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Indonesian Chinese Visual Language of 'Qilin' on Lasem Batik Ancestral Altar Cloth (Tok Wi)

Christine Claudia Lukman¹, Yunita Setyoningrum², Sandy Rismantojo³

ABSTRACT

Lasem batik industry has been widely known as one of coastal Javanese batik producer with strong Chinese influence. One of its famous batik product is tok wi, a kind of tablecloth used to cover the facade of a Chinese ancestral altar table during veneration rituals. Batik tok wi cloths were made to replace the original silk-embroidered version from China by Indonesian Chinese diasporas in Java. Whilst the images used in batik tok wi decoration were commonly copied from traditional original tok wi cloths of mainland China, we argue that there must be unique alterations on the image depiction, which differ from the original version. Tok wi batik cloths are now rarely found or produced, since the modern Indonesian Chinese nowadays hardly use batik tok wi cloths for the ritual purposes. Regarding this, this paper proposed to explore image representation on batik tok wi cloths, which distinguish them from the original version. The research aim to support preservation of tok wi batik cloths as product of Lasem genius loci. This article appointed qilin images from two similar batik tok wi cloths, to be explored by using Primadi Tabrani theory of visual language. This research proved that qilin images on the Lasem batik tok wi cloths was literally depicted in different manner than on the cloths from mainland China. The images were still representing the same symbolic Chinese ideology as the old tradition. However, there were additional values found on the visual language, caused by the essence and characteristics of batik making.

Keywords: Batik, Chinese Diasporas, Lasem, Qilin, Tok Wi, Visual Language.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Batik Lasem is reputedly known since the 17th century. It was said that indigenous people of Lasem had been making batik since the 5th century under the reign of Bhre Lasem I (Nurhajarini,

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Purwaningsih, & Fibiona, 2015). One of well-known Lasem batik product under the Chinese culture influence is batik *tok wi* or altar cloth (or skirt). *Tok wi* is a term widely used by Hokkian ancestry diasporas. While in Chinese, the term 'zhuoqun' (桌裙) is more common. Wealthy Chinese diasporas used different *tok wi* accordingly for each occasion. *Tok wi* were originally square silk cloths decorated with embroideries (see Figure 1). There are various images that typically used on *tok wi* cloths. Most of them symbolized best wishes of prosperity, longevity, and good fortune. Common images that were frequently used are sacred auspicious animals, such as dragon, qilin (unicorn), elephant, crane, butterfly, and phoenix; floral and trees, such as marigold, carnation, peony, and jasmine; also images or symbols of Gods, such as *Fu-Lu-Shou* Gods, the Goddess of *Guan Yin*, and Eight Immortals.

Since the original silk-embroidered version from main land China had been considered too expensive to purchase, batik ateliers in Pekalongan and Lasem started to make the batik version to accommodate the needs of the Indonesian Chinese for ancestral veneration rituals in South East Asia. This began around the late 19th to early 20th century. The altar cloths design then undergo through few modifications, because the decorative images of batik should not create with needlework, but by a process of multiple wax-resist dyeing. Most of the times, batik *tok wi* cloth were made accordingly based on each family values or wishes of their ancestors. Because they produce *tok wi* cloth based on family personal request, batik *tok wi* cloth are rare and hard to find. Though Lasem batik craftsmen have made many batik *tok wi* cloth over the decades, unfortunately, there were minimum evidence of the physical artefacts.



Figure 1: An antique silk-embroidered *tok wi* from main land China bought by a Lasem Indonesian Chinese resident (framed as antique collection, already disused) (Source: Lukman, 2017)

Due to the conformity effort into batik pattern styling, the visualization of symbolic images in the *tok wi* was supposed to follow the pattern guidelines. Typical batik *tok wi* cloth dimension is around 90 to 100 x 100 cm, following the common altar dimension. Common Lasem batik *tok wi* cloth has two main parts, the upper and lower panel. The upper panel is shorter in vertical length, only about $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{3}$ of the lower panel length. This upper panel represents the life after death meanwhile the lower panel represents the life in physical world.

