

## Batik Java – A Prayer Behind Every Stroke\*

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### ABSTRACT

Batik Java is not just a patterned cloth sheet, Batik Java always has a name, philosophy and usability. Batik Java's name indicated by its motif identity or its *isen*. The meaning of Batik Java's philosophy can be detected from its motif. Its pattern can show strata in the society. Some pattern can be only being used by specific society, for example *parang* pattern is only for nobleman society. For example, Batik Java patterns that emulate the life of chickens and the character of bamboo trees, prayer for the prosperity, hope of getting a lot of catch while fishing and a language of communication between men and women. As for the usability, batik Java has many functions such as long fabric which are mostly worn by women, sarong worn by men (although most people also use sarong for women), carrying cloth, shawl, *udeng* as a male head covering and so on. The method used in this research is ethnography study through live in and direct observation with the batik Java's craftsmen and batik Java's users in several centers in East Java. This research summarizes and documented the use of batik in Javanese society in general to gain knowledge about batik Java is not just a fashion, but more than that batik Java has a name, philosophy and usability that is specific to Javanese society. Batik Java inherent with the culture of Javanese society because batik used in everyday life starting from the preparation of birth, birth, maturity, marriage to death.

**Type of Paper:** Empirical/ Review

**Keywords:** batik, function, structure and philosophy

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### 1. Introduction

Javanese people are a dominant ethnic group who live on the island of Java-Indonesia. Their culture and society have grown as one of the great former kingdoms in Indonesia. Some researchers found out that batik Java has been going on with Javanese people for a long time. Since the XII century, batik Java has emerged in the historical record of Javanese society. Factually in the book *The History of Java*, Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1817 recorded in his journey that he found *canting* in 1811 and Javanese aristocrats who wore Batik Java as clothing. (Raffles, 2018)

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For example, Tuban city, which is part of Java island, has batik culture that has lasted a very long time and is still ongoing today. The use of point technique, which is a very simple technique, is still used as the main basis for Batik Java up to these day. Besides the subtlety of making batik Java, is not produced from the *canting* character but the effect caused from ability to form lines. This technique proves an old-fashioned technique that is caused due to the limitations of technology in making batik Java. The use of natural colors that are still used today is a legacy of coloring techniques that are still running today. *Gedog*, a woven fabric product from Tuban city, is one of the sample that its process from the raw material to natural coloring produced in this place. The processes that run from raw material to natural coloring are all produced in this place, one of which is a woven fabric product called 'gedog'. Batik Java dye from *indigofera*, still planted and processed in this place. Both of these things have become a heritage in this place, and until now the area has been the largest *indigofera* natural coloring paste supplier.

Overall, Batik Java is divided into two regions / characters, namely inland and coastal batik. Inland Batik Java is from the kingdom of Yogyakarta and Surakarta region. Coastal Batik is batik that developed along the coast of the northern islands of Java up to Madura. Both of these batik Java have characteristics that can be distinguished in terms of coloring, motifs and patterns. Inland batik Java has the dominant brown color called *Sogan*. While coastal batik Java has more variety of colors such as red, green, blue, yellow, purple, and so on. In terms of structure, inland batik Java motifs has a structured and grip character. While coastal batik Java is more free in expressing its motifs.

This paper will reveal many things about Batik of East Java. East Java is a province on the eastern island of Java. The people of East Java have a different batik Java culture when compared to Batik Java in general. Batik of East Java give a unique character in the expression, because it is more spontaneous character and courage in expression. Batik of East Java has a different language from the language of Batik of Central Java. This is due to the different characters and cultural geography of the people. The East Javanese are egalitarian and bluntly society, expressed in Batik of East Java. The patterns and motifs that are not well structured are expressions of the character of strong society. Broadly speaking, one of the differences between batik in East Java and Central Java is its character. Batik in East Java is more expressive, as is and not well structured in arranging the batik patterns. However, visually, East Java batik feels more contrasting and bold expression of color, as well as in the scale of the motifs and composition.

## 2. Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative research which combines literature study and ethnographic research conducted to artisans scattered throughout East Java. The literature is done by exploring books and existing journals, as well as some writings that still exist. The ethnography research is done by living together with them to get information about many things that are not revealed in their language every day. The locations of this research is done in East Java area, include Banyuwangi, Pamekasan, Bangkalan, Tuban, Trenggalek, Tulungagung, Sidoarjo. Both approaches are used to obtain data accuracy that will be used in this study.

