



Javanese and Chinese Cultural Acculturation in the Development of Surakarta Batik and Peranakan Batik

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Abstract

Batik is one of Indonesia's cultural heritages, recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. The development of Batik in Indonesia has been influenced not only by local cultures but also by interactions with various foreign cultures, including Chinese culture. These interactions gave rise to Peranakan batik, which developed primarily along Java's northern coast. This study aims to describe the forms of cultural acculturation found in Surakarta Batik and Peranakan Batik and to analyze the influence of Chinese culture on the development of batik motifs, colors, and philosophies in Indonesia. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach. Data were collected from books, journals, and relevant documents concerning the history of Batik, the Chinese Peranakan community, and the development of Batik culture in Java. The findings reveal that cultural acculturation is reflected in the use of Chinese-inspired floral and faunal motifs, such as the phoenix and liong (dragon), the application of vibrant colors in Peranakan batik, and the emergence of new batik creations that combine elements of Surakarta court batik with coastal aesthetic traditions. Go Tik Swan emerged as an important figure who successfully integrated Javanese and Chinese cultural elements in the creation of Indonesian Batik. This acculturation demonstrates that Batik is a dynamic cultural product that continues to evolve without losing its local identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Batik is one of Indonesia's cultural products that possesses significant historical, aesthetic, and philosophical values. UNESCO's recognition of Batik as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 further reinforces its position as an important symbol of Indonesian cultural identity. Batik functions not only as a form of clothing but also as a medium of cultural expression that reflects the values, social status, and worldview of the communities that produce and wear it (Raffles, 2008).

The development of Batik in Indonesia has undergone a long historical process and has been influenced by various cultural interactions. One notable example is the interaction between Javanese society and the Chinese community, which has occurred for centuries. The arrival of Chinese migrants in the Indonesian archipelago, particularly on Java, contributed not only to economic and commercial activities but also to the enrichment of local arts and culture (Tan, 2008).

The cultural encounter between Javanese and Chinese communities gave rise to various forms of cultural acculturation. Acculturation refers to a process in which two cultures interact and influence one another without eliminating their respective cultural identities (Gumulya & Octavia, 2017). In the context of Batik, this process led to the emergence of Peranakan batik, which developed predominantly in the northern coastal regions of Java, including Lasem, Pekalongan, and Indramayu. Peranakan batik differs from the court batik traditions of Surakarta and Yogyakarta, particularly in its use of brighter colors and motifs influenced by Chinese cultural symbols (Rahayu, 2014).

In contrast, Surakarta Batik developed within the royal court environment, where strict regulations and symbolic meanings governed its production and use. In the past, certain batik motifs were reserved exclusively for the king and members of the royal family, as documented in Angger Awisan during the reign of Pakubuwana IV (Marduwiyoto, 1981). Surakarta Batik is generally characterized by the use of sogan brown, black, white, and dark blue colors, which reflect the values of modesty, dignity, and authority embedded in Javanese culture (Naomi, 2012).

Despite their distinctive characteristics, Surakarta Batik and Peranakan Batik are closely connected through a process of cultural acculturation. One of the key figures in this process was Go Tik Swan, a batik artist of Chinese descent from Surakarta who successfully developed the concept of Indonesian Batik by integrating elements of royal court batik with those of coastal batik traditions (Rustopo, 2013).

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the forms of cultural acculturation found in Surakarta Batik and Peranakan Batik and to examine the influence of Chinese culture on the development of Batik in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach. Library

research was selected because the study focuses on analyzing literature related to the history, development, and characteristics of Surakarta Batik and Peranakan Batik.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included books and historical documents discussing batik, such as *The History of Java* by Raffles (2008) and *Angger Awisan* by Marduwiyoto (1981). Secondary sources were obtained from scholarly journals, previous studies, and books addressing the Chinese Peranakan community and the development of batik culture in Indonesia.