Recently, the number of modern Indonesian-Chinese diasporas whom are still practicing the ancestral veneration ritual is decreasing because it is considered fussing and irrelevant to modern lifestyle. Meanwhile those who are still practicing the ritual are beginning to simplify the formalities, including the use of *tok wi* cloth. Many modern Chinese Indonesian now considered the tradition as fussing, they choose to simplify the rituals by not to use *tok wi* cloth anymore. Even some are rejecting it because it is against their religion. Rudy Siswanto and his wife, who own Batik Kidang Mas atelier in Lasem, said that they hardly ever made *tok wi* cloth because they seldom get any order to make *tok wi* cloth nowadays (Siswanto, 2018). Although Rudy Siswanto's family is still carrying on the ancestral veneration tradition, they never intentionally produce and sell *tok wi* cloth because each creation usually demands specific images that represents each customer's family values.

1.2 Problem statement

Achjadi and Damais said that each population group developed its own set of symbols based on their religious belief. Those symbols are represented in the motifs they use in everyday belongings as a manner of expression that can be read (Damais, 2006, p. 54). The traditional Chinese culture has the unique tradition called auspicious selection, which use many calculation based on nature characters for the hope of having a good prosperous life. The main goal is to pursue good fortune and avoid illnesses by creating harmony between men and nature. The auspicious selection culture flourished around the Han Dynasty by the development the Yin-Yang theory to the 'Five Elements' and 'Shen Sha'. The auspicious selection practice includes the selection of best day to do important life activities such as matrimonial ceremony, house building, and many more. Further, the practice use symbols and physical representation in the related rituals, including rituals of venerating ancestors.

Before the Chinese Indonesians in Java produced *tok wi* in batik version, they had been decorating their altar table with embroidered silk altar cloth bought from main land China. This means that the *tok wi* cloth decoration was given, thus the concept behind the images was fully Chinese expression. Thus, we argue that when the Indonesian Chinese diasporas began to made batik *tok wi* cloths on their own, there must be some alteration on the images that might differ from the original Chinese version. Dr. Alan Chong from The Singapore Peranakan Museum said that even though the source is Chinese; the practice of venerating ancestors using *tok wi* cloths by the Chinese diasporas began to shift in term of design and symbolic image depiction, which becoming more colorful and merrier (Martin, 2014). Furthermore, unlike making embroidery, batik maker has limitation on creating small details of images due to the complicated hand-drawn wax-resist dye technique.

Hence, this article aimed to explore the identification and representation of qilin images used in batik *tok wi* cloth, which somewhat might differ from the original silk-embroidered version of *tok wi* cloth from main land China. Lasem batik maker had been copying Chinese symbolic images and apply them into the batik design, including using images of qilin. Whilst the concept of qilin as an auspicious creature is well known in traditional Chinese belief, it might not completely understood by the Indonesian Chinese batik *tok wi* cloth makers in Java.

2. Methodology

This research is a qualitative descriptive research. We compare two *tok wi* cloths that have identical style with qilin and squids images as main component and other small objects from 'The Eight Treasures' as filler component (Figure 1a & 1b). Both have rectangular form and probably are reproduction of the same *tok wi* cloth with some alteration. Both are Lasem batik cloths and found as all-year decoration in front of ancestral altar tables at private houses in Lasem.

Both the owners, typical Indonesian Chinese descendants, said they almost never change the *tok wi* cloth unless it had been dirty or worn out. They also said that there are no specific rules of using which *tok wi* cloths on different occasion. They replace it if needed; if the cloth is considered old, dirty, or torn, they made or bought a new one. On the design, the owners said it does not matter which symbolic images as long as they use common auspicious images. But they all agreed that the use of symbolic images in *tok wi* cloths represent their prayer for the ancestors life in other world (means: heaven).



(a) 1st Tok wi Cloth



(b) 2nd Tok wi Cloth

Figure 1a & 1b. Four Crouching Small Qilins on the corners, with a centered Big Qilin (wide format, upper panel hidden), found on an ancestral altar in Karangturi, Lasem (Source: Lukman, et al., 2017)

The research borrowed Primadi Tabrani's theory of visual language to analyze qilin images shown in batik *tok wi* cloth. Tabrani's visual language analysis is considered the most suitable method to use to analyse batik composition, since it identifies visual elements based on eastern visual style. The theory proposed an idea that a piece of still picture is basically formed by visual elements such as lines, color, shape, patterns, which can be categorized as: 1) the image content, or the image itself, which can be identified as any realistic object, for example: image of a horse; 2) the way of image, or how the image is depicted, for example: a horse on the move is drawn with dynamic feet angular position and fluttering hair; and 3) the inner grammar of image, or how the image is understood from the overall

composition, relation of image within its foreground or background, and relation of the image with other images in the composition (Tabrani, 2005, p. 31).

