



Aesthetic Representation of the Character Values of Tolerance and Nationalism in Chinese-Motif Batik Lasem

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Article Info

Article History :

Received : **

Approved :

Published :

Keywords:

Lasem Batik; Chinese Motif;
Aesthetic Representation;
Character Values

Abstract

This study explores the aesthetic representation of tolerance and nationalism as character values embedded in the visual elements of Chinese-motif Batik Lasem. As a cultural artifact rooted in a history of intercultural exchange, Batik Lasem reflects not only artistic beauty but also deep social and moral meanings. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research employs visual analysis to examine the formal elements—such as color, shape, composition, and symbolism—found in selected Chinese-influenced Batik Lasem patterns. The findings reveal that the fusion of Chinese and Javanese visual motifs embodies messages of cultural harmony, mutual respect, and national identity. The aesthetic choices made by artisans—ranging from symbolic flora and fauna to harmonious compositions—serve as a medium to communicate values of tolerance and national pride. This study contributes to the field of visual communication design by demonstrating how traditional art forms can function as effective channels for character education and interethnic understanding through visual aesthetics.

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ISSN 2252-7516

E-ISSN 27218961

A. INTRODUCTION

The goal of character education, also referred to as values education, moral education, or ethics education, is to help students learn how to make decisions between right and wrong, uphold goodness, and wholeheartedly practice good values in daily life, in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Character Education (Priyambodo, 2017, p. 9). A resilient nation that is competitive, moral, tolerant, cooperative, patriotic, and science-and-technology-oriented based on Pancasila, and inspired by faith and devotion to the One Almighty God, is essentially the ultimate goal of character education.

There are 18 character traits: sincerity in practicing religion, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, sovereignty, democracy, curiosity, national spirit, love for the homeland, achievement and appreciation, friendliness/sociability, love of peace, a passion for reading, environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and accountability.

From Sabang to Merauke, there are thousands of islands that make up the Indonesian nation. Due to geographical location and local customs, these islands possess traditions and cultural practices that are unique from one another. The vast number of islands comprising Indonesia gives rise to people of various races, nationalities, and cultures. Koentjaraningrat emphasized that culture is a body of human-created concepts and creations that must be studied, as well as the result of all such ideas (M. D. Rahayu & Alrianingrum, 2014, p. 37).

According to Aziz, (2014, p. 34) China (or *La Petite Chine* in French) as Lasem. It is claimed that Lasem holds numerous valuable cultural heritages that, in themselves, represent unique expressions of strong multiculturalism, particularly between Javanese and Chinese civilizations. In the first century, during the era of Majapahit Nusantara, Lasem served as a stopover for

foreign travelers, especially those from China during the 1st to 15th centuries AD. Lasem is one of the three regions in Java with the highest concentration of Chinese immigration. The renowned naval admiral Zheng He journeyed to the Nusantara in the 15th century as an envoy of Emperor Yongle of the Ming Dynasty of China, who sought to strengthen diplomatic relations with the Majapahit Archipelago, particularly in matters of trade and politics during the 15th century.

The *Serat Badra Santi* states that one of Admiral Cheng Ho's naval captains, named Bi Nang Un, and his wife, Na Li Ni, landed in the year 1335 Saka (113 AD). This text serves as one of the historical sources recounting the existence of batik in Lasem. The Kadipates Gate (*Regol Kadipates*) was located on the Binangun Coast, which was formerly known as the Lasem Coast. Captain Bi Nang Un originated from Champa, which at the time was a territory under the Ming Dynasty. Na Li Ni was a female artist skilled in both dancing and batik-making. When Princess Na Li Ni first relocated to Lasem, she observed that the majority of the local population lived in poor and concerning conditions (Rizali & Bani, 2019, pp. 67–68). According to Akrom Unjiya, (2008, p. 5) in *Lasem Negeri Dampoawang: Sejarah yang Terlupakan (Lasem, the Forgotten Land of Dampoawang)*, in the Kemadhung Garden located in Banjar Mlat, Na Li Ni taught her children the arts of batik-making and dancing. In an effort to boost the nation's economy, *Na Li Ni* created various innovations in batik art. One of the traditional styles she developed is often referred to as *pak*. These styles are characterized by distinctive patterns and designs, each with its own unique features, such as the use of striking color combinations in beautifully themed motifs. This approach reflects a certain egalitarianism in Lasem batik. *Batik renda* broke societal taboos, became more approachable, and was frequently worn by individuals from all social classes and ethnic backgrounds.