Data were collected through documentation techniques, including identification, reading, recording, and classification of information relevant to the study's focus. The data were analyzed using content analysis, in which the collected information was interpreted and categorized into themes related to the forms of cultural acculturation found in Surakarta Batik and Peranakan Batik.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Surakarta Batik

Surakarta Batik developed within the cultural environment of the royal court, which highly valued social order, symbolism, and hierarchy. During the kingdom era, certain batik motifs were reserved for members of the royal family and the aristocracy. This regulation is reflected in the royal decree of Kanjeng Sunan Pakubuwana Senapati ing Ngalaga Abdurrahman Sayidin Panatagama (Pakubuwana IV), which states: “No one shall dare to wear what I wear, for it is my forbidden attire, and no one is permitted to violate this prohibition.”

According to Angger Awisan (Marduwiyoto, 1981: 116–118), the regulations concerning the use of batik were as follows:

1. Forbidden batik cloths reserved exclusively for the king and members of the royal family included batik sawit (matching motifs used on both cloth and headcloth), batik modhang cumekirang (sharp diagonal patterns commonly used as decorative borders or central ornaments on textiles), batik kang talacap modhang (plain square or triangular patterns without ornamentation), batik udan iris (motifs resembling raindrops), batik tumpal, batik sawat, batik parang rusak, batik cumekirang, modang, and batik bango tulak.
2. Batik tumpal refers to a batik cloth with a white center and batik-patterned borders.
3. Batik kekembangan, also known as udaraga, features a red center with green and yellow borders.
4. Bango tulak is characterized by a black center and white borders.

5. Lenga teleng has a white center with black borders.
6. Daragem tenun consists of a red central section with purple borders on both sides.
7. Batik semukirang decorated with lunglungan motifs (patterns resembling flower stems or leafy vines) or kekembangan motifs (floral patterns) could only be worn by the patih (prime minister), close relatives of the king, and royal officials holding the rank of Wadana.
8. Batik sawat katandhan sembagen, featuring floral motifs combined with elar motifs (patterns resembling bird wings), was permitted for public use.

These regulations demonstrate that batik in the Surakarta court tradition functioned not only as clothing but also as a marker of social status and political authority. Certain motifs were closely associated with royal power and could therefore be worn only by specific social groups (Marduwiyoto, 1981).

Another distinctive characteristic of Surakarta Batik is its use of sogan colors, dominated by shades of brown, black, white, and dark blue. These colors symbolize modesty, dignity, and the Javanese philosophy of life, which emphasizes harmony and balance (Naomi, 2012).

Over time, these restrictions gradually diminished. The emergence of batik saudagaran enabled the broader public to wear motifs inspired by court batik traditions. This development reflects the transformation of batik from an exclusive symbol of royal status into a more inclusive cultural identity shared by all levels of society.

Characteristics of Peranakan Batik

Peranakan Batik is one of the batik traditions that emerged from the process of cultural acculturation between local Javanese communities and the Chinese Peranakan community. The emergence of this batik tradition cannot be separated from the history of Chinese migration to the northern coastal regions of Java. Most Chinese migrants originated from Southern China and arrived through maritime trade routes, eventually settling in coastal areas such as Lasem, Pekalongan, Indramayu, and other regions along the northern coast of Java. The long-standing interaction between Chinese migrants and local communities resulted in various forms of cultural acculturation, including in the art of batik making (Tan, 2008).

Visually, Peranakan Batik differs significantly from Surakarta and Yogyakarta court batik traditions. While court batik is generally characterized by dark colors such as sogan brown, black, and dark blue, Peranakan Batik predominantly employs brighter colors, including red, yellow, green, purple, and blue. The use of vibrant and diverse colors has become one of the defining characteristics of coastal batik influenced by Chinese aesthetics (Rahayu, 2014).

In addition to its distinctive colors, Peranakan Batik is characterized by a variety of motifs. Floral and faunal motifs are dominant elements in coastal batik. Common motifs include buketan, jamprang, Chinese-inspired motifs, esuk-sore motifs, and Islamic motifs. These patterns reflect the influence of various cultures that interacted within coastal communities, which historically served as centers of cultural exchange and trade (Prawira, 2018).

The influence of Chinese culture is particularly evident in the use of motifs such as liong (dragon), phoenixes, and ships. In Chinese culture, the liong (dragon) symbolizes strength, prosperity, and good fortune, while the phoenix represents immortality, happiness, and harmony. The presence of these motifs indicates that the Chinese Peranakan community preserved elements of their ancestral culture through batik art (Wee, 2011).