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1 Batik Java Structure in General

Throughout the lives of Javanese people, batik Java cannot be separated from the daily lives of its people. Batik Java is not just a piece of cloth for fashion. Batik Java is made with a spiritual struggle, so that batik Java is a hope, prayer, advice contained in a batik Java artwork. Each sheet of classical Batik Java, always has a name, usability and philosophy (interview with Rifai, 2012). Unlike the batik in general which is owned by the world community, or the general public outside Indonesia, batik is just a fashion product that can be used by anyone and at any time. Batik Java has usability and limitations for users so that every batik Java cannot be used by just anyone.

Before the XV century, batik Java was only used for Javanese kings. Even up to the beginning of the XX century, batik Java was still an art product that was still very limited in use. For example, batik Java that is used by Javanese kings, is not allowed to be used by the general public. This rule is so strict that people do not dare to use it. This is one of the reasons why there is the emergence of new batik with different genres and patterns. *Sudagaran* Batik, is one of the genres of batik made for the benefit of wealthy merchants, because they are not permitted to use classic batik that belonging to the nobles. The standard in the use of batik Java has many kinds, for example people will not feel comfortable when using batik Java every day that is devoted to attending grief. Javanese and Chinese *peranakans* have batik types that are only used for grief. Batik created for employees also will not be used by noblemen. Batik for special rituals, definitely will not be used by just anyone.

In addition to special needs batik also has many functions, including for everyday clothes (long cloth and sarong), baby and goods carrier, headband, and so on. Each has a different form, structure and motif. Long cloth (see figure 1) is commonly used by women and men. The long fabric structure has a length of 2.5 *kacu* (2.5 x the width of the fabric). This long cloth, usually have plain cloth (*ilat*) or with *tumpal pucuk* at the end. *Tumpal pucuk* have large and small size. The triangle-shaped in *tumpal pucuk* has the function as a suffix. Long cloth with this type of structure, does not require *wiru* (fabric folds) in its use. (Roojen, 2001)



Figure 1. Structure of Long Cloth

Sarong (see figure 2) has a size 2 x the width of the fabric. Sarong has circular shape that does not break. The structure of the sarong consists of a body and a *tumpal*. The type of *tumpal* is a differentiator between the right and left. East Java people have a special habit in using sarong which is the *tumpal* is always at the back. *Tumpal* has a different motif and color when compared to the body of the cloth. The character of the *tumpal* is always in contrast when compared to the body of the cloth. If the body motifs are complicated and dark, then the *tumpal* motif will be simple and have a bright color. Conversely, if the body with a bright color with a simple motif, then the *tumpal* will be done with subtler motif and in a dark color. In the inland, sarong is only used for men. It is something that is uncommon if sarong is used by woman. On the contrary, in the coastal areas and Madura, sarong is commonly used for women. This is why in coastal areas or Madura in particular, sarong is still widely made today.

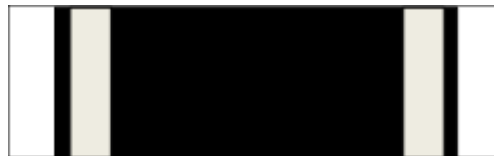


Figure 2. Structure of Sarong

The headband or *udeng* (see figure 3) consists of 1 x the width of the fabric. Headbands or *udeng*, is use as head coverings in various forms of how to use them. *Udeng* in each region has its own character. Each cultural region in East Java has a different form and method of use. Broadly speaking, the use of a cover consists of two types, which is open and closed. *Udeng* has a special structure, that is a square with a void in the inside part. This void is called *blumbangan* (pool), and on the edges are carved motifs with flame tongues symbols. (Tulistyantoro, 2017).

Figure 3. Structure of *Udeng*

While the *gendongan* / a sling (see figure 4) has a longer shape. *Gendongan* has a special structure and type of motif that is not the same as other types of fabric motifs. *Gendongan* structure has symmetrical motifs at both ends. The structure consists of bodies, *papan* (empty square) and edges. The motif used always emphasizes to its usability, which is protecting the baby from all dangers. There are two types of *gendongan*, namely *gendongan* with the Chinese *peranakan* / *encim* style and *gendongan* with a local motif.

