, and certainly not an obligatory part of their wedding *hantaran*.

The exception to this general malaise of *songket* is the conspicuous display of *songket* at various events designed in part to showcase Sambas Malay culture. For example, when 'national dress' is specified as the dress code, or when formal attire is required at official government functions, Malay women feel obliged to wear a

32 See Megumi Uchimo, 'Socio-cultural history of Palembang songket', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 33, 96 (2005): 205–23; Fiona Kerlogue, 'Jambi batik: A Malay tradition?', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 33, 96 (2005): 183–204, and Susan Rodgers, Anne Summerfield and John Summerfield, *Gold cloths of Sumatra: Indonesia's songkets from ceremony to commodity* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007).

33 Fiona Kerlogue, 'Interpreting textiles as a medium of communication: Cloth and community in Malay Sumatra', *Asian Studies Review*, 24, 3 (2000): 335–47. The one exception here would be the *songet* worn by the Pangeran Ratu (and his wife) on formal occasions and in formal photographs, which is made of yellow silk with silver thread.

long *songket* skirt and *selendang*, while Malay men wear a knee-length piece of *songket* over a *baju Melayu* (a loose fitting, high-necked, long-sleeved shirt and trousers). On other occasions, when the political elite of Sambas want to display their identification as Malay, as seen on billboards around Sambas and in various departmental and political publications, *songket* becomes *de rigueur* for both male and female office bearers (and their spouses, if photographed together). At the spectacular wedding celebrations for the youngest daughter of the regent, who married a Malay doctor from Sambas in early 2008, *songket* was not only worn by the bride and groom and their parties but by all Malay (and even some non-Malay) guests. The celebrations spanned four days and reflected the regent's desire (as he explained) to showcase all the elements of a traditional Sambas Malay wedding ceremony that are often overlooked today due to time and financial constraints. Speaking to *songket* weavers after the event, this wedding was indeed a lucrative time for them but also an incredibly hectic one, given that the wedding party (the bride, groom and their families) had to have four completely different sets of *songket* clothes — one for each day. The celebrations were a sea of shimmering gold and silver thread, which the non-Malay researcher was seduced into wearing.

The Sambas Department of Trade and Industry has tried various strategies to boost the local *songket* industry in an effort to develop the socio-economic status of local weavers. In particular, they have invited weavers to training days and to exhibitions in order to encourage weavers to use *songket* in innovative way — such as for bags, shoes, cushion covers and prayer mats. However, these efforts have had limited success in part because *songket* weavers are not always good sewers or do not necessarily have a flair or interest in learning new design skills. In part, however, these products cannot compete with the price and versatility of machine-made fabrics from the consumers' perspective. As a consequence, the number of Sambas Malays involved in *songket* production is declining, and fewer younger people are interested in *songket* weaving as a form of work. Those that are still involved have had to develop new modes of work and employment in order to stay competitive. For example, most weavers no longer use gold or silver thread but gold- and silver-like alloys. Furthermore, in order to cover the cost of the materials, many now work on consignment for a larger entrepreneur. Others work as migrant *songket* weavers in Brunei, where few locals are interested in this form of work but where stricter dress codes prescribe specific *songket* designs to be worn by members of the royal family and dictate that *songket* be worn for certain formal events (as explained to me by Sambas weavers who had worked there). Another factor here may also be a resurgence in interest and display of Malay culture and arts in Brunei in keeping with its avowed status as a 'Malay Islamic Monarchical State'. (The Sultan of Brunei in his Declaration of Independence of 1984 proclaimed that Brunei Darussalam would be known as 'Negara Melayu Islam Beraja').<sup>34</sup> Yet as Anthony Reid notes, it remains unclear when Brunei's elites first defined themselves as 'Malay'. Certainly it was relatively

34 It remains unclear when Brunei's elites first defined themselves as 'Malay'. According to Anthony Reid, it was relatively late in comparison to other Malay kingdoms, suggesting the influence of British classificatory systems on their self-identification as Malay. See Anthony Reid, 'Understanding *Melayu*', p. 22. It has also been argued that this proclamation is ideological and politically motivated to legitimate the sultan's political control. See Naimah Talib, 'A resilient monarchy: The Sultanate of Brunei and



late in comparison to other Malay kingdoms, suggesting the influence of British classificatory systems on their self-identification as Malay.