This article analyses two identical qilins images found on two different Lasem batik *tok wi* cloths. The image presentation of qilins in both *tok wi* cloth are quite similar, but each has different details. Each qilin image will be first analysed by its way of image, and then by the inner grammar structure towards the whole image composition.

The analysis on the way of image will discuss detail depiction of qilin images through several aspects, which are: a) *Angle of view*, related to the image identification and readability; b) *Line*, related to shape that is formed. Line can be used as outline, which marks boundary between the image and the background. Line also can be used as a sign to indicate movement; c) *Color*, related to the shape that is formed. The use of color contrast together with lines can be used to create shapes. Due to its process limitation, batik only produce solid colors.

The inner grammar structure analysis will break down several expressions, which interpreted from the whole composition related to the qilin image. The aspects that will be analysed are the expression of: a) *3-dimensional space*, since batik is two-dimensional media; b) *movement*, by the way lines used to construct the images; c) *time and space*, by how the objects are located and related each other on the whole composition; d) *the center of interest*, which can be shown by its location on the composition, its size and scale, using blow-up image to show details, or by repetitive presentation.

3. Literature review

3.1 Lasem and the Indonesian Chinese diasporas

Lasem in Central Java has been known as one of the coastal towns in Java with multicultural development. The arrival of the Arabian and Chinese many centuries ago had contributed into the creation of unique culture of the town. Local people now named Lasem as “Tiongkok Kecil” (or little Republic of China 中华人民共和国) since Chinese-style houses and *kelenteng* (bio 廟)⁴ are widely found in Lasem relative to the other towns in Central Java. The biggest trading activity between the Chinese with indigenous Javanese had flourished during the reign of Ming Dynasty in China around 1368-1643, long before the Western came. “The Treasure Fleets”, series of expedition that were commanded by Admiral Cheng Ho, brought the most significant Chinese migrant along with its culture influence at that time (Nurhajarini et al., 2015). Whilst the Treasure Fleets brought the most migrant to Lasem, it was not the first Chinese settlement. Ronald G. Knapp mentioned that the first Chinese settlement of Lasem formed around the 13th century, after for centuries they came and stop over in coastal region of Java for trading purpose (Knapp, 1986). On the 15th century, during the reign of Hindunese Majapahit Kingdom, the Chinese settled a residential complex and built a quay for trading purpose in the east side of Lasem river. The settlement grew bigger and mingled harmoniously with the locals during the reign of Islamic Demak Kingdom on the late 15th century. On the 17th century, the Chinese population grew bigger due to the migration of Chinese refugees from Batavia whom hid from the Dutch Indies government. These refugees lived on the south side of Lasem. From 1745 onward to the arrival of Japan imperialist on 1945, Lasem was governed by the Dutch Indies, which transformed the Chinese settlement (Chinatown) to the northern side of Lasem River (an area named Gedong Mulyo) and around the Grote Post-weg⁵ (Pratiwo, 2010). Moreover, on the mid 20th century, came the second wave of Chinese migration. Whilst the former migrations were mostly came from Fukkien (Hokkien people), the second wave came from widely varied places in main land China (Kohl, 1984). These second wave Chinese migrants have stronger Chinese influence and considered to be more arrogant and superior compared to the former migrants. At first, this made a slight boundary between them, as the second wave migrants were then being called ‘*cina totok*’ (pure Chinese), meanwhile the former migrants were referred to ‘*cina peranakan*’. But nowadays, we hardly identify any difference between these Chinese migrants culture, since they had already married each other and also blend well with Javanese local

⁴ The term “kelenteng” is widely known for Chinese religious building only in Java. Meanwhile in other islands it was called with different term such as “bio” (Sumatera), “pakkung” (Borneo mainly by Hakka lineage Chinese Indonesian)

⁵ Grote Post-Weg is a famous important land route built by Daendels, the Dutch Indies governor on 1808-1811 which connected Java island from west to east.

culture. In the case of Lasem batik industry, the Chinese families who run batik ateliers came from various migration waves.