Another characteristic that distinguishes Peranakan Batik from court batik is its relatively plain background and the limited use of Isen-isen (filler patterns). In addition, decorative borders or frames surrounding the main motifs are frequently used. This composition creates a dynamic and decorative appearance that is typical of coastal batik traditions.

One of the most distinctive motifs is the esuk-sore motif. This design combines two different patterns or color schemes within a single piece of cloth or sarong. Generally, the lighter-colored section is intended for use during the morning and daytime, while the darker-colored section is associated with the afternoon and evening. This unique design demonstrates the creativity of coastal batik artisans in adapting their products to the practical needs of society.

Besides Chinese cultural influences, Peranakan Batik was also shaped by Islamic cultural values that developed in coastal regions. In batik motifs influenced by Islamic teachings, the depiction of living creatures follows certain restrictions. Human or animal heads are often omitted or replaced with plant forms and ornamental patterns. Examples of Islamic influence can be found in the batik motifs of Sumedang and Kemlayang (Suciati & Ds., n.d.).

The development of Peranakan Batik was also associated with the clothing habits of the Chinese Peranakan community. During the colonial period, many Chinese men commonly wore trousers that exposed part of their legs. This style was considered inappropriate according to prevailing social norms, leading to the adoption of batik sarongs, which were regarded as more practical and modest. As a result, the production of batik sarongs became increasingly popular among Peranakan communities.

The development of Peranakan Batik reached one of its peaks through the works of Go Tik Swan, also known as K.R.T. Hardjonagoro. As a person of Chinese descent raised within a Javanese cultural environment, Go Tik Swan successfully developed the concept of Indonesian Batik by combining elements of court batik with the characteristics of coastal batik traditions (Rustopo, 2013).

Go Tik Swan's father, Go Dhiam Ik, was a Chinese man who married a Javanese woman. As a fourth-

generation Peranakan, Go Tik Swan rarely wore traditional Chinese clothing. His maternal family was among the largest batik producers in the region, and the strong influence of Javanese culture within his family led him to identify more closely with Javanese traditions and attire.

To this day, Go Tik Swan's batik creations remain highly appreciated and continue to be produced. In the 1950s, President Soekarno admired his work and encouraged him to create a distinctive Indonesian batik that could serve as a national symbol. In developing his batik designs, Go Tik Swan incorporated elements of traditional batik and ancient cultural heritage while introducing brighter color combinations, elevating his works to the status of high artistic achievement.

In 1991, Go Tik Swan stated that Surakarta Batik had traditionally been associated with black motifs, white backgrounds, and sogan colors, whereas coastal batik was known for its bright colors. However, with the emergence of Indonesian Batik, these distinctions were no longer rigid. This transformation is reflected in four of his most renowned creations:

1. Sawunggaling, featuring bright tones with light blue, white, or yellow backgrounds combined with the sawunggaling motif derived from the tradition of cockfighting.
2. Kembang Bangah, characterized by the kembang bangah motif arranged in a diamond-shaped composition.
3. Semen Rama, featuring ornamental vines and plant motifs on a dark blue background combined with bright yellow, red, dark green, and brown colors.
4. Pisang Bali, inspired by Indonesia's natural wealth, displaying pink, orange, and yellow tones against a black background.

The works of Go Tik Swan demonstrate how elements of Javanese court batik and coastal batik traditions can be harmoniously integrated. As batik continues to evolve with increasingly diverse colors and motifs, Javanese cultural values remain an integral part of its identity.

These findings indicate that Peranakan Batik is the result of a dynamic process of cultural acculturation. Chinese, Javanese, and Islamic influences do not negate one another; rather, they blend together to create a distinctive batik identity. Therefore, Peranakan Batik serves not only as a textile art form but also as historical evidence of centuries of cultural interaction in Indonesia.

Forms of Acculturation in Surakarta Batik and Peranakan Batik

The acculturation between Javanese and Chinese cultures is clearly reflected in the development of batik in Indonesia. Chinese communities that settled in Java adapted to local cultural traditions while maintaining elements of their ancestral heritage. This process resulted in the emergence of batik styles that combine the aesthetic characteristics of both cultures (Gumulya & Octavia, 2017).