Skilled weavers from Sambas have been working as weavers in Brunei for around 15 years. The first weaver to go was a woman from a village not far from the town of Sambas. Women from the same village I spoke to reported almost factory-type work in Brunei, which was nevertheless highly paid. Working conditions in Brunei are vastly different from those in Sambas, where weavers tend to work only in daylight hours and will typically only work for long hours when they have pressing orders or a backlog. In addition, most weavers in Sambas work from home or nearby in small work places, often working with family members or fellow villagers. They also get paid on the basis of their output. Work in these conditions tends to be highly social and relaxed, but not well paid. In contrast, weavers in Brunei live in hostels in close proximity to their work place, work long hours including evenings, and generally receive a fixed monthly income.<sup>35</sup> Yet they can earn in the space of a two-year contract enough to build a house or cover their children's university fees.

It was in this context of a declining local industry but the heightened self-conscious display of *kain tenun adat Sambas*, that an exhibition of *songket* was held in Melaka (Malaysia) in November 2007 as part of the eighth annual Dunia Melayu, Dunia Islam Convention. This event attracted participants from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and other parts of the Malay world. As part of the convention a number of events such as seminars, workshops and exhibitions were organised on themes as diverse as Malay and Islamic culture, tourism, education, information and communication technology, youth, and women's affairs. This was not the first example of an international cultural exchange between Sambas and Melaka. In the past several years, there have been a number of events organised by the Melaka-based Dunia Melayu, Dunia Islam (or Malay World, Islamic World) in which Sambas and other Indonesian regencies have participated. The Dunia Melayu, Dunia Islam has established institutional links with a number of Malay organisations in Riau, Jambi, Aceh, Bangka Belitung as well as in West Kalimantan. So it is not surprising that at the annual convention in November 2007, a number of different Malay groups from West Kalimantan as well as from other parts of Indonesia participated in the programme of seminars on Malay arts and contributed to the exhibition of *songket*.

Most of those from Sambas who attended this event, including Darwis Mochtar, are associated with one of three non-government Malay cultural organisations, namely, the Sambas-based Majlis Adat Melayu (Council of Malay Customs and Traditions), the Sambas-based Dewan Kesenian (Arts Council) and the international Lembaga Adat Melayu Serantau (Institute of Diasporic Malay Customs and Traditions).<sup>36</sup> All three organisations see their role as the promotion and preservation

regime legitimacy in an era of democratic nation-states', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 4, 2 (2002): 134–47.

<sup>35</sup> I was able to confirm weavers' comments as well as see their work situation for myself when I visited Brunei in August 2009.

<sup>36</sup> I have translated the word *serantau* as diasporic as there is no English word that adequately covers the meaning of *serantau*. The word is related to the verb *merantau* ('to migrate / leave one's home') and to the word *rantau* (which can mean 'shoreline' and 'abroad'). The word *serantau* therefore connotes a



of Malay culture and arts, and while formally independent of the government, all three rely heavily on the regency- and provincial-level governments to fund their activities and overseas travel. The Majelis Adat Melayu and Dewan Kesenian have particular interest in the promotion and preservation of Sambas culture. Both of these are dominated by senior Malay men who, like Darwis Mochtar, formerly worked in the provincial or regency government. The Dewan Kesenian, for example, was established in 2002 by several Malay community leaders working with other non-Malay community leaders in Sambas. All shared a commitment to the preservation of Sambas arts and culture and, for this reason, the organisation involved from the start representatives from the main 'local' cultural groups, that is, Malay, Dayak and Chinese. The Dewan Kesenian should not be confused with that network of Dewan Kesenian (or Arts Councils) established under the New Order Government of Suharto, although it was quite likely informed by this model. Its difference lies in that the new Dewan Kesenian in Sambas seems to have been the result of a local initiative following the establishment of the new regency.<sup>37</sup>