Lasem Batik is a product of two distinct cultures—Javanese and Chinese. From this

cultural convergence emerges a mutually enriching synthesis. Due to the significant influence of Chinese culture in Lasem, bright colors such as red often dominate the patterns of Lasem batik. Chinese-inspired themes frequently feature elements like bamboo plants and phoenix birds. In Chinese culture, bamboo is regarded as a symbol of strong familial unity. An example of a batik motif rooted in Javanese culture is the teal motif, inspired by fragments of coastal stones, symbolizing the Lasem region located along the northern coast of Java. The themes and imagery crafted by batik artisans are largely based on natural environments, conveying stories and highlighting the importance of flora and fauna as representations of local wisdom in Lasem (Suminto, 2015, p. 24).

There are three main categories of Lasem batik motifs, each possessing its own uniqueness in terms of both form and the philosophical meanings they convey. First, geometric motifs such as the *kawung* motif represent one of the classic patterns, characterized by circular shapes resembling the areca fruit. Second, organic motifs such as the hong bird (phoenix) display a more naturalistic pattern featuring elements of flora and fauna. This motif reflects the strong influence of Chinese culture in Lasem, as the hong bird (phoenix) in Chinese tradition is regarded as a symbol of elegance and happiness. Third, there is a motif that combines three cultural influences—Lasem, Pekalongan, and Solo—known as the *Tiga Negeri* motif. This motif is distinguished by a blend of colors and patterns from the three regions: the characteristic red of Lasem, the brownish “sogan” tone of Solo, and the bright, vibrant hues of Pekalongan (Setiadi, 2025, pp. 156–157).

This study examines the values of character education related to tolerance and national spirit found in Chinese-themed Batik Lasem motifs, and selects batik producers in Lasem city as the research site. It also refers to several previous studies that may serve as relevant literature for other researchers. Some

research findings published in national and international publications are outlined below.

Enrico (2020) In Jurnal Seni & Reka Rancang, Volume 2, Number 2, the article titled “The Design of Contemporary Batik Motifs Based on the Aesthetic Culture of Lasem Batik Motifs” explores the cultural acculturation between Chinese and Javanese traditions in Lasem, a coastal area with a growing population of immigrants, particularly those of Chinese descent. The use of more varied and vibrant colors compared to inland batik—such as green, yellow, orange, red, light blue, and even pink—is one of the visually appealing aspects of coastal batik design.

Rahayu M. (2014) In the Department of History, Volume 2, Number 2, titled “The Motifs of *Peranakan* Chinese Batik from Lasem, 1900–1960”, the study reveals that the development of *Peranakan* Batik in Lasem was driven by the influx of Chinese immigrants, the majority of whom were engaged in trade. One of the commodities they traded was batik cloth, which was produced in Lasem and began to develop with distinct Javanese quality and uniqueness. As a result of their distinctive characteristics, the Chinese increasingly wore batik garments as a means of expressing their national identity. *Peranakan* Chinese Batik from Lasem is still considered to retain the main thematic elements of Chinese culture. In the 20th century, Lasem batik underwent an evolution in its decorative motifs, which were heavily influenced by Chinese culture. Red became the dominant color of choice. Between 1900 and 1930, panels of batik cloth often featured traditional Chinese designs such as pomegranate flowers, open peonies, chrysanthemums, lotuses, peacocks, and phoenixes. However, in a later phase, around 1990, the color palette used in Lasem batik began to shift toward more vibrant and diverse tones. These new colors included green, yellow, purple, and blue. Additionally, characteristic Lasem elements—such as Sekar Jagat, local landmarks, the Latohan hills, and native plants—came to dominate the chosen subjects.

Rahayu K. (2008) In her dissertation entitled "Efforts of the Rembang Regional Government to Protect Lasem Batik", she explains that the first person to introduce the art of batik to the Netherlands was known as Van Zuylen, and it is believed that the evolution of batik began during that period. Between 1840 and 1940, this style of batik—also known as "Dutch batik"—grew and developed significantly. Initially, it was only the Dutch and Indo-Dutch residents living in coastal areas who produced Dutch batik, and almost all of it was in the form of sarongs (particularly in Pekalongan). Dutch batik became renowned for its refinement, intricate details, and harmonious compositions. Furthermore, most of the decorative elements featured a variety of flowers arranged in bouquets or flowering trees, often accompanied by ornamental birds or motifs inspired by European fairy tales. At the time, bright-colored Chinese or Javanese ornaments were also used in similar compositions to suit European tastes.

