

# SARAWAK PUA KUMBU: AESTHETICS LIES IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

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**Abstract:** The beauty of Pua Kumbu is not merely a cultural expression but also represents the wealth of information to pass from one generation to another. The art of creating Pua Kumbu design motifs is based on the body of knowledge gathered through collective memory, and the conservation of Pua Kumbu's knowledge and history. The aesthetic perception stimuli from the audiences are complicated cognitive processes. Hence, this study aims to measure the aesthetic perception of 400 participants about design motifs applied on the cloth according to their gender and background using ARS-Revised questionnaire. The findings revealed that female participants exhibited a greater knowledge of Pua Kumbu compared to their male counterparts. Participants from Sarawak perceived higher in cognitive stimulation, knowledge, and self-reference which indicated that they were more likely to be knowledgeable about Pua Kumbu. Participants from Sabah demonstrated the lowest in both cognitive stimulation and expertise despite Sabah being situated in the same region as Sarawak; Borneo. Gender and background of the participants are concluded to exert significant influence on the knowledge in Pua Kumbu design motifs. Knowledge of Pua Kumbu is crucial for the appreciation of aesthetic in preserving the culture and heritage of Sarawak, Malaysia at its best.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic Perception, ARS instrument, Culture, Iban, Pua Kumbu. Survey

## 1. Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that suggests people are interrelated to owned customs and beliefs, which is compatible to Pua Kumbu and the Iban community. This textile is made by employing the woven weaving technique which uses cotton as the main component. In the past, the weavers were solely women. Thus, the design motifs selection was aspired by women and this made the design motifs sacred due to the fact that the weavers were seen as the chosen one, talented and gifted. It is believed that the humanoid figures or anthromorphs (*engkaramba*) motifs could be merely weaved by chiefs' wives and daughters. In general work to date, the figure of *engkaramba* is the representation of deities of the Iban animistic belief. It also serves as a talisman to protect the wearer from danger as well as to ensure a bountiful harvest for the season. Besides the anthromorphs motifs, some other motifs encompassed are the representations of animals, plants and Iban daily activities, which are either complicated or simplified design motifs. The intangible cultural knowledge of Pua Kumbu is essential, not only for the Iban community but also to others, although it seems difficult to understand the hidden meaning without having the art knowledge on the particular subject.