

Batik From Itangible Cultural Heritage to Nation Identity

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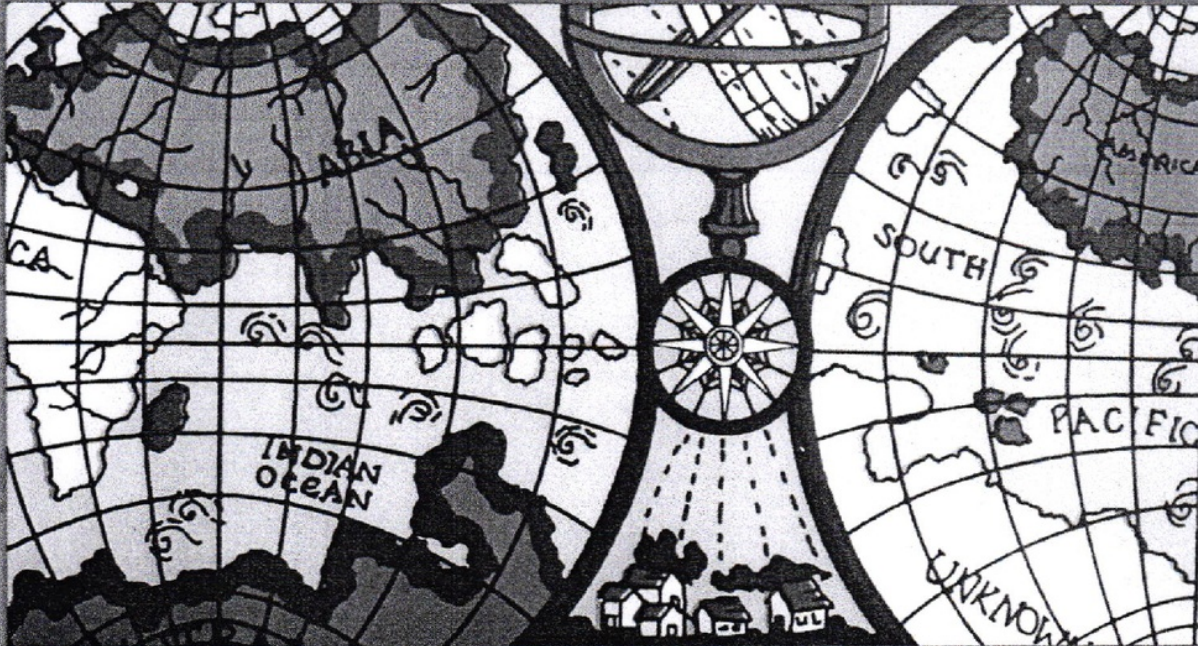
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**TRANSFORMING SOCIETIES:
CONTESTATIONS AND CONVERGENCES
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Bak : From Intangible Cultural Heritage to National Identity

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Introduction

Batik is a form of artwork which has high aesthetic value as a part of Indonesian culture, and has been designated as a world cultural heritage art form by UNESCO (on October 2, 2009). This date is set as National Batik day by the Government of Indonesia through Presidential Decree No. 33 passed in 2009. The preservation of Batik was then strengthened by the enactment of Law No. 11 year 2010 on cultural heritage. The government aims to strengthen the existence of Batik in Indonesia because Batik has been used in the country since the Hindu kingdom era, as shown by the motifs showing a Kartarajasa statue of the Majapahit King (1216-1231)¹⁴⁴. The skills required to make batik have been passed down from Indonesian ancestors, from generation to generation. With regard to this, Batik has evolved in terms of its techniques, motifs and usage, due to interactions with other countries such as India and China, European countries, and also Islam. This interaction has led to the cultural acculturation of Batik motives. Chinese culture is indicated by the motif of lions and European culture is indicated by the motif of flowers.¹⁴⁵

In Indonesian society, Batik not only functions to cover the body or to protect from heat and cold, it also serves as a social and religious cloth.¹⁴⁶ As well as being used to make traditional clothes, Batik is also used in a variety of life-cycle rituals, and the motifs are used to show the social status of the people who wear it. However, Batik has been neglected by young people over the years because it is considered impractical and old-fashioned. Young people prefer to wear Western clothes which are considered to be more modern.