The Sambas-based Majelis Adat Melayu (or Council of Malay Customs and Traditions) was founded following the establishment of a provincial-level Majelis Adat Budaya Melayu (or Council of Malay Customs and Culture) in Pontianak (the provincial capital) in 2000, after the provincial-level Majelis recognised a need for representation from affiliated Malay organisations across West Kalimantan. The history of the West Kalimantan Majelis Adat Budaya Melayu deserves greater attention than can be given here, but its origins seem to be connected to a desire on the part of a group of Malay intellectuals and cultural proponents to construct a customary law and cultural organisation for Malays similar to that already established by the Dayaks of West Kalimantan. Similar to the Dayak organisation, the Majelis Adat Budaya Melayu is also headquartered in a *Rumah Adat* (or 'customary house'), a massive raised wooden structure in Pontianak.

Both the Majelis Adat Melayu and Dewan Kesenian have close relationships with a range of regional Malay organisations such as Dunia Melayu, Dunia Islam. For example, the Majelis Adat Melayu has formal organisational links with Dunia Melayu, Dunia Islam through its relationship to the Majelis Adat Budaya Melayu in Pontianak. The other regional organisation that also has an institutional basis in West Kalimantan is the Lembaga Adat Melayu Serantau (LAMS), which has affiliated organisations across Indonesia where there are significant numbers of Malays. One Sambas son who represented LAMS in Melaka is Abdi Nurkamil Mawardi, a young Malay whose father, H. Mawardi Riva'i, was formerly the head of LAMS in Kalimantan Barat and is remembered as a highly respected Sambas Malay *budayawan* (cultural specialist / writer). Like other Sambas *tokoh budaya* (respected cultural specialists) – many of whom now provide the backbone to these new cultural organisations – Mawardi Riva'i was a man who recorded in detail the language and culture of Sambas out of a deep love for and identification with Malay culture.<sup>38</sup> From

group of people with the same cultural / ethnic origins who have travelled over water in search of a better life but who still retain a sense of their common origins.

37 For a discussion of a similar initiative in Makassar, South Sulawesi, see Elizabeth Morrell, 'Strengthening the local in national reform: A cultural approach to political change', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32, 3 (2001): 437–49.

interviews with several *tokoh budaya* in Sambas, their individual efforts to preserve Malay culture are also motivated by a desire to record aspects of Sambas culture and society that they believe are in danger of being lost. An example here is the research and writing by Pak Mu'in Ikram, a former civil servant in the Department of Education and Culture in Pontianak, who was also a prolific free-lance journalist and wrote many articles on Sambas Malay culture and traditions — an interest he has pursued in his retirement in his personal writings.

It is not accidental that Melaka should figure so prominently in Indonesian reworkings of Malay identity and culture given the extent to which the Malaysian government has invested in positioning Melaka as the foundation site of the first Malay-Islamic civilisation. This is where the DMDI is headquartered, with its museum located in the heart of old colonial Melaka and a short walk from the reconstruction of the Sultan of Melaka's palace. For Nigel Worden, 'Melaka is a classic example of heritage creation and promotion', one which has received much federal government as well as local government financial support. Melaka has particular prominence in Malaysian reworkings of history as it is the seat of a fifteenth-century Malay Islamic sultanate.<sup>39</sup> The search for an ancestral seat of Malay civilisational power is in Malaysia a highly politically charged activity, related as it is to the politics of *bumiputeraism* (indigeneity) and the desire to ground claims to the long-standing presence of local Malay people. Nevertheless, this reference to an ancestral seat of Malay civilisation in Melaka has translocal referents, as Leonard Andaya notes in relation to 'the ancient rivalry between polities on both sides of the Straits of Melaka seeking to become the leading centre of the Malay world'.<sup>40</sup>

