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Multiculturalism of Mythological Images in Batik Motifs

Case Study: Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog

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ABSTRACT

Cirebon is a city on the north coast of Java which had one of the largest ports in the archipelago in the 1300s. This affected the number of immigrants, from traders, merchants, and so on, which led to acculturation of culture, beliefs, and descent in Cirebon City. One form of cultural acculturation is found in the Keraton Kanoman in Cirebon in the form of a symbol of Paksi Naga Liman. Like another city on the north coast of Java, Semarang, which is also rich in cultural acculturation is reflected in the mascot form of a mythological creature, Warak Ngendog. From the two forms of mythological creatures, there are similarities in the form of the concepts of hybridity and multiculturalism. Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog as symbols of cultural acculturation are also found in the decorative motifs of Cirebon batik and Semarang batik. The depiction of the form of the two mythological animals is based on aesthetic aspects and elements of the spirituality of the community's life. This research uses qualitative methods through historical literature studies and folklore studies. This research aims to examine and compare the aesthetic and design elements in the form of ornaments, colors, and the philosophical background of the creation of the Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog motifs as mythological creatures. The results of this research will then be used as a guideline for the creation and development of decorative styles in batik motifs that represent fictional four-legged mythological creatures that are enigmatic, unique, aesthetic, and expressive because there are acculturation of Javanese, Arabic, Hinduism, and Chinese cultures as a reflection of messages of spirituality and values harmony of multicultural society.

Keywords: *Acculturation, Ornaments, Paksi Naga Liman, Symbols, Warak Ngendog*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cirebon and Semarang are major port cities on the island of Java. As port cities located on the coast of the North Coast of Java, Cirebon [1] and Semarang have something in common in the form of cultural acculturation. The two cities have traces of the same past history, which was once a stopover for Admiral Cheng Ho from China to Java [2] [20], resulting in cultural acculturation in them. The cultural acculturation in Cirebon is Hindu, Chinese (Chinese), and Islamic, almost similar to the existence of cultural acculturation that exists in Semarang society, namely Chinese (Chinese), Javanese, and Arabic. Multiculturalism that can be found as cultural traces in the two port cities is in the form of mythological images in batik motifs, one of which is the research conducted by Aryani [19] on the Semarang batik motifs, Warak Ngendog.

In line with the research conducted by Effendi (2019) on mythology [18], which is a form of

philosophical representation of a value or belief that is believed by a community or society that occupies a certain area and has been passed down from generation to generation, Cirebon and Semarang are still strongly influenced by myths rooted in the community. One form of cultural acculturation that can be found in Cirebon is in the environment of the Keraton Kanoman Cirebon [1] [3] in the form of a symbol of Paksi Naga Liman. Meanwhile, the form of acculturation in Semarang is reflected in the form of the mascot of the folk's event from the annual festival, *Dugderan*, in the form of a procession of mythological creatures, Warak Ngendog [4] [5].

Based on the two findings of images of mythological creatures, Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog [15], which are also a symbol of this culture, there are similarities in the form of concepts of hybridity and multiculturalism that are still preserved in their community [6].

2. METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is a qualitative method through data collection techniques in the form of library research (library research). Data collection in this qualitative research was carried out in stages [7] [8]: 1) Collecting field notes by observing as a participant, observer; 2) Interviews, namely by conducting unstructured interviews, open interviews, and making interview notes; 3) Documents, namely writing field notes during research studies, maintaining logbooks during research, making photos or videos, as well as documents from textbooks, resumes and academic manuscripts related to various mythological figures, objects, forms, meanings, and their development [8][9]; 4) Audiovisual materials, namely studying evidence of physical traces through art artifacts to be studied, recording in video, studying objects or objects of artworks [10].

This study will interpret the data obtained from various kinds of social phenomena by comparing and

classifying the research object and then identified through the data reduction process.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Anatomy and Meaning of Animal Figures

The symbol of acculturation of mythological creatures for traditional society in Indonesia is something that has a diachronic-historical meaning. Based on the data obtained from the two mythological creatures, Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog, both of them have something in common with the element of acculturation which is reflected in their anatomical form (Table 1). As shown in table 1, both Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog have similarities in acculturation of Chinese and Islamic (Arab ethnicity) cultures. This is evidence of artifacts of the traces of Admiral Cheng Ho's voyage to the archipelago several centuries ago [2]. The proof of Admiral Cheng Ho's landing is shown by the stone cave where he had stopped during his stay in Semarang, which has now changed to Sam Po Kong Temple, as well as Muara Jati Harbor in Cirebon, which has now changed its name to Cirebon Harbor [11] [17].