3.2 Lasem batik industry and Chinese influence

Batik, on the first place, were produced specially for the kings. Only aristocratic families allowed to wear batik clothes. In the latter case, commoners were also allowed to wear batik cloths. Whilst originated from clothing purpose, batik were also incorporated into other use, such as home textile decoration including ancestral altar tablecloth (*tok wi*).

The term batik is generated from two Javanese words: '*amba*', which means to write; and '*titik*', which means dots. Regarded its meaning, the definition of batik is more closely related to the activity of writing or drawing dots on a cloth. The dots, as objects being written or drawn, are referred to the wax application using '*canthing*'. Hence, the images drawn on a batik cloth become important. They are not just common decorated cloths, but every piece has meaning based on the images drawn in it.

The image of a batik cloth is basically composed of three customarily local ornaments: a) *Main component*, which are the main images that can significantly be read, and thus the cloths were named after the images; b) *Filler component* or *variation*, which are the smaller images drawn to fill the blank spaces in between the main images. This filler component does not have specific meaning on the batik; c) *Isen-isen*, which are used to decorate leftover blank spaces between the main and filler components. *Isen-isen* is usually composed of arrangement of basic elements such as dots, flat or curved lines, small circles, and many more (Susanto, 1973).

According to *Serat Santi Badra*⁶, an old Javanese codex, the Chinese had influenced the birth of Lasem batik industry. The technique of batik-making was introduced by one of Admiral Cheng Ho's ship crew, named Bi Nang Un and his wife Na Li Ni in 1413 (Nurhajarini et al., 2015). Cirebon and Pekalongan, which are also situated in the northern coastal area of Java, were also known as batik cloth producer. These towns, alongwith Lasem, have had long batik production history with strong influence of Chinese culture. Hereinafter, batik producers from these areas developed unique visual characteristic on their batik cloths, including specific colors used, images, patterns and the composition. Generally speaking, batik from the northern coastal batik (called *batik pesisir*) is usually identified with brighter, more freely styled characteristics than batik from the classic aristocratic Javanese palaces (called *batik keraton*). Aristocratic batik from Javanese palaces has design limitation on the use of colors, patterns, and the composition because the symbolic representation.

Compared to batik pesisir from the other northern coastal town, Lasem batik also has its distinctive dye color, images, and composition. Each Lasem batik atelier have secret recipe on their natural dye. The well-known color from Lasem is distinct solid red color which people called '*getih pitik*' (chicken blood). For decades, other batik ateliers from other region in Java, such as from Pekalongan and Surakarta, have been sending their pre-waxed batik cloths to be dyed red in Lasem⁷.

3.3 Chinese ancestral altars & ancestral veneration tradition

The traditional Chinese people devoted their daily religious life to ancestral altars that were always located in the principal area of their houses (Smith, 2015, p. 257). The practice was inherited from the traditional Confucian era, which last to the neo-Confucian era faith. The concept behind the practice was the belief on 'life in the other world'. The traditional Chinese believe that each soul of deceased family member become two parts after death: 1) a *yin* component known as the *po*, attached to physical body and go down to the earth alongwith the burial (associated with the grave) and 2) a *yang* component known as the *hun*, the spiritual part that leave the body and go to heaven (associated with the ancestral tablet). On the further journey after a man's death, the traditional Chinese believe that each soul then divided in three parts: 1) physical body, which was laid on the grave; 2) part of soul that remained to live on the ancestral tablet; 3) other part of soul that went to The Courts of Judgements to

⁶ Badra Santi was a wise prince from the Majapahit kingdom (1432-1527)

⁷ Batik clothes are produced by wax-resist dye technique. To dye batik in various colors, batik clothes have to be waxed first, to cover parts that should not be colored. Each dyeing process produce only one color. After the first color successfully dyed, then the clothes is being waxed again. This time to cover other parts that is not going to be colored. Then the dyeing process is performed twice or three times more with each color until every part of the clothes is fully colored.

be reborn. The ancestral tablet then placed on the ancestral altar and believed as representation of the ancestors' existence at home.