It is within these contexts – the one national, the other transnational – that we need to locate the establishment of DMDI in 2000 and to understand its aim to become the centre of the study and preservation of the history, literature, culture and art of the Malay Islamic world. The federal and local Malaysian governments (the chairman of DMDI is the governor of Melaka) seek to play a role in this honouring and preservation of Malay culture through the recognition of other Malays' efforts. In this way, the Malaysian government situates itself as protector and benefactor, if not also judge, of Malay culture. In November 2007, at an official reception hosted by DMDI, Abdi Nurkamil was one of six Indonesians (the only one from West Kalimantan) presented with an award for their protection and advancement of Malay art and culture by the Prime Minister of Malaysia. From the point of view of the recipient, this award was interpreted as a recognition and acknowledgement of the value of Malay culture in West Kalimantan. As Abdi Nurkamil noted with a sense of irony, local Malay art and culture are more appreciated in Malaysia than they are in West Kalimantan.<sup>41</sup>

38 Personal communication, Abdi Nurkamil Mawardi (June 2008).

39 Nigel Worden, 'National identity and heritage tourism in Melaka', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 31, 89 (2003): 31.

40 Andaya, 'The search for the "origins" of Melayu', p. 56.

41 As expressed in one newspaper heading: 'Bukti seni budaya Melayu Kalbar diakui dunia: Potret penerima penghargaan pelestari budaya dari PM Malaysia' [Evidence West Kalimantan Malay arts and culture acknowledged by the world: Portrait of a recipient of an award for the preservation of culture from the Prime Minister of Malaysia] (*Pontianak Post*, 24 Nov. 2007, p. 22).

While no actual *songket* weavers participated in the DMDI Convention in Melaka in 2007, many of their products were taken in the form of samples that exemplified local Sambas designs. Apart from seminars and discussions of different *songket* motifs and production methods – for example, there are technological differences in how *songket* is woven in Sambas compared with Palembang and Brunei – the visit to Melaka was also an opportunity to talk business. One of the outcomes of this exchange was a memorandum of understanding between LAMS and Melaka that Sambas weavers would produce *songket* for sale in Melaka using both Melaka and traditional Sambas motifs. Particularly sought after from Sambas *songket* weavers are the knee-length *songket* cloths worn by men as part of their Malay dress. I was told by members of the Sambas delegation, that Malaysian participants were impressed by the high degree of skill exhibited by Sambas weavers along with their ‘traditional’ methods and motifs. The absence of local Malaysian weavers in Melaka, as well as the favourable exchange rates for Sambas *songket* once converted into Malaysian Ringgit, no doubt also entered into their calculations.

In general all the designs and samples from Sambas were much admired during the Melaka exhibition. One design – and one of the five registered Sambas motifs discussed below – was not well received, however. This was a sample of the design ‘*pucuk rebung enggang gading*’. The trouble with this design was its representation of the ‘hornbill bird’ or *burung enggang*, which was seen to be in conflict with an Islamic prohibition against the representation of living beings. Yet, undoubtedly this design has some valid claim to being a fitting representation of Sambas culture. For example, when I asked *songket* weavers to name a traditional Sambas motif, the hornbill motif was one of the motifs they mentioned. The hornbill is not only an important motif in Sambas *songket*, it is also the official emblem of West Kalimantan, as well as being central to many Dayak cosmologies. Nevertheless, at the end of the exhibition in Melaka, the participants from Sambas were asked not to bring this design with them to further exhibitions of Malay culture as the representation of a living being was deemed un-Islamic. The indirect message here was that such a design was therefore inappropriate as an icon of Malay design.