Table 1. Meaning Comparison Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog

Paksi Naga Liman			Warak Ngendog		
Information	Anatomy	Meaning	Information	Anatomy	Meaning
Dragon (Chinese culture)	Head	The symbols of the Under World are symbols of things that are identical to the dark side of human life, such as sin, envy, evil, hypocrisy, and so on. The dragon also acts as a counterweight to avoid all these actions	Dragon (Ethnic Chinese)	Head [old] → Body (scales) and tail [new]	Symbol of human nature that tends to be greedy and destroy / destroy indiscriminately
Elephant / Liman (Hinduism Culture)	Trunk, ivory, body	Symbols from the Middle World are the essence of Hinduism (earth religion), human behavior in the world that depicts compassion, tepo saliro, and mutual respect.	Goat (Javanese ethnicity)	Body parts, legs, tail [old] → Horn parts on head, feet [new]	Symbol of human desire to guard and abandon dishonorable deeds, must be able to protect oneself by seriously observing fasting (Kejawen)
Horse	Tail, body	The form of an animal that looks similar to / resembles the character of an Elephant (Liman)			
Birds / Paksi (Islamic Culture)	Limbs, wings, spurs, claws	The symbol of the Upper World is the spiritual, transcendental life which is identical with the Divine condition and transcendence	Camel (ethnic Arabic)	Neck [old] → Head (facial structure), body (hump) [new]	The symbol of the beginning of the month of Ramadan / human fasting must be able to reverse one's worldly affairs towards the afterlife (spiritual)

Cheng Ho's legacy, apart from tangible objects such as ceramics and ancient plates from China, also carries the local wisdom of his native country itself, namely the culture that is believed by the Chinese people in the form of legendary creatures in mythology, dragons [12] [13], which are also the inner motifs. One of the

Pesisiran batik decorations is the Mega Mendung batik motifs with the Paksi Naga ornament on it. Besides being an icon of Cirebon, the Mega Mendung batik motifs also has historical significance in it, which is related to the arrival of the Chinese nation in Cirebon. The elements of Chinese culture are clearly depicted

through the form of clouds in Mega Mendung, namely as a symbol of bringing rain, a symbol of fertility and giving life, as believed by the Chinese Nation.

Based on the comparison of the meanings of the two mythological creatures in table 1 above, the dragon figure as the main marker which is quite vital [12] is that it occupies the anatomy of the head. This shows that dragons carry a very strong Chinese cultural influence compared to other cultures, just as the anatomy of the head is a major identifier compared to other body parts [13].

Meanwhile, other cultures are depicted through different animal anatomy, such as Islamic or Arabic culture in the form of birds or Paksi (the representation of the Buraq animal as the vehicle ridden by the Prophet Muhammad in the Isra Miraj incident) in the figure of Paksi Naga Liman [14]. Whereas in the figure of Warak Ngendog, Islamic or Arabic culture is depicted through the anatomy of the camel as a typical desert animal and has special features as written in the Alquran [4] [15].

The strong influence of Hindu culture prior to the entry of Islam to Cirebon, also influenced the

appearance of the Paksi Naga Liman figure in the form of Liman, which is a combination of elephants and horses, which are attached to the impression of a riding animal or an animal to carry loads. This is different from the culture in Semarang, which is a port city on the North Coast of Java and is not influenced by the Hindu kingdom, so that the influence that emerges comes from the local ethnicity, namely Javanese culture in the form of a goat. Goats themselves in the life of Javanese people have many roles, for example a source of livelihood (breeders), so that they become the main ingredients for the procurement of important ceremonies such as *Aqiqah* and *Nyewu* (1000 days of death anniversary). Thus, it can be said that the goat is a symbol of the religiosity of the Javanese ethnic community. This is confirmed by the results of research [16] which states that the head of the goat is one of the offerings for the Sea Alms ceremony in Tanjungan Village, Rembang Regency which is full of philosophy and has a symbol of the cultural richness of the local community.

Table 2. Visual Comparison Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog







Paksi Naga Liman Mythological Imagery	Warak Ngendog Mythological Imagery
	
Image in Ornamental Variety	Image in Ornamental Variety
	
Interpretation	Interpretation
	

Figure 1. Top left: Paksi Naga Liman (source: Author's documentation, 2017)

Figure 2. Top right: Warak Ngendog (source: Pinterest, 2019)

Figure 3. Center left: Paksi Naga Liman motifs (source: <http://keratonbatik4.blogspot.com/2017/10/batik-paksi-naga-liman.html>, 2021)

Figure 4. Center right: Warak Ngendog motifs (source: Author's documentation, 2018)

Figure 5. Bottom left: Interpretation of Paksi Naga Liman (source: Author's documentation, 2018)

Figure 6. Bottom right: Interpretation of Warak Ngendog (source: Author's documentation, 2020)

3.2 Image and Representation in Ornamental Variety

In addition to the meaning of the acculturation element based on the anatomy of several animal figures in Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog, there are also similarities in terms of decorative images in batik motifs. In several batik motifs typical of Cirebon, there are ornaments of Paksi Naga (or often the dominating image of the Dragon) on the Mega Mendung batik motifs. The Mega Mendung batik motifs is known as a typical batik icon from Cirebon that is not found in other regions.

