



INDONESIAN GOLD: GLORY, GLAMOUR AND GRANDEUR

By Dr Navamintr Tom Vitayakul

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Precious gold, representing high standard of excellence, is used in jewelry, awards, medals, trophies and other decorative objects as well as in textiles. Gold symbolizes high status, wisdom of aging and fruition. Among the diverse textiles of Indonesia, fabrics woven or decorated with gold and silver threads, mainly from Sumatra, are stunningly beautiful. Hand woven from cotton, silk, or even wood fibers, these ornate gold cloths are the epitome of remarkable aesthetics. The Sumatran silks are glowing and rich with scarlet reds and shining gold. The motifs are created in the ikat technique and some are woven with or decorated by using metallic threads resulting in sumptuous *Songket* textiles among various types. These luxurious fabrics originally required a certain amount of real gold to be made into gold threads.

According to Indonesian tradition, golden *Songket* is often associated with the glory of the Srivijaya Kingdom, which was prosperous and victorious from the 7th to the 14th centuries in Sumatra. These elaborate textiles originated from Lampung, Palembang and Minangkabau in Sumatra while some are from Bali. These pieces are crafted into heavily woven or embroidered

women's sarongs, men's and women's sarongs with gold threads, and silk ikat *selendang* or shawls and headscarves trimmed in gold that women take pride wearing. Dated from the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century and the present, the gold cloths of Sumatra such as *Songkets* move beyond ceremonial contexts to become a marketable commodity, as heritage textiles and collectibles. With or without gold embellishment, they are the evidences of high levels in creativity, technical brilliance, weaving excellence, and the artistic resilience.

Dr Navamintr Tom Vitayakul works in his family's hospitality businesses of the Rose Hotel Bangkok, the Rose Residence and Ruen Urai Fine Thai Cuisine. He is a Council Member at The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage, and has contributed to Thai and English magazines on art, travel and lifestyle and had two columns in Bangkok 101. Tom is a member of the Thai Textile Society Committee as the Program Liaison Chairperson, and has written articles in previous newsletters. A collector, he spoke at two Collector's Corner programs on "Under the Spell of Silk: Textiles from Lower Isaan and Cambodia" and on "Textiles from Eastern States of India: West Bengal, Odisha, Tripura and Assam."

Venue: The Siam Society
4th floor lecture room
31 Asoke Montri Road (Sukhumvit Soi 21)

Time: 10:00 am

Thai Textile Society Members: **B300** Non-members: **B400** Students: **B100**

For information and reservation contact bkk.tts@gmail.com