B. METHOD

The research titled "Needs Analysis of Character Education Values of Tolerance and Nationalism Spirit in Lasem Batik with Chinese Motifs" employs a qualitative research method and an interdisciplinary approach, integrating the fields of history and sociology. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. Data validity is ensured through triangulation techniques, including source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Rohidi, 2011, p. 67).

In collecting the required data, this study employed observation, interview, and documentation techniques. To validate the data, source triangulation as formulated by Patton was utilized. Furthermore, the theory and concepts used to examine the research problem include the theory of cultural identity by Alo Liliweri and the concept of character education values formulated by the Ministry of

National Education in 2011.(Girantiet al., 2019, p. 315).

This study employs an exploratory research approach, specifically qualitative research in the form of a descriptive version, which further examines the previously described phenomenon.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1) Results

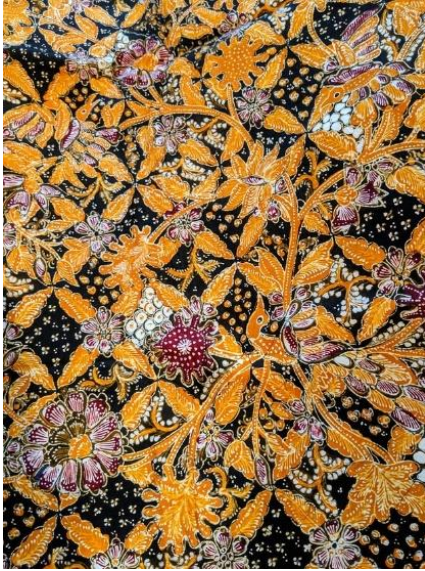
a) Lasem City

Lasem City is home to a diverse range of cultures, and tolerance has long been deeply rooted in Indonesia. Lasem stands as a prime example of Indonesia's strong culture of tolerance. The central theme of Batik Lasem reflects this type of acculturation. Following Rembang City in Central Java, Lasem is the second largest city in Rembang Regency. It is located on the northern coast of Java. Historically, the city served as a port for Chinese travelers during the Ming Dynasty. Their arrival, led by Admiral Cheng Ho, was intended to establish bilateral relations with the Majapahit Kingdom at the time. Lasem is one of the coastal areas with a significant number of Chinese immigrants, where Javanese and Chinese cultures have blended together (Ayuningrum, 2017, p. 123) (Enrico et al., 2020, p. 162).

The majority of them are entrepreneurs, and many still have descendants to this day as they continue to reside in Lasem. The growth of the Chinese community in Lasem has given rise to the nickname "*Tiongkok Kecil*".

b) Cultural Acculturation in Lasem Batik

One of the classic motifs of Batik Lasem is *Kembang Kawung*.



Picture 1. *Kawung Motif*
Source: Author's Documentation

Lasem Batik is a cultural heritage that has endured to this day, despite experiencing fluctuations from its peak in the late 19th century until the 1970s (K. Rahayu, 2008, p. 192).

Batik Lasem is immensely rich in cultural heritage. The art of batik-making is the most tangible manifestation of Lasem's culture. Batik Lasem falls under the category of coastal batik, which is defined as batik produced in coastal areas, characterized by vibrant colors and striking designs.

The tradition of batik-making in Lasem dates back to the era of the Majapahit Kingdom. Classic dark-toned motifs are still present in variations of Batik Lasem, such as *Kembang Kawung* and *Gringsing*



Picture 2. *Burung Hong Motif*
Source: Author's Documentation

The indigenous culture in Lasem subsequently absorbed Chinese culture. After blending with Chinese cultural influences, the colors and patterns of Lasem batik evolved. As a result, Lasem Batik adopted themes featuring Chinese mythological flora and fauna, such as the lotus flower, the Hong bird (phoenix), and the Liong (dragon). Red, white, yellow, blue, brown, and black are the traditional colors used (Darmayanti & Bahauddin, 2020, p. 3).

c) *Tiga Negeri Batik*

Batik *Tiga Negeri*, as a form of multicultural batik, integrates cultural elements from Indonesia, China, and the Netherlands.



Gambar 3. *Batik Tiga Negeri*
Source: Author's Documentation

Batik Tiga Negeri is one of the most renowned types of Lasem batik. This batik, which remains deeply connected to cultural acculturation, originates from the influences of three nations: Indonesia (Java), China, and the Netherlands.