Based on the results of the comparative analysis shown in table 2 above, the real figures of the Paksi Naga Liman were found on the golden carriage in the Keraton Kanoman, Cirebon. The application of the Paksi Naga Liman figure to the batik decorative motifs has several variations, all of which have very detailed Hindu cultural nuances, such as the Balinese carving motifs. Paksi Naga Liman figures in batik motifs are not depicted with stylization techniques or simplification of forms due to the complexity of hybridity that exists in Cirebon, as explained by Sofiyawati [3], through the visualization of mythological creatures related to the Islamic teachings of Tarzekat Syattariyah which developed during the reign of the Keraton Kanoman in Cirebon. Although in Islam it 'absolutely' avoids the appearance of animate beings in its cultural arts, this seems to be the opposite of the Paksi Naga Liman figure who emphasizes flexibility in its belief values which are more syncretic.

Meanwhile, in line with Effendi's research [18], the figure of Paksi Naga Liman is depicted in the direction of dark art that displays a dark, creepy, and savage side as a form of expression and embodiment of ideas and aesthetic values of contemporary art works. Thus, according to Effendi, as shown in table 2, the interpretation of the mythical image of Paksi Naga Liman is the result of elaboration of the methods and discourses of postmodern art such as adochism, parody, pastiche, or intertextuality.

In contrast to the Paksi Naga Liman figure, Warak Ngendog has a variety of decorative variations on several Semarang Batik motifs. The appearance of the figure of Warak Ngendog in a three-dimensional form in the form of a ceramic sculpture shows a very strong impression of Chinese culture. The difference in the depiction of the Warak Ngendog figure is based on the belief of the Semarang people in the content of the Warak Ngendog folklore itself which is only displayed once a year during the procession of the Warak Ngendog statue at the Dugderan Festival [21].

According to information obtained by the author when conducting surveys and interviews with three

batik producers in Semarang, namely the craftsmen of Kampung Batik Bubakan in Central Semarang; Batik Semarang 16 in Meteseh; and Batik Zie in Kampung Malon, Gunungpati, the image of Warak Ngendog is depicted according to the perceptions of the batik makers. This is because the figure of Warak Ngendog is an imaginary creature in the form of a four-legged animal which is predicted to appear for the first time in the late 19th century during the reign of Semarang Mayor Ario Purboningrat (1881-1897) [21], so that the form of Warak Ngendog is only a symbol, which is told from generation to generation and it is not known with certainty the true form of the animal itself.

Therefore, based on the comparison of meanings (table 1) and also the comparison of figures (table 2) from Warak Ngendog, Author makes an interpretation of the work with some changes in the anatomy and meaning of the Warak Ngendog motifs that already exist in Batik Semarang (table 3).

Table 3. Changes in the Interpretation of Warak Anatomy as Ornamental Variety

Description	Warak image (old)	Warak image (new)
Goat (Javanese ethnicity)	Body parts, legs, tail	The horns on the head, feet
Dragon (Chinese ethnicity)	The head	Body (scales) and tail
Camel (Arabic ethnicity)	The neck	The head (facial structure), body (hump)

Warak Ngendog's interpretation of the new form into the decorative motifs of batik was carried out by the author with the consideration that the image of Warak Ngendog in previous motifs in Semarang Batik was deemed less able to represent the hybridity of Warak Ngendog itself. From several previous Warak Ngendog motifs, the impression shown is more like a lion or a dog. This is a concern for the author about the misperception of people outside the city of Semarang who do not know about this multicultural symbol of Warak Ngendog.

4. CONCLUSION

The author finds that the socio-cultural factors and geographical aspects of the cities of Cirebon and Semarang have the potential to be a source of inspiration for creating new batik motifs, combinations, and or a combination of old motifs and traditional patterns. Through the process of analyzing from the

point of view of the two mythological creatures believed by the people of Cirebon and Semarang, Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog, the author finds that creating and developing new and fresh motif designs that have cultural and commercial values can arouse the interest of the younger generation. The new contemporary design is able to arouse the interest of the younger generation to like and join in the efforts to conserve Cirebon and Semarang batik.

The depiction of the mythological creature Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog is part of a multi-interpretation understanding that can be different and develop according to everyone's perception. So that it is possible for the development of decorative motifs for Cirebon and Semarang batik with the depiction of the Paksi Naga Liman and Warak Ngendog figures that differ along with the times and technology in the future.

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