

EXPLORING THE FORMS AND SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF TIE WEAVING IN EAST SUMBA

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the researcher's interest in using East Sumba's tie weaving as a research object because Sumba's traditional fabrics record and store various forms and meanings of the views of the people of East Sumba, which are manifested, expressed, and realized in visible forms through the medium of Sumba woven fabric. The purpose of this research is to understand the symbolic form and meaning of each motif in the tie weaving of the East Sumba people. The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive research method with Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic theory. This study reveals the forms and meanings of connotations, denotations, and myths in the symbols of East Sumba tie fabric, while the data collection techniques used in this study are interviews, observations, and picture taking. The results of the study show that the symbols used in East Sumba tie weaving serve to remind or depict events from the past, as well as to represent the customs or cultural life of the people of East Sumba. The meaning contained in the East Sumba tie weaving is to reveal the teachings and concepts of the East Sumba society regarding the existence of ancestors as supernatural forces that determine the existence of their lives as humans, as well as their society or ethnic groups.

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Introduction

Every society has culture, including the people of east sumba. Every culture does not only exist in thought but also in behavior, actions and in the various products produced by its people.

One of the people's views on life and expressions of their culture can be seen in East Sumba tie- weaving media.

Likewise, what happens to the people of East Sumba, the daily lives of these people are very dependent and tied to the culture they adhere to and believe in, such as in marriage (proposal), the death of maramba (noble person), burial ceremony, pulling of grave stone, making of grave stones, building traditional houses, making traditional houses, thanksgiving ceremony and planting rice. Cultural practices have become intuition, inherent, intrinsic, and internalization in people's lives (Djawa 2023). Death in East Sumba customs is distinguished between servants (ata) and noble (maramba). Usually noble (maramba) processes of the funeral ceremony can take months, sometimes even years. The term pakadimbung means storing a corpse for a very long time. But what's more important is that they have traditions, namely the culture that they have inherited from generation to generation, at least two generations that they can recognize as belonging in common (Jawa 2021).

What is interesting is that through the east sumba tie weaving, people get chance to understand the culture and the view of life of sumbanese people. Sumbanese tie weaving is chosen as research object because,

1. Sumbanese traditional fabrics record and store various forms and meanings of the views of the people of East Sumba manifested, expressed and released in certain forms can be seen in reality through the medium of Sumba woven cloth.
2. Tie-weaving Sumba has a very high level of mobility because it can be under everywhere. Different from other media such as traditional houses and Static grave stones, because they cannot be moved.
3. Form and the meaning recorded and stored in the tie weaving depicts meaning and purpose. Symbolically, the meaning and intent contained in Every shape in tie weaves contains symbolic meaning not the meaning of symbolic meaning has the conventional nature of meaning this meaning only agreed upon by those who share that culture as a point of view life, expression of life, and forms of life behavior. In cognition or thought, this outlook on life and behavior contains woven values in various forms and contain meanings that are understood by people who adhere to that culture.

Each sign is found in various forms of cultural media that contain meaning and purpose. This sign is expected to disclose the life of the community, be it their thoughts, feelings, habits, values, and norms of life, whether it is related to The Creator (vertical relationship) and with others (relationship horizontally) (Sanga et al 2019, 4).

This study aims to thoroughly explore symbolic forms and meanings of East Sumba's cultural products, especially those found in their woven cloth. Each woven fabric produced in East Sumba conveys strong cultural messages believed by its community, although these meanings are not universally understood but rather conventionally interpreted by the followers of their culture. In addition, the disclosure of form and meaning symbolism will be a source of knowledge and learning for people who want to study culture and semiotics. Researching the shape and symbolic meaning of Sumbanese woven cloth enhances our understanding of cultural diversity. Regional differences in conventional meanings stem from varied cultural perspectives expressed through behaviors and media.

Research Method

The method used in this research is a method qualitative descriptive research with semiotic theory. The researcher used descriptive research because they want to describe or describes the facts of the situation or symptoms that appear in weaving tie east sumba. Qualitative descriptive research is research that describes or describes the object of research based on facts and what it looks like Nawi & Martini (1996).

This method was used because in this study what was collected are all statements of informants that describe qualitative facts in the form of words. The data is obtained by listening to what is conveyed by informants, and then there is interaction between researchers and informants, through ongoing conversations (Saga et al 2019). Method Qualitative descriptive research is a method that aims to make a description or make a picture, or painting in a systematic, factual, and accurate regarding the data, characteristics, and relationships of the phenomena involved studied Djajasudarma (2006, 9).