Batik is part of the ancestral heritage of Indonesia and is full of philosophical meaning, so should be preserved. Recognition from the international community through the work of UNESCO should be appreciated, with the tradition passed on to the younger generation so that they will fully inherit its value. At present, young people don't know the techniques used to make, colour and drawing Batik, but they should receive the full inheritance i.e. the meanings behind the process of making Batik. With regard to this, there should be a policy to introduce Batik through formal education, at schools, as well as through training outside of schools. This effort would aim to preserve Batik; preservation as stated in the Cultural Heritage Act means not only to protect, but also to utilize and develop.

In reference to the explanation above, this paper discusses the influences of foreign culture on traditional Batik and the changes in the functions of Batik as a traditional art which has a meaning

¹⁴⁴ Hoop, Van Der. (1949) *Ragam-Ragam Perhiasan Indonesia*. Koninklijk Bataviasch: Genootschap van Kunsten et Wetenschappen, p. 81.

¹⁴⁵ Darmo. (1965). *Sinjang Parang Rusak Ingkang Kathah Gadhah Dongeng*. Madjalah Djaja Baja No. 18 Th. XIX Januari 1965, p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ LRKN. (1984). *Kapita Selekta Manifestasi Budaya Indonesia*. Bandung: Foreign Affair Department and Alumni, p. 111.

and philosophy, and which has become a style of dress which displays national identity. To know the changes in the functions of Batik, this study employs historical methods and is supported by an anthropologic approach focused on acculturation and socio-cultural elements. At first, the use of Batik was very limited, but then developed with many variations, so that Batik now can be used for a variety of purposes, such as everyday clothing, home accessories and souvenirs.

Tradio nal Bak : The Beginning and its Development

When the Indonesian people began using Batik is somewhat difficult to track. However, Batik was recognized as a technique for drawing on and coloring fabrics during the ancient kingdom era in Indonesia. There are two different views about the origins of Batik. First, G.P. Rouffaer states that Indonesian Batik derives from India, brought by traders in the 4th century.¹⁴⁷ In line with Rouffaer, Fruin Mess states that Pasundan society imitated Hindu people in making Batik.¹⁴⁸ Second, Brandes says that Batik does not derive from Hindu but from Java. Also, it belongs to the culture which involves a process of learning.¹⁴⁹ In line with Brandes, Sutjipto Wirjosuprpto says that Batik had been well known before Indian culture entered Indonesia.¹⁵⁰

Interactions with other nations have enriched the tradition of Batik especially in the development of pre-existing motifs. The influence of Indian culture in particular can be seen in the use of cindhe motifs, both in the Surakarta and Yogyakarta Palaces. In reference to those views, it is believed that Batik originates from Indonesia. This is supported by the fact that Batik is also recognized by a society which did not have any influence from Indian culture, while Chanting (e pen- like tool for making batik) is only recognized in Indonesia.

In the palace of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, the Batik motifs show the social class of the people who wore the cloth. Also, certain motifs could not be worn by commoner groups (mostly men). At first, there was no prohibition from wearing certain Batik motifs in society, but people were aware of their position and did not dare to wear a fabric with motifs used by the King or nobility. A ban was issued after an announcement from the Sunan of Surakarta in 1769. Later, a similar ban was issued by Sultan HB VIII in Yogyakarta. The forbidden motifs included Sawat, Parang Rusak, Cemukiran, Cement, Udang Riris, Rujak Senthe and Garudha Ageng.¹⁵¹ Indonesian Batik can be understood as the process of drawing and coloring with a *liddy* technique, using candles.¹⁵² The process begins with drawing Batik patterns and pouring melted wax by following the pattern with a tool called *canting* (a pen-like tool). A *canting* is made of copper and has one or more holes of various sizes through which melted wax can flow and attach itself to the cloth.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ G.P. Rouffaer and H.H. Joynboll. (1914). *De Batikkunst in Nederlandsch-Indie en Haar Geschiedenis*. Utrecht: A Gosthookte, p. 36

¹⁴⁸ Fruin Mess. (1921). Terj. S.M. Latief. *Sedjarah Tanah Djawi Jilid I*. Weltevreden: Balai Pustaka, p. 12.

¹⁴⁹ J. Brandes. (1889). Een Jayapatta of Acte van eene Rechterlijke Uitspraak van Caka 849. *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-Land en Volkkunde*, Vol. XXXII, p. 125.

¹⁵⁰ Sutjipto Wirjosuprpto. (1964). Bunga Rampai Sedjarah Budaja Indonesia. Djakarta: Djembatan, p. 64.