Figure 4. Structure of *Gendongan*

### 3.2 Batik Java Types and Its Function

Batik Java in the life of Javanese people is a culture. From birth to death, batik Java attached with the society. Various kinds of batik are used for swaddling (*bedong*), diaper (*popok*), or sling (*gendongan*), long cloth, sarong, headgear or *udeng* and finally for covering the corpse (Association of Batik Fabric Lovers and Weaving, 1990).

*Bedong* is the first form of batik Java cloth for newborn babies. *Bedong* usually uses a small cloth deliberately prepared to warm the baby from birth up to several months old. Besides *bedong*, the second form of batik Java cloth is *popok* / baby diaper. *Popok* is used batik Java that had been used and then cut into pieces. Most people ask “Why use batik Java that has been used?”. It is because batik Java cloth that has been used has a soft character when compared to batik Java cloth that is still new. This is where in the life cycle of the Javanese people, they began to come into contact with batik Java for the first time. The transition from the womb to the outside world is mediated by *bedong* (which means that the baby is warmed with batik Java

cloth). So that the soft touch of Batik Java is still imprinted until the Java man is big and mature. The long cloth that has been used is then cut into pieces and made a diaper for newborns.

A sling is a tradition in some families. *Gendongan* as a baby sling in Javanese culture is an inseparable part. In addition to carrying, this batik Java also serves to swing the baby when going to sleep. The warmth of mother and child is mediated by *gendongan*. *Gendongan* has a special shape, size, structure and motif. In Madura the *gendongan* is a gift from parents when they have grandchildren. There are even families that have a *gendongan* that is kept hereditary. There are two types of *gendongan*, namely *gendongan* Batik Java for inland and *gendongan* Batik Java for coastal area. Both have the same function but different appearance. The *gendongan* of the inland batik, is the *gendongan* made with the dominance of the *sogan* / brown color. The motif used is tendrils with little bird composition and both have the meaning of a symbol of prosperity. A piece of *gendongan* contains a message, a prayer or hope that the child being held is always happy and does not lack anything. In contrast to the *gendongan* of the coastal or *encim* / Chinese *peranakan*, the color of the characters is bright and the motifs are typical. Motifs used in the form of mythological animals such as dragons, phoenix's / *hong* birds, lions, venomous animals (centipedes / thousand feet, scorpion), and Chinese characters that sound happy. Each of these motifs has one hope / prayer so that the one being carried is protected and strong from spiritual threats.

Long cloth of Batik Java that are better known are also called *sewek*, *samper*, *jarik*, or *sayut*. Long cloth has a function to cover the bottom. The main function is such a pant for man and a long skirt for woman. In rituals, both adult men and women are used these *sewek*. It has great variety of use such as for everyday clothing and certain ceremonies (weddings, circumcision ceremony and others). The motifs used are also have enormous variations. The motifs are adapted based on its usability, ranging from childhood, adolescence, adulthood, parents to death. Batik Java motifs for teenagers usually show cheerfulness. For the adults, batik Java is used for proposings, weddings, post-wedding, marrying off their child, pregnancy, and death (for mourning and body coverings). The motifs in *sewek* for coastal area and Madura, usually using *tumpal pucuk* for the edges with small and wide sizes. East Javanese people in using batik Java usually use this *tumpal pucuk* because they are rarely use *wiru* or folds of fabric.

Sarong of Batik Java is a fabric that is sewn in a circle and is endless. This sarong of Batik Java can be used for both men and women. Sarong used by men only in the inland society. While the coastal and Madura society, sarong is also widely used for women. The use and manufacture of sarong for the people of East Java, is adjusted to the needs and habits of the people. They always use a sarong with *tumpal* on the back (not on the front of the body). The *tumpal* of sarong from Tulungagung always has a darker color compared to the body of a sarong. The use of dark color on the *tumpal* is expected to last longer not fade quickly compared to other parts. All of this is because while wearing sarong, the position *tumpal* is on the back and often use for sitting. *Tumpal* in Batik Java sarong for inland society, does not really have a special shape and more to the difference of color (usually darker) (interview with Sodik, 2013). While in coastal areas and Madura, *Tumpal* has many variations such as the diagonal line *tumpal* or right-angled, which in principle the contrast in shape, color, motif, motif density. Headgear or *udeng*, identical to men. *Udeng* has many different forms. In principle, *udeng* consist of two types, which is covering the head full and only part of it. Besides being used for daily, *udeng* also used for certain ceremonies. Any ceremonial *udeng* is still used and not being taken off (Kalinggo, 2002).