Research Findings and Discussion

Interview of Research Results

There are ten symbolic forms of East Sumba tie weaving, each with its respective motif meaning, namely:

Mamuli Motif



The Mamuli motif is highly regarded as a symbol of honoring the status of woman and a representation of femininity, primarily because of its shape, which resembles a womb. In the traditions of Sumba, particularly in East Sumba, Mamuli holds great importance as a piece of jewelry. It is typically given by men to women during marriage proposals, symbolizing the female womb as a sign of fertility. The Mamuli motif often incorporates additional decorative elements that enrich its meaning. These elements include animal motifs-such as birds, horses, chickens, or lizards-that convey profound symbolic messages. For instance, birds represent freedom, horses signify strength and social status, while lizards are believed to symbolize protection. Additionally, geometric lines, spirals, or zig-zag patterns are often used to represent the flow of life and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Sometimes, the Mamuli motif is adorned with ornaments resembling buffalo horns, which symbolize strength and wealth.

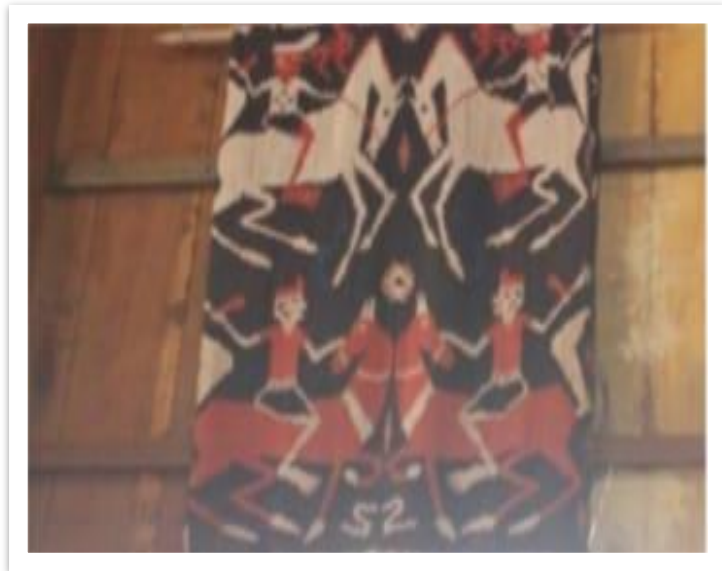
The colors used in the Mamuli motif carry their own significance. Red often symbolizes courage and vitality, black represents magical strength and protection, white signifies purity and spirituality, while yellow or gold symbolizes nobility and glory. The natural dyes used in these textiles not only enhance their aesthetic appeal but also reflect the close connection between the Sumbanese people and their natural environment.

Beyond its decorative elements, the Mamuli motif holds profound spiritual and social functions. It is often used to signify the social status of its owner, as in the past, textiles with the Mamuli motif were typically owned by nobles or prominent families. Spiritually, the motif is believed to serve as a link to the ancestors, who are seen as guardians of life and sources of blessings.

During traditional rituals, textiles featuring the Mamuli motif are often used as a symbol of respect for ancestors or as offerings to seek protection and blessings. The Mamuli motif has also evolved over time. In the modern era, this

motif is not only applied to ikat textiles but also to other products such as bags, scarves, clothing, and accessories. Although the design has undergone variations to meet global market demands, the philosophical essence and traditional values embedded in the Mamuli motif have been well-preserved. Thus, the Mamuli motif stands as a cultural heritage symbol that is not only visually appealing but also rich in meaning and relevance to the lives of the people of East Sumba.

Horse Motif (Njara)



The horse motif (Njara) holds significant importance in Sumba's marriage customs and death rituals, symbolizing both transportation and a spiritual journey. Horses, commonly used by the Sumba community, serve as a vital means of transportation, especially before the introduction of modern vehicles like motorcycles and cars. The horse motif in the ikat weaving of East Sumba carries deep meaning and often reflects the close relationship between humans, nature, and other living beings. The horse is seen as a symbol of strength, bravery, and resilience in Sumbanese culture. In many weavings, horses are depicted in a stylized form, with curved lines or sharp angles that convey movement and energy. This motif is not merely an illustration of an animal but is often used to symbolize specific qualities or characteristics valued by the Sumbanese community, such as endurance, loyalty, and freedom.