Madam Tjoa Giok Tjiam first introduced this batik in 1910. Her batik enterprise was established during an economic crisis under Dutch colonial rule.



Gambar 4. Batik *Tiga Negeri*
Sumber : Author's Documentation

The dyeing of this batik was carried out in three different cities, which is truly remarkable. The first is the red color (known as *getih pitik* or *kanaveri*), representing the Chinese tradition in Lasem, and it was dyed there.

Next is the indigo blue, a common hue used in the floral motifs of Dutch-influenced Pekalongan batik. The dyeing process for this color took place in Pekalongan.

The final tone is Sogan Brown, a traditional color in Javanese batik. This dyeing was done in Surakarta.

The batik motifs also incorporate elements from three different cultures: the rose from the Netherlands, the lotus flower from China, and traditional Javanese batik patterns such as Parang and Lereng. These batik motifs are not only aesthetically pleasing but also carry profound philosophical meanings.

The flora and fauna motifs are also influenced by various elements of Chinese art and culture. These include chrysanthemums,

lotus flowers, bamboo, hibiscus or peony, whistle flowers, and a motif known as "paru-paru," which resembles plant veins. Additionally, animals such as hummingbirds, dragons, Qilin (a mythical Chinese creature often depicted as a lion), turtles, butterflies, and cranes are also commonly featured.

d) Aesthetic Analysis of Visual Elements

The visual aesthetics of Lasem Batik are heavily influenced by the fusion of local and Chinese cultures, resulting in a unique visual richness. An aesthetic analysis of its visual elements can be described through several key components:

1. Line

The line elements in Batik Lasem are highly diverse, ranging from fine curved lines to bold and angular strokes. Lines are used to form the main motifs such as flowers, phoenixes, dragons, as well as other geometric and flora-fauna elements. The finesse of the lines in the hand-drawn technique reflects the high level of skill and diligence of the batik artisans (Enrico et al., 2020, p. 169).

2. Shape

The forms in Lasem Batik tend to be decorative and symbolic. Floral motifs such as lotus flowers, leaves, and tendrils are combined with animal forms like the hong bird (phoenix) or dragon, reflecting Chinese cultural influences. These forms are not only aesthetically pleasing but also carry philosophical meanings. (Nurhajarini et al., 2015, p. 91).

3. Color

Color serves as a strong identity in Lasem Batik. The distinctive "chicken blood red" (*Merah Lasem*) is its primary hallmark, symbolizing courage and spirit. In addition, other colors such as deep blue, black, cream, and golden yellow are often used to enrich the visual composition. The traditional dyeing process using natural dyes enhances both the aesthetic and ecological values of this batik. (Mulyanto et al., 2022, p. 241).

4. Composition

The composition in Lasem Batik is often symmetrical, yet remains flexible in terms of spatial arrangement. The main motif is usually placed dominantly at the center or distributed

harmoniously across the fabric. Filling techniques (*isen-isen*), such as *cecek* (dots) or *sawut* (short strokes), are used to create a dynamic visual rhythm and texture (Subagiyo, 1981, p. 11).

5. Visual Texture

The visual texture in Lasem Batik emerges through variations of lines, dots, and densely arranged *isen-isen* (filler motifs). This texture creates a sense of depth and visual complexity, enhancing the aesthetic experience when observing the batik. (Maghfiroh & Kurniadi, 2010, p. 207).

6. Visual Rhythm and Rhythm

Repetition of motifs and *isen* creates a regular visual rhythm. This rhythm is not only visually pleasing but also evokes a sense of calm and balance, reflecting the philosophy of harmony in life (Septiana et al., 2013, p. 28).

7. Symbolic Meaning

Lasem batik is not merely a visual artwork, but also rich in meaning. Certain motifs, such as the hong bird, symbolize immortality and nobility, while the lotus flower represents purity and enlightenment. These symbols enhance the aesthetic depth through cultural and spiritual contexts (Sarwono et al., 2023, pp. 28–29).

2) Discussion

a) The Value of the Character Trait of Tolerance

Tolerance is an attitude and behavior that shows respect toward the religions, ethnicities, opinions, and actions of others. It reflects a fundamental value that supports peaceful and respectful coexistence within a diverse society.

At the heart of democracy lies the ability and willingness of both individuals and the general public to uphold the rights of minority groups, as long as those groups comply with the laws established by the majority. This principle ensures that democracy does not become tyranny of the majority, but rather a balanced system where all voices are

acknowledged.