¹⁵¹ Sumartono. (2009). Seni Rupa dan Desain in Mukhlis PaEni (Ed), *Sejarah Kebudayaan Indonesia*. Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, p. 71. See Nunung. Nurdjanti. Batik Yogyakarta Abad XX: Fungsi dan Perkembangannya in M. Agus Burhan (Ed). (2006). *Jaringan Makna Tradisi Hingga Kontemporer*. Yogyakarta: BP-ISI, p. 125.

¹⁵² Clair Holt. (1967). *Art in Indonesia Continuity and Change*, Ithaca: University Press, p. 149.

¹⁵³ J.E. Jasper and Mas Pirngadie. (1916). *De Batikkunst* Gravenhage: Kunstddrukkerij v/h Mouton, and Co, p.16



Figure 1: A Canning, Candle and Small Pan on a Stove

The cloth which has been drawn with the melted wax is called *rengrengan*, which is then colored.¹⁵⁴ Most of these activities are done by women because women are generally more anxious to do things that are subtle and complex. After the Batik process is complete, the next step is coloring and *nglorod*.¹⁵⁵



Figure 2: A Woman Drawing Batik

The next stage is generally done by men, because it requires a lot of energy, especially the coloring process which uses natural materials such as wood and leaves. To achieve the desired color, the process must be repeated many times. The above process can be repeated many times to add another color. If the process is done with care and full accuracy, the Batik cloth can meet the minimum quality.

The process of making Batik, which is performed carefully, is intended to achieve perfect results and reduce the risk of failure. It was supported by the condition in the past that the fabric material was rare and very expensive during Dutch colonial rule and the Japanese occupation. Therefore, not everyone could afford to have and wear Batik cloth; only the nobility and rich people would wear it.

Until the late 18th century, what is certainly meant by Batik is written as *Batik* because the tool used to draw the pattern on the fabric is a *canting*. However, at the start of the 19th century, around 1815, a stamp made of copper was invented. This tool replaced the functions of the *canting*. The stamp

¹⁵⁴ S. Soetopo. (1956). *Batik, Batik magazine*, No. 9, p.29.

¹⁵⁵ *Nglorod*, *Nglorod*, a term in the batik process which means removing or lowering. In this context, it is releasing wax from fabric by entering into boiling water until the wax melts into fabric.

seal is dipped into the wax that has been heated and melted, then it is printed on to cloth. Batik produced using this technique is called printed Batik.¹⁵⁶ The use of a stamp in that era was an innovation because the time needed was less than using the *canting*. Therefore, in respect of quantity, the amount of Batik able to be produced using the stamp-seal technique was more than previously. In 1966, a combination between a stamp-seal and a *canting* Batik was developed. The first process used the stamp-seal, then the *isen-isen* ('filler') used a *canting*. A year later (1967), artists developed Batik painting, using a small brush to sweep the wax across the cloth. Batik produced after this is recognized as modern batik or freestyle batik. Each batik technique certainly has its advantages and drawbacks, but all of them remain in use and complement each other, so there is a diversity of Indonesian Batik.

Basic Motifs and Their Meaning

Motifs produced by Batik artists are a reflection of the culture in which they are made. Therefore, each region has its own characteristics that are typical. In Indonesia, there are many areas that have become centers of Batik, but they generally can be divided into Batik *Vorstenlanden* (Yogyakarta and Surakarta) and Batik *Pesisiran*. Yogyakarta and Surakarta are known as the cultural centers of Java. Batik produced in this area generally undergoes a very delicate process. The decorative pattern tends to be symbolic and philosophical. Therefore, this type of Batik is known as classic Batik.

Batik that is produced outside the area of *Vorstenlanden* is called Batik *Pesisiran*. *Pesisir* literally means beaches; therefore, Batik *Pesisiran* means Batik from the coastal areas. The areas that produce Batik in Yogyakarta and Surakarta are coastal areas such as Cirebon, Pekalongan, Lasem in Java, Palembang in Sumatra, Makassar on Sulawesi Island, and Banjarmasin in Kalimantan. The many centers of Batik result in different motifs which show the special characteristics of each area. Special characteristics are also displayed through the colors used in each region, as well as differences in the colors displayed on the Batik from Yogyakarta and Surakarta.

A motif is basically an image consisting of lines and points displayed on each piece of Batik. The motifs certainly consistent with the concept of beauty within the community where it was produced. Motifs can be iconic (like the characteristics of Batik *Pesisiran*), or can also be symbolic (like classical Batik).¹⁵⁷ Generally, motifs can be divided into two, namely geometric and non-geometric patterns.