Corpse or *lurub* is a term that is very scary to discuss, but this is Batik Java as part of a life cycle ritual. For some society, death is not a scary thing, because death is only physical separation from the spirit, while the spirit enters the spirit realm. The ritual of death in Javanese society is a ritual of delivering the spirit into the spirit realm. Therefore, both the living and the dead will be treated specifically. For those who have died will be subject to a cover called

*lurub*. This fabric of *lurub* has a special motif. The motif used is called *slobok*. This tradition is different from the Chinese *peranakan* society. Because they have a tradition of using the color of a sarong for the ritual of death. At the time of the deceased corpse, they will use the color blue, while at the departure of the corpse they will use the green color which means prosperity, peace.

### 3.3 Prayer and Hope in Batik Java

Based on the fact above, batik Java is a result of a person's struggle which is then trusted and obeyed by its users. The meaning in batik Java is not just a piece of cloth for fashion purposes, but it has a very noble value. Some examples of batik that have spiritual value are for proposings, *satrio manah*, *sabet's* chain; for marriage: *per keper*, crown, *kangkung setingkes*, *sigar tahu*, *topa*, daily life, *ring pering*, *tasek melaya* etc. (Tulistyantoro, 2012).

Batik Satrio Manah, Sabet Chain has uses to propose. This batik Java is given by the bridegroom when applying for a woman. Both of the batik for the bride, have a chain-shaped motif. The chain is interpreted as a binding between couples who will get married. Each has special motif elements (besides chains) such as birds / chickens, wings / *lar*, and houses / *meru*. (see Figure 5.) (interview with Faiqoh, 2011; interview with Hindun, 2012).



Figure 5. *Sabet Rante* Motif

*Per Geper* or butterfly motifs are motifs that describe happiness (Knight, 2005). While crowns, *Seroja* Flower, *Sigar Tahu* and *Topa* are batik Java motifs with diagonal basic shapes. This composition expresses the philosophy of four points of the compass. The composition of the motifs is in the form of opposite compositions such as birds / *lar*, flowers and houses. All of this is the harmony between the two elements of conflict known as dualism. The goal is harmonization with the center in the middle. This cloth is used for wedding rituals (see Figure 6) (interview with Painah, 2009).



Figure 6. *Per Geper* / Butterfly and crown Motif

*Kangkung Setingkes* motif (*kangkung* flower bouquet) is a Banyuwangi batik which is a unifying symbol between two families of brides and grooms. For Javanese marriage is not just a union of a man and woman, but between two large families of brides and grooms (see Figure 7.) (interview with Foni, 2013)



Figure 7. *Kangkung Setingkes* Motif

*Tase Malaya* is a motif of Tanjung Bumi Madura, which depicts the waiting of a mother whose husband has sailed away. While waiting for her husband to come they prayed in expression in batik. *Tase Malaya* is a picture of sea water with the expression of marine life (interview with Myskia, 2011).

The *Reng Pereng* motif is a batik Java motif in the form of a bamboo clump with a pair of chickens in it. This motif is very common throughout Java. This motif is in the form of advice about life for newlywed couples. The contents advice of this motif, is to learn to live like a bamboo tree that can live in all weather and soil. Even a dried bamboo still can stay alive. Bamboo can only be dead if it is removed from the soil. A pair of chickens is a saying that a living person should learn like a chicken who always scavenges for life so the chicken can live. This diligent nature from the chicken is taught to young couples to always work diligently so that they can live in prosperity (interview with Faiqoh, 2011).



Figure 8. *Reng Pereng / Pring Sedapur* Motif

#### 4. Conclusion

Batik Java is not a piece of cloth just to fulfill fashion needs. Batik Java has a high spiritual value, which contains prayer, hope, advice and so on for daily life. Batik Java is inseparable from the life cycle of the Javanese society from birth to death. Every motif talks about life. In addition, this Batik Java has a structure in accordance with the functions and its usability. Batik Java also has a name, usability and philosophy. This is the batik Java that distinguishes it from other batik outside Indonesia. Batik Java is batik that is second to none when compared to batik outside Indonesia. These batik Java research still finds many motifs that have not been revealed as many people know. Therefore, research on batik Java motifs in provinces areas is needed to develop regional batik Java motifs.



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