The concept of tolerance is complex and nuanced. It goes beyond mere passive acceptance—it involves active engagement in understanding others. Tolerance requires open communication, the freedom of conscience and belief, and a commitment to harmonious coexistence in diversity. It also relies on a legal framework that supports mutual understanding among individuals, encourages peaceful living between generations (such as between parents and children), and promotes inclusive interaction among all members of society.

In essence, true tolerance fosters a social environment where differences are not only accepted but valued as essential elements of human interaction and collective progress (Pitaloka et al., 2021, p. 1697).

The harmonious interaction between the Chinese and Javanese communities is clearly reflected in the motifs of Lasem batik and the social life of its creators. This spirit of tolerance is deeply rooted in the Lasem community. However, Lasem batik is particularly known for its blood-red color, or *Abang Getih* batik, which is heavily influenced by Chinese culture. The long-term blending of these two cultures has transformed Lasem into a region rich in values of tolerance.

By learning batik with a Lasem-themed approach, students not only practice batik-making and theme creation, but also gain insights into sustainable living as reflected in the culture of the Lasem community.

b) The Character Value of National Spirit

Nationalism constitutes the foundational ethos of national identity that emerges within the collective consciousness of the Indonesian people.

It cultivates a profound sense of belonging and attachment to the nation, akin to an expression of love. The creation of national

symbols—such as songs, flags, and emblems—reflects this sentiment. National songs are composed with harmonious melodies that evoke emotional resonance, while flags and emblems are designed and colored to represent the nation's cultural values, instilling a deep sense of security and pride among its citizens.

Indonesia upholds respect for racial, linguistic, religious, geographical, and cultural diversity. Nevertheless, similar pluralism can also be found in other nations composed of people from various backgrounds. The Youth Pledge (*Sumpah Pemuda*), which affirmed a shared commitment to unity and the aspiration to become a strong, dignified, and respected nation on the global stage, has been internalized and transformed into a spirit of nationalism. (Lestyarini, 2013, p. 342).



Gambar 5. Batik Tiga Negeri
Sumber : Author's Documentation

Nationalism is reflected in the Tiga Negeri Batik motif, which carries profound philosophical meaning as a symbol of the acculturation of three cultures: Javanese, Chinese, and Dutch. The distinctive red of Lasem represents courage, the sogan brown from Solo signifies the simplicity of Javanese culture, while the influence of blue from the Dutch reflects openness to modernity. This combination of colors and motifs not only enhances the aesthetic beauty of the batik but

also represents unity in diversity and a richness of historical value (Rizali, 2018, pp. 103–104).

Character education is a method of instilling moral principles that encompasses knowledge, awareness or will, and actions to live in accordance with those principles in relation to God Almighty, oneself, others, the environment, and the nation. The development of individual character contributes to the shaping of national character. However, as individuals live within specific social and cultural environments, it is only within these environments that character formation can be effectively facilitated. In other words, character and cultural development can only occur in learning environments that do not detach students from their social context, local culture, or national culture (Pratiwi et al., 2021, p. 10).

The representation of Lasem Batik as a wise local cultural identity in the Rembang region, particularly in the town of Lasem, cultivates a sense of reverence and ownership toward the cultural heritage passed down from their ancestors (Mulyana, 2022, p. 210).

D. CONCLUSION

Batik Lasem has undergone a long and meaningful journey. In the past, batik was created through perseverance and diligence. Each piece of batik carries distinct meanings and intentions as expressed by its creator. Batik Lasem belongs to the category of coastal batik, similar to batik from Pekalongan, Madura, and Cirebon. Coastal batik is generally characterized by brighter colors compared to inland batik from regions such as Solo and Yogyakarta. This distinction is influenced by Chinese cultural elements that have long been integrated into coastal batik, as coastal areas served as the first points of contact for Chinese settlers arriving in Java. As a result, cultural acculturation between Chinese and Javanese traditions occurred.

Over time, this cultural integration in Lasem has continued to evolve, fostering a

strong sense of tolerance among the local communities, including both Chinese-Indonesian and Javanese populations.

The author of this study focuses on analyzing the values of national education and national tolerance embedded in Lasem Batik. While numerous studies on Lasem Batik have been conducted from various disciplinary perspectives—such as art, history, economics, law, and others—there remain aspects of Lasem Batik that have not yet been explored. It is hoped that future researchers will continue to investigate these unexplored dimensions.

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