Geometric Patterns

Lereng Pattern

The word *lereng* derives from the word *pereng* that means oblique land. *Lereng* is the pattern which has oblique lines. Those lines are then filled by ornaments, such as various *Parang* ornaments. *Parang* literally means sharp weapon, and also derives from the word *prang* which means war. The war is between the person who wears batik and their passion, for example, *Parang Rusak* means the war against everything that destroys life, while *Parang Curiga* means the war against distrustfulness,

¹⁵⁶ *Op.Cit.* LRKN, p. 112 see also Fera Ratyaningrum, Batik Indonesia Sebagai Bagian Kekayaan Budaya Asia in *Seminar, and Pameran Nasional Batik: Empowering Batik: Dalam Membangun Karakter Budaya Bangsa*. (Yogyakarta: Crafts Arts Education Study Program, Crafts Arts Education Department, FBS-UNY, 19 May 2011), p. 54.

¹⁵⁷ Purwanto. Revitalisasi Nilai Pendidikan Seni Batik in *Seminar, and National exhibition of Batik: Empowering Batik: Dalam Membangun Karakter Budaya Bangsa*. (Yogyakarta: Crafts Arts Education Study Program, Crafts Arts Education Department, FBS-UNY, 2011), p. 93

so that the user is expected to be free of suspicion by submitting his fate to God.

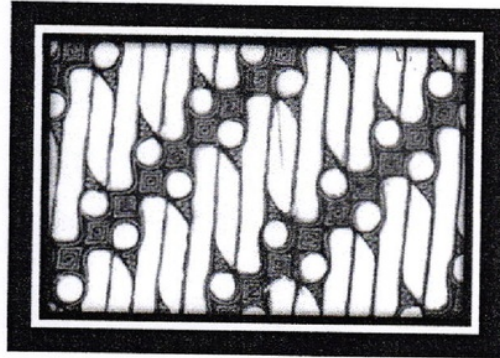


Figure 3: *Lereng Pae rn (Parang Rusak)*

Ceplok Pae rn

This pattern is basically arranged according to a rectangular plane, a circle and a combination of the two. The filler of the plane is commonly the stylization of pieces of fruit or flowers. The pattern of the siwalan fruit forms four circles in one rectangular plane, and is called a *kawung* pattern, while the pattern of the flower is called *truntum*. *Truntum* derives from the words *runtung* and *tuntum*. *Runtung* means 'together', while *truntum* means 'growing and developing'. Therefore, the cloth with a *truntum* pattern is often worn by parents whose son is celebrating his wedding. In this case, *truntum* means that the bride and groom will live together peacefully and their love will keep on growing and developing.

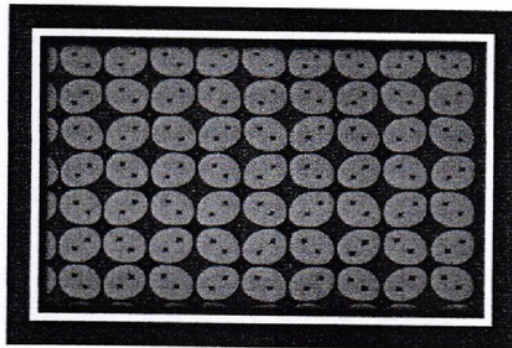


Figure 4: *Kawung Pae rn*

Banji Pae rn

The word *Banji* derives from Chinese, especially from the Hokkien dialect, and means 'prosperity, happiness and long life'. This pattern is characterized by cross-lines which form a 90 degree shape (see Figure 3). This pattern is also called a *swastika* pattern. The word *swastika* derives from Sanskrit, and means 'good'. This motif is also called *Balok Bosok*, *AtauKerton* in Java. Also, this pattern in Java is completed with other ornaments such as flowers and leaves as the fillers (*isen-isen*).

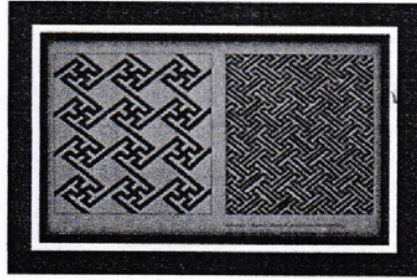


Figure 5: *Banji Pae rn*

Nik Pae rn

This pattern imitates the pattern of woven cloth or a plait. The procedure for making this Batik is not to draw lines but to make dots on the pattern. *Cakar* belongs to the group of *nitik* patterns.