The horse also plays a significant role in traditional rituals, particularly those related to funerals, weddings, and other important celebrations. In some traditions, the horse is seen as a bearer of spirits or a protector for the deceased. Therefore, the presence of the horse motif in ikat fabrics not only adds an artistic touch but also serves as a medium to connect the human world with the spirit world. Additionally, the horse motif is often combined with various other natural elements, such as flowers, trees, or geometric shapes, each of which carries its own symbolism. For example, geometric shapes often represent balance and harmony, while natural elements may reflect beliefs in the power of nature or deities who govern life. The combination of these motifs enhances the aesthetic of the ikat fabric while deepening the philosophical meaning behind it.

Chicken motif (manu)



The chicken motif (manu) represents the rooster, symbolizing awareness, as its crow at dawn awakens people in the morning. It also symbolizes life and leadership, with protective qualities attributed to those it represents. The chicken motif in East Sumba ikat weaving also holds deep meaning, reflecting cultural values and strong symbolism within the Sumbanese community. Chickens, as important domestic animals in daily life, are often depicted in various forms and postures, representing activities such as crowing, foraging, or standing proudly. The chicken is often seen as a symbol of courage, birth, and fertility in Sumbanese traditions. In many beliefs, the chicken is regarded as a guardian symbol, representing protection and security for families or communities.

The chicken is also linked to various aspects of traditional rituals in Sumba, particularly those associated with life and death. In some rituals, chickens are used as sacrificial animals offered to ancestral spirits or deities to seek blessings or protection. Therefore, the chicken motif in ikat fabric often carries a deeper spiritual meaning, connecting the human world to the realm of spirits and maintaining the balance of the universe. Furthermore, the chicken motif is often combined with other elements such as flowers, leaves, or geometric patterns that enrich its symbolic meaning. For instance, a chicken depicted with its wings spread wide can symbolize freedom or the strength to protect the family, while a chicken laying eggs may represent fertility and new life. This combination creates a sense of harmony and balance within the ikat design.

Human Motives (Tau)



The human motif (Tau) represents the image of humans as God's creation, emphasizing their fundamental needs for recognition, attention, appreciation, and affection from others. The motif, often depicted as a naked human, symbolizes a state of human existence marked by loneliness, innocence, fear, and poverty. It portrays the struggles of humans in the world, seeking compassion and mercy from Almighty God for their happiness. Additionally, this motif conveys that in the presence of the Creator, nothing is hidden, as He is All-Seeing and All-Hearing. This is expressed in the local language as "ninya na mbokulu wua matana, na ma mbalaru kahiluna." These motifs often depict various aspects of human life, both figuratively and symbolically. In tie weaving, humans are often portrayed in specific positions that carry deep meaning, such as sitting, standing, or lying down. Each position usually has an interpretation related to social life or ritual practices. For example, a sitting human motif can symbolize an individual's role in traditional ceremonies or rituals that require calmness and respect.

Moreover, the human motifs in East Sumba tie weaving can also represent social class, status, and an individual's role within the community. In some motifs, the human figures are adorned with specific attributes, such as traditional clothing or jewelry, which indicate a person's position within the social hierarchy. Some motifs also depict the relationship between humans and nature, such as humans shown alongside animals or plants, symbolizing harmony between people and their surrounding environment.

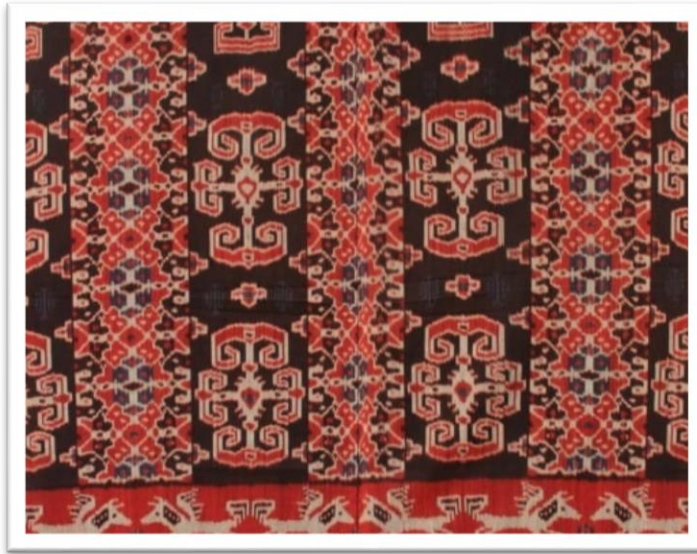
Shrimp Motif (Kurang)



The shrimp motif (Kurang) symbolizes brotherhood, unity, and togetherness. When combined with the fish motif, it represents the duality of human nature, where words and actions may not align. This concept is expressed in the Sumbanese proverb, "kurangu laku dalungu, kambuku lindi pinungu," meaning "the shrimp walks at the bottom while the fish swims at the surface," which reflects the disparity between appearance and reality. These motifs often represent the close relationship between the Sumbanese people and their natural environment, particularly the coastal and river ecosystems where shrimp are found. The shrimp symbolizes sustenance, abundance, and prosperity, as it is an essential source of food and livelihood for many communities in East Sumba. Its presence in ikat textiles reflects the importance of aquatic life in the daily lives of the people, serving as a reminder of their dependence on nature for survival.