Most people I have spoken to were very pleased with the possibility of a commercial relationship with Melaka and the potential to further develop trading relations between Malaysia and the *songket* weavers of Sambas. The exceptions here were those people concerned with the issue of trademarks and the registration of Sambas motifs. In particular, some staff from the Sambas Department of Trade and Industry worried that too few Sambas motifs are registered, as to date only five out of a list of 15 have been through the lengthy and expensive registration process.<sup>42</sup> They worried that Sambas could lose its cultural property rights not only to other regencies in West Kalimantan but also to other ‘Malay’ nations such as Brunei and Malaysia. As one staff member said, ‘While Mempawah claims our designs, Brunei recruits our workers.’<sup>43</sup> Two points suggest, however, that the flow of cultural property rights is not as one way as the Department of Trade and Industry fear. One weaver, I know, brought back from Brunei five motifs, which have since become her

42 DINAS PERINDAGKOP, ‘Laporan utama’, *Buletin Ekonomi* (Sambas: Pemerintah Kabupaten Sambas, 2005), p. 7.

43 Mempawah is a city in the Pontianak Regency of West Kalimantan and the earlier seat of the Mempawah sultanate.

personal design motifs (*cirikhas*) and selling point. Furthermore, one of the leaders of the Dewan Kesenian in Sambas told me that from his conversation with a weaver who lives in his village and who worked in Brunei for five years, people in Brunei still largely prefer their own designs, particularly for *songket* worn on formal occasions where there are rules regulating what can be worn by whom.

### Conclusion

The above discussion has used the example of *songket* to explore processes which contribute to a reframing of Sambas Malay cultural forms in terms of cultural heritage. These processes have both performative and reflexive elements, which combine to make it difficult for people to view their cultural practices in purely local terms. Other studies that I am aware of have sought to identify similar disembedding processes from the perspective of national cultural policies or from an international vantage point, where western tourists, for example, have led to the commodification of culture in various ways. This paper has taken the middle ground, as it were, and has tried to track the effects of regional Malay influences on the conceptualisation and performance of Sambas Malay culture.

It is in this context that many of the cultural forms exchanged are done in a way that strips them of localised normative values. They become aspects of a wider cultural heritage to be enjoyed, performed and consumed but not ones that must be acquired or performed at particular times. Just as certain rituals are no longer essential elements within the agricultural calendar, so is the production and purchase of *songket* increasingly removed from earlier *adat* requirements that the bridal couple and their close family must wear *kain adat Sambas* at a wedding or that *kain adat Sambas* should be part of the bride's *hantaran*.

This disembedding, however, has not meant that Malay cultural processes are devoid of social or moral values; rather it has allowed for the insertion of new values and readings. One example here is the strengthening of more reflexive and heightened forms of Malay Muslim religiosity. Here we can see the growing influence of particular cultural and religious sensibilities. This was most explicit in the example of the organisers of the exhibition in Melaka requesting the removal of a bird motif in future *songket* designs. While this example suggests a widening sphere of influence of Malaysian cultural (Islamic) politics, there is of course quite a history and a contemporary expression of this sort of reform in Indonesia. The influence of transnational Islamic values are apparent at the everyday level in relation to *songket* too: one reason women are less inclined to wear *songket* to formal and religious occasions is their preference for more lightweight fabrics that allow for more encompassing modes of dress.

The other conclusion to be drawn from this discussion of *songket* is that notions of cultural disembedding are not always something that happens to the socially and politically subaltern, as a result of the actions and interests of the socially and politically dominant. An interesting example of this process happening in reverse is that of the weaver, who brought back designs from Brunei and has now incorporated them into her *songket* weaving as her special designs. That *songket* is both mechanism and expression of disembedding and abstraction can also be seen in the case of the conscious display of *songket* as cultural heritage, whether by the local political elite or at international exhibitions. It is perhaps not too far fetched, however, to argue that

*songket* is also undergoing a process of re-embedding. Although *songket* is to an extent untethered from earlier social practices of production and consumption, it is still imbued with local significances, even when some of these are drawn from more regional sources. That is, although the earlier social institutions that once set the social expectations on the production and wearing of *songket* may have weakened, others have nevertheless evolved, which set new rules and expectations — such as the use of new less expensive threads; the use of *songket* in the display of personal social and cultural capital; the identification of *songket* as ‘national dress’ on certain public occasions; the value of *songket* as cultural heritage, along with the desire for new designs within the local Sambas *songket* market.