The first form of acculturation can be observed in batik motifs. Surakarta Batik, which was originally

dominated by geometric patterns and royal court symbols, gradually incorporated floral and faunal motifs influenced by Chinese culture. Motifs such as the phoenix and liong (dragon) became integrated into batik designs, enriching the visual diversity of Indonesian batik while preserving traditional Javanese artistic elements.

The second form of acculturation is evident in the use of color. Traditional Surakarta Batik is characterized by sogan shades, including brown, black, white, and dark blue, which symbolize the philosophical values of Javanese court culture. In contrast, Peranakan Batik is known for its vibrant colors, such as red, yellow, green, purple, and bright blue. The interaction between these two traditions led to the emergence of new batik styles that combined the elegance of court batik with the vivid color palette of coastal batik, creating a richer, more diverse range of batik designs.

Acculturation is also reflected in the social function of batik. In the past, court batik served as a marker of social status, with certain motifs reserved exclusively for members of the royal family and nobility. However, as cultural interaction increased and the batik industry expanded, these restrictions gradually diminished. Batik became more accessible and could be worn by people from all social backgrounds. Consequently, batik evolved from an exclusive symbol of aristocratic status into a broader representation of cultural identity shared by Indonesian society as a whole.

These developments demonstrate that the acculturation between Javanese and Chinese cultures did not replace existing traditions but instead enriched them. The fusion of motifs, colors, and social meanings has created a dynamic batik tradition that continues to evolve while preserving its cultural roots.

Go Tik Swan as a Symbol of Cultural Acculturation

One of the most influential figures in the development of batik as a product of cultural acculturation was Go Tik Swan, also known as K.R.T. Hardjonagoro. As a person of Chinese descent raised in a Javanese cultural environment, Go Tik Swan successfully integrated elements of royal court and coastal batik traditions into his creations (Rustopo, 2013).

His renowned works, including Sawunggaling, Kembang Bangah, Semen Rama, and Pisang Bali, demonstrate a harmonious fusion of traditional Javanese motifs with more vibrant and diverse color combinations. Through these creations, Go Tik Swan combined the philosophical and aesthetic values of Javanese batik with the colorful characteristics commonly associated with coastal and Peranakan batik traditions. His works illustrate how cultural interaction can foster artistic innovation while respecting cultural heritage.

Go Tik Swan's contribution provides evidence that cultural acculturation does not eliminate the identities of the original cultures involved. Instead, it enriches the national cultural heritage by creating new forms of artistic expression that incorporate elements from different cultural traditions. His batik

designs represent a successful synthesis of Javanese and Chinese cultural influences, resulting in a distinctive style that has become an important part of Indonesian batik heritage.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Riyadi and Hermawan (2021), which found that the Chinese Peranakan community in Surakarta demonstrated a high level of acceptance toward Javanese culture. This cultural openness contributed to the emergence of various forms of assimilation and acculturation, which were reflected not only in social and cultural practices but also in artistic traditions such as batik.

CONCLUSION

Surakarta Batik and Peranakan Batik represent two batik traditions that developed from different cultural backgrounds, yet have continuously interacted with one another. Surakarta Batik reflects the values of Javanese court culture through its dominance of sogan colors and symbolic motifs rich in philosophical meaning. In contrast, Peranakan Batik demonstrates the influence of Chinese culture through vibrant colors, floral and faunal motifs, and symbols associated with prosperity and good fortune.

The process of cultural acculturation between Javanese and Chinese communities has generated innovations in batik motifs, color schemes, and social functions without diminishing the cultural identity of either tradition. Go Tik Swan stands as a prominent example of this successful acculturation process through his creation of Indonesian Batik, which harmoniously combines elements of Javanese and Chinese cultures.

The findings of this study indicate that Batik functions not only as a form of artistic and cultural expression but also as historical evidence of intercultural interaction among different ethnic communities in Indonesia. Therefore, preserving Batik means not only safeguarding a valuable cultural heritage but also maintaining the values of cultural diversity, mutual respect, and tolerance embedded in it.

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