Symbolically, the shrimp motif is also believed to carry deeper meanings related to fertility, resilience, and adaptability. Shrimp, as creatures that thrive in water, are seen as symbols of life and regeneration. Water itself is a vital element in Sumbanese cosmology, representing growth, purification, and the cyclical nature of life. The shrimp's ability to move and adapt in its environment can be interpreted as a reflection of human endurance and the need to navigate through life's challenges with flexibility.

Patola Motif



The patola motif is a unique cultural heritage that combines geometric, floral, and faunal elements with bright colors. Patola fabric serves not only as clothing but also carries ritual and symbolic meanings, reflecting the life and beliefs of the Sumbanese people. In East Sumba, patola-inspired motifs were adapted and integrated into the region's distinctive tie weaving practices, resulting in a harmonious blend of foreign influence and local artistry. The motifs are characterized by complex geometric patterns, often featuring diamond shapes, crosses, and interconnected grids. These repeating elements are not merely decorative but carry significant meanings. For instance, the diamond patterns can symbolize the interconnectedness of life, balance, and harmony, while the symmetrical and precise designs reflect the weaver's skill and spiritual dedication.

The adoption of patola motifs also indicates the social and cultural status of the wearer. Historically, textiles with patola-inspired motifs were reserved for the nobility or high-ranking individuals in Sumbanese society. These textiles were worn during important ceremonies, including weddings, funerals, and other (customary) rituals, where they were believed to provide spiritual protection and blessings. The patola motifs often represented purity, prosperity, and a connection to the divine, reinforcing their importance within the ceremonial and symbolic context of Sumbanese culture.

Fish Motif (Njiang)



The fish motif symbolizes life, abundance, and sustainability, representing the community's relationship with natural resources in the context of agriculture and fishing. Found in textile art, such as tie fabric, this motif reflects traditional values and cultural identity. The fish motifs in East Sumba tie weaving hold profound cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance, reflecting the deep connection between the Sumbanese people and their surrounding waters. Fish symbolize fertility, abundance, and prosperity, as they are an essential source of food and sustenance for coastal and riverine communities in East Sumba. The presence of fish motifs in textiles underscores the community's reliance on aquatic resources for survival and their respect for nature's bounty. In many cases, these motifs are seen as an expression of gratitude to the natural world for providing life and sustenance.

Symbolically, fish motifs are often associated with fertility and regeneration, as fish reproduce prolifically and thrive in water—an element that symbolizes purity, life, and continuity in Sumbanese cosmology. For this reason, textiles featuring fish motifs are often used during rituals or ceremonies that celebrate life, such as weddings, childbirth, or agricultural festivities, where they are believed to bring blessings of abundance, new beginnings, and harmony. Fish are also seen as symbols of resilience and adaptability, as they navigate the currents of rivers and seas, embodying the strength and determination needed to face life's challenges.

Crocodile Motif (Woya)



The crocodile motif symbolizes strength, protection, and honor. In local culture, crocodiles have a close relationship with nature and mythology, reflecting identity and social status in textile art, such as tie fabric. The crocodile motifs in East Sumba ikat weaving are among the most powerful and symbolic designs, deeply rooted in the mythology, spiritual beliefs, and cultural identity of the Sumbanese people. The crocodile holds a revered position in the traditions of East Sumba, symbolizing strength, protection, and ancestral power. For the Sumbanese, the crocodile is often viewed as a sacred creature, believed to be a mediator between the physical and spiritual worlds. This belief originates from local folklore that tells of ancestral connections to crocodiles, where it is said that the first ancestors of the Sumbanese people were born from or closely related to these creatures.

Symbolically, the crocodile represents power and authority, making it a common motif in textiles associated with Sumbanese nobility and leaders. It serves as a symbol of protection for the wearer, warding off evil spirits, misfortune, and harm. Textiles featuring crocodile motifs are often worn or displayed during important ceremonial occasions, such as funerals, weddings, and ritual offerings, where they reinforce the social status and spiritual connection of individuals within their communities.