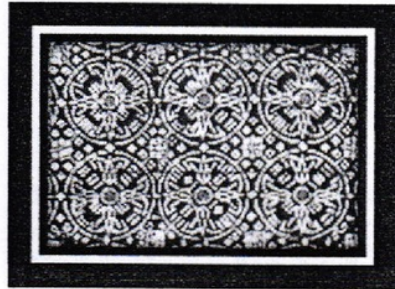


Figure 6: *Nik Pae rn*

Non-Geometric Pae rns

Non-geometric batik pattern in general includes a tree of life, home, Meru, dragon, wings and flames gurdha. This pattern is completed with pictures of plants, animals or parts of animals. Meanwhile, the filler elements are called *cecek*, *sawut*, *sisik*, dan *gringsing*¹⁵⁸, for example Semen (Yogyakarta dan Surakarta), Megamendung (Cirebon), dan Jawa Hokokai (Pekalongan).

SemenPae rn

This word *semi* derives from the word *semi+an*, and means growing. The philosophical meaning of this word is the early stages of life. Non-geometric motifs symbolize the movement of sperm towards the ovum in a woman's body. Therefore, semen is understood as the description of the first stage of human life, that is, growing and developing. This pattern also shows the Javanese appreciation of nature, as it is depicted in the form of a 'life tree'. In that tree, humans, animals and even spirits (which are described as scary creatures) are protected. They all live together in this world without annoying each other. The existence of others, indeed, is needed by nature for balance, so that nature will be eternal and give life to all creatures on earth.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.



Figure 7: *Semen Pae rn*

Megamendung Pae rn

This is produced in Cirebon, a coastal town located on the border of Central Java and West Java. Chinese influence can be seen in Batik from Cirebon. The well-known motif from this area is called Megamendung, i.e. a motif like clouds in Chinese paintings. This motif is characterized by color gradation, therefore, requires a lot of work since it has a high degree of difficulty and requires coloring many times.



Figure 8: *Megamendung Pae rn*

Jawa Hokokai

This pattern was first produced in Pekalongan during the Japanese occupation. It is called the Jawa Hokokai because it was produced by a group called Jawa Hokokai or the Javanese Matins Association, which was established on March 1st 1944. In the field of crafts, this organization produced a new motif that is very beautiful and interesting due to its floral patterns, leaves and butterfly motifs in various colors which require accuracy and patience to produce. The lack of cotton cloth during the Japanese occupation also forced the Batik artists to be more creative and efficient when using available materials. This can be seen from the long fabric with two different motifs used. The geometric motif is made on the left side while a *sulur* motif, complete with flowers and butterflies, appears on the right. One fabric with two motifs is commonly called *esuk-sore* Batik.

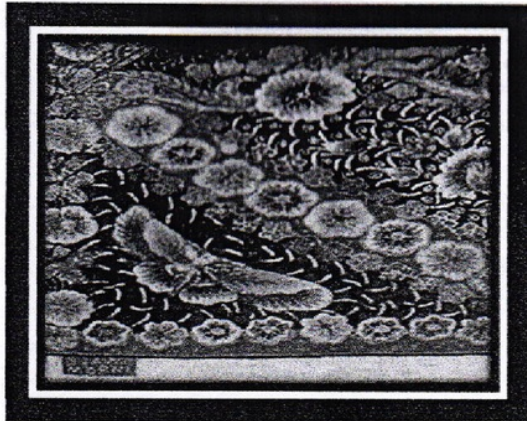


Figure 9: Jawa Hokokai Pae rn/Esuk Sore Pae rn

Changes in the Functions and Preservation of Batik

In reference to various sources, Batik cloth was used to cover the body or in clothes at the beginning, but the fabric was not cut and sewn. The basic technique was very simple; cloth was wrapped around the body and fastened so that it did not come loose. The men wore Batik cloth by wrapping it around counter-clockwise, while for women it was wrapped clockwise. Starting from this simple process, it then developed into a variety of more complex models, and due to this complexity, other items were needed also.

When Indonesians interacted with other nations, the clothes they wore influenced the use of Indonesian cloth. The traditional way of dressing was abandoned and was made more practical. This happens after the Europeans, and especially the Dutch, opened businesses in Indonesia. How they dressed was considered more practical, and their way of dressing was even imitated by educated people in Indonesia. This was because the Western education referred to a modern ideology which influenced the society's mindset¹⁵⁹. Moreover, people who lived in the city imitated the way Europeans dressed, as part of their social and cultural interaction. Consequently, Batik was neglected and most people who wore Batik were from villages.¹⁶⁰ Even after Indonesia's independence, Indonesia kept in touch with other nations, and these influenced Indonesian culture, especially in terms of clothing. Batik, as a traditional clothing item, was increasingly marginalized, and was only used in ceremonies or traditional parties up to the 1970s.