This ancestral veneration tradition is indeed a filial piety and loyalty of traditional Chinese children, which express meaning of rootedness and continuity in the family. Members of family usually perform daily, monthly, bi-monthly, or seasonal routine rituals on the ancestral altar. They also perform rituals on each family important occasion such as weddings, birthdays, or funerals by burning incense sticks, prepare offerings on the altar table. They believe the continuity of ancestors' life in other world would depend on their prayers.

The table usually made of hardwood, beautifully carved with decorated ornament and polished. The ancestral altar tables shall be placed in such position that it overlooked much of the residents' life that went on in the house. This also means as a permanent presence watching over the doings of the descendants (Baker, 1979, p. 86). If possible, an ancestral altar table should consist of two parts, which can be extended forward to place offerings for ritual purposes. The back table is used to place ancestral tablets, which are very important, as the ancestor souls are believed residing in them. An altar cloth then should be placed accordingly along the front side of center table. Maria Khoo Joseph explained that the purpose of textile hanging as altar frontal is to demarcate sacred place aside from the daily spaces. On any special occasions, the altar cloths will help highlight the area since it usually placed in a room for social purposes (Martin, 2014).



Figure 2(a). Depiction of Qilin in 2-dimensional form: Ming Dynasty double gourd vase (Source: <http://chineseimperialporcelain.com/944/> accessed on Sunday, 26 August 2018)

3.4 Qilin and its symbolic meaning in Chinese culture

Qilin is one of the Chinese mythology creatures. It is a chimera, which has a horse-like body, with neck like a wolf, head like a dragon, and tail like an ox. Objects with qilin images often associated with a number of positive attributes, such as: 1) felicity, benevolence, 2) wise administration, grandeur, honor and rank, 3) longevity, 4) virility and illustrious offspring. Qilin skin often appears like fish scales with blue or green color on its back, yellow on its chest, and some were depicted to have two or three horns like deer's (Welch, 2008, p. 104).

The original depiction examples from main land China can be seen on silk-embroidered *tok wi* cloth in Figure 1, on a Ming Dynasty double gourd vase (see Figure 2a) and the statue in Beijing's Summer Palace (see Figure 2b). We can see that in the 2-dimensional form (on a vase), qilin body was usually depicted from the side view, but the head is turning over so its face is depicted from the front view.



Figure 2(b). Depiction of Qilin in 3-dimensional form: statue in Beijing Summer Palace (Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/qilin> accessed on Friday, 24 August 2018)

Qilin sometimes replaces the image of tiger in a composition of mythology creatures, which commonly use also phoenix, dragon, tortoise altogether. This grouping of mythology creatures is called "The Four Heraldic Animals" or "Four Intelligent" (Welch, 2008). According to the traditional Chinese mythology, qilin would show up on the event of birth or sage of a ruler. The coming of qilin is believed would bring prosperity for nature and people. It had been said that The Yellow Emperor⁸ (known also as Emperor Huang Di), one of greatest and legendary emperors of China, saw a qilin when he was sitting in the Imperial Garden before the time he reigned. It was said to show up again before the birth of Confucius⁹. Another belief said that qilin could live up to 2000 years and therefore qilin has been

⁸ Emperor Huang Di was known as a cultural emperor and patron saint of Taoism. He encouraged reading and writing culture, also unified China territory in the Yellow Plains of Yellow River.

⁹ The qilin showed up to Confucius mother before his birth, bringing a jade book with a note that the child she would gave birth to will rule as a king, although without rank (Sax, 2010).

used as a symbol of longevity, old age, as well as virtue and wisdom attribute. The latter homophone might be the main background of why the Chinese were likely to include qilin on their batik *tok wi* cloth design.

Qilin often is associated with other identical mythical creature such as: 1) *Bai Ze*, means 'white marsh'. It is been said that Emperor Huang-Di (Yellow Emperor) met bai ze on his journey to the eastern mountain and gave him the list of demons in the world. Bai ze is depicted with large horns and white feather; 2) *Giraffee*, a gift once sent to Chinese emperor. The giraffee, often-depicted with fish scaled-skin, is associated with good will, gentleness, and benevolence to living creatures; 3) *XieZhi*, is a creature of justice which can tell lies from truth. XieZhi often depicted as a goat with large single-horn (unicorn); 4) *Xiniu* (rhinoceros), often depicted with bovine appearance with short curved horn to communicate with the sky.