Peacock Motif



The peacock motif in Sumbanese culture symbolizes beauty, elegance, and pride. The peacock serves as a symbol of status and luxury, with its beautiful feathers reflecting the cultural values and identity of its wearer. In textile art, such as tie fabric, this motif also represents a connection to the spiritual world and local mythology. The peacock motifs in East Sumba ikat weaving are a striking representation of beauty, elegance, and spiritual symbolism. While the peacock is not native to Sumba, its presence in ikat textiles reflects the influence of cultural exchanges and the Sumbanese people's ability to incorporate external inspirations into their rich artistic traditions. The peacock motif is often admired for its intricate design and visual appeal, symbolizing grace, prosperity, and nobility. In Sumbanese culture, these motifs are not merely decorative; they carry deep cultural and symbolic meanings tied to status, spirituality, and connection to the divine.

The peacock is widely recognized as a symbol of beauty and perfection due to its vibrant plumage and striking tail feathers, which can fan out in a mesmerizing display. In East Sumba, the peacock motif embodies ideals of balance, harmony, and the appreciation of aesthetic beauty. It is often associated with fertility and renewal, as the peacock sheds and regrows its feathers cyclically, symbolizing rebirth, hope, and transformation. For this reason, textiles featuring peacock motifs are frequently used during ceremonies such as weddings or other rites of passage that celebrate new beginnings, prosperity, and continuity of life. Additionally, the peacock holds spiritual significance as a symbol of protection and divine connection. In various cultures, including influences from Indian and Southeast Asian traditions, the peacock is seen as a guardian against negative energies, bringing blessings and warding off harm.

Deer Motif (Ruha)



The deer motif depicts the beauty of nature and local culture, symbolizing courage and resilience that reflect the values of the Sumba community. The deer motifs in East Sumba tie weaving carry rich cultural significance and profound symbolic meaning, reflecting the harmony between humans, animals, and nature in Sumbanese society. The deer is a revered animal in Sumbanese culture, often admired for its beauty, agility, and gentle nature. Its depiction in tie textiles symbolizes themes of freedom, grace, fertility, and spiritual connection, making it one of the most meaningful motifs woven into the region's rich textile traditions.

In Sumbanese beliefs, the deer is a symbol of fertility and abundance, representing life's natural cycles and the promise of renewal. As an animal that thrives in open fields and forests, the deer signifies the richness of the land, a resource that sustains both people and animals alike. Its presence in ikat textiles is often associated with blessings for prosperity and harmony, making it a favored motif during ceremonial events like weddings, where it symbolizes the hope for a fertile and harmonious union. Deer motifs can also be seen in textiles used for rituals celebrating new life, such as childbirth, reflecting its association with renewal and growth.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings on the Forms and Symbolic Meanings in East Sumba tie weaving, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The motifs of tie weaving found in East Sumba are inspired by the flora and fauna, encapsulated in artistic expressions. The symbols present in East Sumba tie weaving carry meanings rooted in the philosophy of East Sumba.
2. There are many motifs found in East Sumba tie weaving, including the Mamuli Motif, Horse (Njara) Motif, Chicken (Manu) Motif, Human (Tau) Motif, Shrimp (Kurang) Motif, Patola Motif, Fish Motif (Njiang), Crocodile Motif (Woya), Peacock Motif, Deer Motif (Ruha)
3. The motifs mentioned above originate from the worldview of the East Sumba community. For example, the Mamuli motif is considered a symbol to honor the status of women (feminine) and resembles the shape of a womb. The Horse (Njara) motif represents an important symbol in marriage customs and serves as a vehicle for the deceased in death rituals. The Chicken (Manu) motif symbolizes awareness, life, and protective leadership. The Human (Tau) motif is seen as a deterrent to evil and holds meanings of power. The Shrimp (Kurang) motif illustrates brotherhood, unity, and togetherness. The **Patola Motif** this motif is influenced by fabrics from India and usually symbolizes high social status and wealth. The **Fish Motif (Njiang)** Represents life in the sea, often associated with abundance and fertility. The **Crocodile Motif (Woya)** A symbol of strength and protection, as crocodiles are considered powerful and dangerous animals. The **Peacock Motif** Symbolizes beauty and luxury. The peacock is often associated with the beauty of nature. The **Deer Motif (Ruha)** Represents grace and agility. Deer can also be associated with speed and resilience.
4. The meanings used in East Sumba tie weaving express the perceptions and conceptions of the East Sumba community regarding the existence of ancestors as a supernatural force that determines the existence of life for them, both as individuals and as a society or ethnic group.
5. The symbols used in East Sumba tie weaving serve to remind people of events that occurred in the past, as well as to reflect the customs and cultural life of the communities in East Sumba.

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