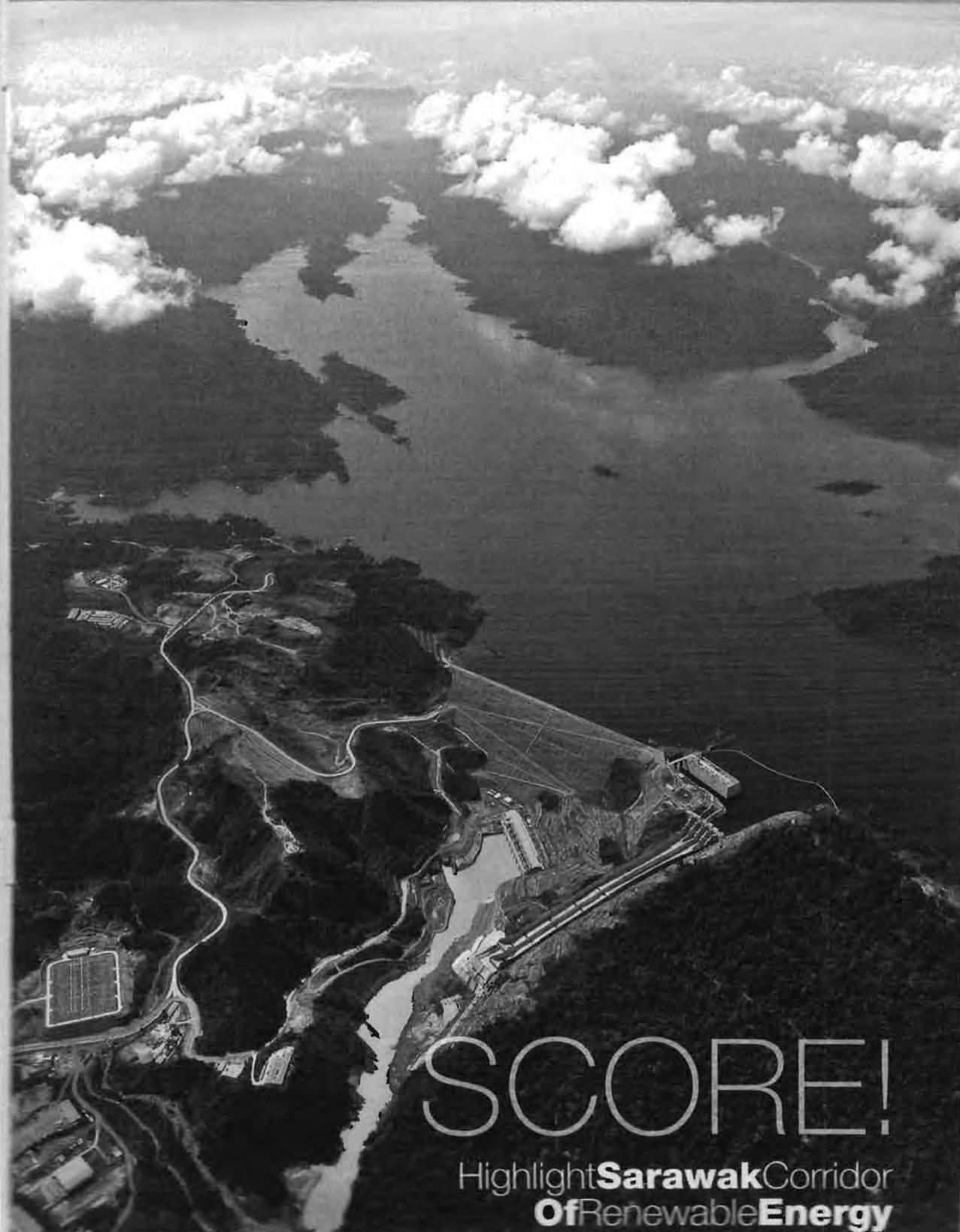


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Royal Terengganu Songket – Songket Length



Improving lives of **Songket** **Weavers** in Sarawak through the Production of Contemporary Songket



Royal Terengganu
Songket – Sampin

Dr. June Ngo Siok Kheng, Deputy Dean (Postgraduate & Research), Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Dr. June Ngo Siok Kheng is currently a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Textile Design majoring in Knitted Textiles from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australia, in 1992. Dr. Ngo was offered a tutorship position from UNIMAS in November 1994 and has been with the institution ever since. Upon receiving her Master Science degree in Textile Design majoring in Printed Textiles from the Philadelphia University in United States, from which she was honored with the President's Award in 1997 for being the best graduate student, she was then appointed as a lecturer and has been holding this position since then. Her PhD degree, which she obtained in 2008, was conferred by the University Science Malaysia (USM). Recently in 2010, she was appointed as Visiting Research Fellow for the University of New South Wales.