The question remains, however, how are we to explain the contemporary force and interest in translocal cultural processes in Sambas? And why, for example, are forms of transnational cultural processes emanating from Sambas as well as the Malaysian and Brunei sides of the equation? In other words, it is one thing to identify translocal processes, but quite another thing to explain why at any one point in time we may observe a greater presence of such regional trafficking. This is an important issue if we are to understand the source and strength of cultural heritage processes observable in Sambas. Here, I want to sketch what I see as some of the key structural features that support contemporary processes of translocalism identified in the paper. Three aspects seem particularly noteworthy of analysis: namely, the social forces of commodification, internationalisation and institutionalisation. I have briefly commented on processes of commodification in relation to the production and sale of *songket* above. In my final comments, I want to focus therefore on internationalisation and institutionalisation.

In relation to processes of internationalisation, we need above all to locate Sambas in its historico-political context. Here we have a new regency seeking to establish itself on new terms, that is, with a predominantly Malay face. Within the limits of its internal resources, Sambas is seeking to achieve a greater share of political, economic and social capital. Here Sambas competes not only with rival regencies within West Kalimantan (some of whom are also ‘Malay’ regencies), but also with an increasingly internationalised economy. Here the small and relatively poor state of Sambas draws on whatever connections and status it has in its outward search for economic and social status. Yet in looking beyond its borders, particularly in relation to its near neighbours of Malaysia and Brunei, Sambas is immediately situated within a larger world of Malay cultural politics. And it is within this context that we cannot ignore the influence of the cultural and Islamic posturings of Melaka / Malaysia and Brunei within the Malay world. Of further note, both Malaysia and Brunei seem to be important in the emphasis of Islam within Malay identity. Not only has Brunei established itself as ‘forever a Malay Islamic Monarchy’,<sup>44</sup> but within recent Malay cultural politics in Malaysia, the emphasis on Islam as constituting Malay-ness has become stronger — as the rejection of the hornbill motif in Melaka indicates. Such posturings are not only an outcome of Malaysia’s and Brunei’s internal cultural politics and relative wealth (which bankrolls their separate efforts to revive their status as former seats of Malay-Islamic civilisational and political power), but also draws on a sense of

44 Anthony Reid, ‘Understanding *Melayu*’, pp. 22–3.

common Malay 'roots'. However contrived the question of origins or that of an ancestral seat of Malay-Islamic civilisation may be, these attributes continue to be central to imaginings of Malay-ness and to the understanding of internal differentiation across the region.

Of course, a discussion of internationalisation makes no sense without further reference to the institutions that articulate and enact the search for greater social and political capital. As noted at the outset, not all people in Sambas are in equal proportion interested or active in the revival of Sambas Malay culture and traditions. Disproportionately, it is people who are involved or entwined in some way with various institutional forms that are the agents in the internationalisation and commodification of (Sambas) Malay culture. Such institutional forms include the organisational forms that support labour migration; the institutionalisation of cultural property rights; and cultural organisations such as LAMS and Majlis Adat Melayu. While many of these institutional forms are to a large extent reliant on some form of state funding (such as LAMS and Majlis Adat Melayu) or even embedded in the state (as in the case of Dunia Melayu, Dunia Islam), it would be reductive to define all such institutional forms as agents of the state. Here other interests and concerns need to be woven into the story, whether those of *songket* weavers working in Brunei, the desire to display and collect prestigious items of cultural heritage, or the longstanding interest and expertise of local *budayawan*.

In the current context, an involvement in translocal processes across insular 'Malay' Southeast Asia seems to be a significant element in the production of cultural heritage in Sambas. The dynamics here are complex and work at numerous levels of scale, but at the very least suggest the value of considering the contemporary salience of regional relationships in constructions of Malay culture and identity. The above discussion of *songket* as cultural heritage is only one example, which we could draw on here. Nevertheless through this limited example, we can glimpse some of the important features of contemporary translocal cultural processes in the Malay World and their relationship to processes of abstraction and disembedding.