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SIGNIFICANCE AND INTERPRETATION OF MOTIFS IN SARAWAK**Edric Ong Liang Bin****INTRODUCTION**

First of all, I wish to profess that I am not an authority to interpret all the cultural motifs of our multi-ethnic society. The field of study is so vast with our twenty-four or more ethnic groups each quite different from the other. I am speaking from the viewpoint of an interested person who because of my work as an architect and designer have found out a few things or so. And so I wish to share this with you.

Moreover, I believe that there are some issues of principles and ethnics regarding the interpretation and application of our cultural motifs that need to be brought to light and addressed at this symposium.

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by

Edric Ong Liang Bin

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MOTIFS

The Oxford Dictionary defines 'motif' as the 'main feature in a work of art'. Therefore we are talking about what are the significance and interpretation i.e. the importance and meaning of the main features of our Sarawakian works of art as in painted art, textiles, pottery, carving, sculpture/statuary, architecture, jewellery, ornamentation, music and dance.

Most of us here can quickly identify a piece of 'pua-kumbu' and know that it is Iban not an Orang Ulu weaving. Similarly we can differentiate a piece of 'kain songkit' as being a Malay textile. But whether that silver-threaded supplementary weft weaving we see in India Street is genuine Sarawak Malay work or a Sambas, Trengganu, Thai or Pakistani then becomes more difficult to distinguish for the lay person. That is because many of the 'songkit' designs or motifs are common to the whole SE Asia region.

There are similarities and differences in Sarawakian art with the rest of SE Asia and our anthropologists will tell you why — the common roots, origins, etc. But what we are concerned with at this time is: what is the difference?

What sets Iban 'Pua-Kumbu' apart from say a Thai 'mudmee' or a Sumba 'ikat' or the Ifugao blankets from Philippines?