Songket, the glorious fabric created to delight Kings, now carries between its threads 2000 years of our heritage. Woven into the weft and warps is the grace and meticulous craftsmanship of generations of female artisans. As Malaysia develops and all things machine made and air-conditioned are revered, the small population of songket weavers are not only aging, but suffering the indignity of having to compete with mass produced songket from India and Pakistan. This not only pushes an already poor community further below the poverty line, it also signals the impending demise of the fine heritage of Malaysian handwoven songket.

This is where Dr. June Ngo began her Ph.D research entitled "Transforming the Traditional Malaysian Handwoven Songket into Contemporary Songket for Broader Apparel Usage" in 2003. The three and a half year study had Dr. Ngo finding ways to revolutionise traditional Malaysian songket into an innovative textile for a variety of uses beyond sampins and sarongs, using design and innovation to extend the market in many different directions.

An example of a Royal Terengganu Songket for Interior, handwoven by Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah's Weavers in Kuching, Sarawak.



PINK JAMBU™ Songtik Fables 2011 collection; Anticipation. A collaboration project between Royal Terengganu Songket and Pink Jambu.

Another strategy was to create the finest quality lightweight songket available for today's discerning consumer. Dr. Ngo experimented with various types of threads, loom adjustments and weaving techniques to improve the aesthetics, quality and speed of production.

Just as the study was completed, Dr. Ngo was approached by Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah (YTNZ) to help create a brand of high quality handmade songket for a broad range of uses. Dr. Ngo was appointed the Textile Design and Production Director at Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah in 2008.

She was tasked to ensure smooth production of high quality contemporary songket for broader usage (fashion, interior and corporate gifts) with the aim of penetrating the international market. The Foundation under the patronage of her Majesty Tuanku Nur Zahirah, the reigning Raja Permaisuri Agong of Malaysia, uses the brand Royal Terengganu Songket (RTS) to improve the lives of artisans in a sustainable way.

this sustain the life of the craft, it also provides young women from Kuala Terengganu and Kuching with full time employment and valuable skills.

To date, RTS have customised collaborative pieces with renowned Malaysian designers such as Dato Tom Abang Saufi, Melinda Looi, Jovian Mandagie, Tangoo, Pink Jambu and Datuk Radzuan Radziwill. Each designer worked very closely with Dr. Ngo to create truly unique masterpieces and the beautiful masterpieces are published in a book entitled "Songket Revolution". "Songket Revolution" is a coffee table book on songket published by YTNZ in March 2009 to raise awareness on songket, its history and evolution, nation-wide and internationally.

Dr. Ngo was also involved in the PINK JAMBU Songtik™, a collaboration project between Royal Terengganu Songket and Pink Jambu. PINK JAMBU Songtik™ came to life in 2010 with a debut collection of 42 shawls that represented the first step towards marrying the two quintessential Malay high crafts of



Marina Ibrahim (CEO and Design Director of Pink Jambu) and Dr. Ngo embarked on the next chapter of their collaboration to produce the latest collection of Songtik shawls, showcasing the technical innovation to merge the two techniques of batik-painting and songket-weaving on a single surface. Stories of love, relationship and wellbeing take centre-stage in the PINK JAMBU™ Songtik Fables 2011 collection. From anticipation to trust, tales of life's journey illustrate the twelve exclusive shawls that form the core of this innovative and exciting collection made possible by a collaboration between Pink Jambu and Royal Terengganu Songket. The result of their collaboration is the perfect union of the two ancient crafts to create unprecedented designs that are set to stir excitement in the world of Asian heritage textiles.

Dr. June Ngo continues to spread her knowledge and expertise to the younger generation of designers through her teachings at UNIMAS and the brand Royal Terengganu Songket, continues to evolve in the Foundation's effort to provide better livelihoods to artisans.

Dr. June Ngo in discussion with Ramsukmawati Binti Ramlee, Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah's weaver in Kuching, Sarawak.



Dr. June Ngo with Tengku Marina Ibrahim at the launch of PINK JAMBU™ Songtik Fables 2011 collection at Shangri-La Hotel, Kuala Lumpur.

The Foundation supported Dr. Ngo's work with songket weavers, textile designers, marketing, PR, equipment and funds to carry on her research while the fine songket created was being sold under the brand Royal Terengganu Songket.

Changing the demographic, the Foundation hired young weavers to be trained from scratch by Dr. Ngo and master weavers. Not only does

songket and batik. In this collection, the designers experimented with contemporary yarns, colour palettes, prints and motifs to create soft and plush shawls. The Songtik 2010 collection is distinctive in that the shawls are reversible to showcase the beauty of wearing batik and songket interchangeably.

Following the success of the 2010 collection, designers Tengku