This situation affected the Batik industry, so that production drastically declined and many Batik entrepreneurs went bankrupt, particularly in the 1970s. In Yogyakarta, Batik entrepreneurs had to let go of their workers and change their businesses into guest houses serving foreign tourists. The situation became more serious when the Batik craftsmen also lost their jobs and were forced to other jobs to sustain their livelihoods.

To preserve the cultural arts, including Batik, from extinction, the government has recently issued regulations to empower the Batik craftsmen. These regulations are referenced in a letter: 430/1349,

¹⁵⁹ D.H. Burger. (1970). *Sedjarah Sosologis Ekonomis Indonesia 2*. Jakarta: Pradnya Paramita, p. 221.

¹⁶⁰ Kementerian Penerangan. (1952). *Republik Indonesia Propinsi Jawa Tengah*. Djakarta: Kementerian Penerangan, p. 321.

dated 30 April 2012, and are related to the Yogyakarta Cultural Preservation Movement. The letter is about the enactment of Regulation No. 4 of 2011, on the Cultural Values of Yogyakarta. The regulation states that all components, both government and the community, have to implement the preservation of a culture which becomes the nation's identity.

The letter and Regional Regulation No. 4 seem to embody the realization of what had been initiated by various institutions and societies. The government, private sector and educational institutions, including universities, have empowered Batik since 1980, by making uniforms made out of the cloth used on certain days. In this case, the style of the clothes is similar to that of Western clothes, but the materials are Batik. This has benefited many batik entrepreneurs and craftsmen.

It is inevitable that the professional Batik makers tend to be already old, meaning regeneration is needed. Many young people in Cirebon; for example, do not want to follow their parents and make Batik, meaning there is a crisis regarding its regeneration.¹⁶¹ Regeneration efforts are being conducted through exhibitions and bazaars dedicated to Batik. In order to attract the younger generation to the exhibitions, a competition has been held, the aim of which is to get students and beginners interested. Batik is also being introduced to young people at an early stage through schools, from elementary to high school level. In Yogyakarta, Batik is included in the curriculum, as local content. Therefore, some vocational school students are capable of producing Batik cloth of a high quality.

Due to the use of Batik shirts as uniforms, the functions of Batik have changed. Formerly, Batik was only used as a traditional cloth, but it has become a daily used cloth today. Considering the fact that Batik is good for making clothes and is able to show identity, all officials wear Batik. Batik as souvenirs are even given to official guests, as was the case with Nelson Mandela, who was given a Batik souvenir. He was impressed with Batik, and could often be seen wearing Batik at official events, as was the case when he attended the World Cup ceremony. It seems that what the government has done only a few simple things, but have been able to help Batik become known worldwide. Nowadays, many Indonesian people wear Batik at both formal and informal occasions. Therefore, Batik cannot be separated from being Indonesian.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the protection of Batik as a cultural item has been reinforced since Batik was included in the UNESCO world cultural heritage list. Moreover, the government has issued laws regulating its preservation. The development of Batik, both in its coloring techniques and its motifs, has been covered here. Regarding the development of Batik motifs, many have been developed as influenced by other cultures, like the *Cindhe* motif from India, the Banji, the dragon and the *megamendung* motifs from China, and floral motives or *bukaten* from European countries. Western culture has also influenced the colors used in Batik. Formerly, Batik only used colors such as red, blue, black and white as a background, but now various bright colors are used, such as red, yellow and green.

With regard to its utilization, Batik fabric was originally used as traditional clothing, but today it is used to make shirt and skirts which are worn on both formal and informal occasions. At state official events in Indonesia, including state banquets, Batik is often used as the dress code.

¹⁶¹ Batik Cirebon Terkendala Regenerasi. *Kompas*, 22 July 2011.

Batik, as an item of Indonesian cultural heritage, has been appointed a World Cultural Heritage item, and is the pride of Indonesian society. However, being proud is not enough, because there is also a responsibility to protect, utilize and develop Batik. Since Batik has become well known, the international community has a responsibility to help preserve it also, such as those attending the APSA conference; who can share the knowledge they gain about the preservation of Batik, as an intangible culture, with others in the international community.

Through these activities, we expect the international community to recognize Indonesian Batik, as well as develop an affection for it. Maybe there is a possibility, in the future that a Thai Batik style or styles from other countries at the APSA conference will be developed. At least, that is what I hope.

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