4. Analysis

4.1 Analysis on the way of image

4.1.1 1st Tok wi cloth

General Description

There are one big qilin with four other qilins images shown on the 1st batik *tok wi* (figure 1). Instead of circling around the big qilin, the smaller qilins looks like crouching alertly in each corner. Each small qilin faces is facing the big qilin in the center. These qilin are dynamically depicted, with one of front legs crawling up to the air. They are all drawn with the same detail: head without horns, each leg have five sharp white claws, each has blue and pink body, and instead of fish-like scales, the body is decorated with various *isen-isen* such as typical Lasem *latohan*¹⁰, 'cecek sawut', and 'ukel'.

- a) Angle of view The big qilin seems to turn aside its head about 45 degree, its head is pictured from the front view with a bit deviation. It twists its body, thus making its front body and chest visible from the front. While the back body, its legs and claws, and also its tail visible from slightly upward side view. The other small qilins are hardly recognizable if not depicted with the same *isen-isen* as the big qilin. The smaller qilin heads are sometimes unclearly drawn because the draftsman was probably misdepicted the qilins body orientation.
- b) Lines The outer outlines were dyed in pale white. These outlines formed boundaries between the qilin images with the background. The inner outlines were also dyed with pale white color, which intended to frame overlap inner details such as qilin head against its back body. Both inner and outer lines were light lines that are slightly seen.
On few parts, pale white colored *isen-isen* were used as inner outline too, such as 'cecek sawut' motif that outlined the qilin face. *Isen-isen* here are mostly intended to fill blank spaces within the inner and outer outline of body parts, particularly on top of blue and pink body surface. *Isen-isen* that is used to fill the tail, which look like curved lines called 'ukel'.
- c) Color The blue color is used to create background or negative space, while the pink color is used to create foreground or positive space. We can see mistakes happened in some of the dye coloring, which shown in the qilin's back leg. The center qilin's back leg that should be colored in blue was colored with red, same as the background color. On the upper right corner, the qilin's half lower body was also erroneously dyed with red, the color of the background. This could be happening because the process of batik making involves many people work through a long cycle (about 2 months). One who create pattern drawing process would not be the same person as the one who create filling motifs (*isen-isen*), apply the resisted-wax, nor the one who dye color.

¹⁰ Latohan is a kind of fruit plants that live abundantly around the northern coastal Java.

4.1.2 2nd Tok wi Cloth

General Description

Same overall condition found here in the 2nd tok wi cloth style. There are one big qilin with four other qilins images (see figure 3b). This tok wi cloth also depicting the smaller qilins around the big one in the center. Each small qilin faces is facing the big qilin in the center. They are all drawn with the same detail: head without horns, one of front legs crawling up to the air, each leg have five sharp white claws, each has colorful body full of *isen-isen* ornaments, and the fish-like scales of the body is properly depicted with typical Lasem *isen-isen* called *watu kricak* (meaning: small pieces of stones) and *rambutan/rawan* (meaning: rippled swamp water).

- a) Angle of view The big qilin turn over its head, thus making its head visible from the side view. It twists its body, thus making the front body (chest) visible from the front. While the back body, its legs and claws, and also its tail visible from slightly upward side view. The other small qilins are hardly recognizable if not depicted with the same *isen-isen* as the big qilin. The smaller qilin heads are sometimes unclearly drawn because the draftsman was probably misdepicted the qilins body orientation.
- b) Lines The outer outlines were dyed in thin light pink. These outlines formed boundaries between the qilin images with the background. It looks like the wax had been applied to the outlines using a smaller ‘canthing’ than the 1st tok wi. This can be seen from the light pink outlines that are hardly seen because they are so thin. This indicates that this cloth was made with better quality than the 1st tok wi, because the smoother and thinner the lines produced in batik cloth, the higher is the quality. Thus the batik cloth becomes more expensive due to the degree of difficulty in the process. The facial features of the qilins are carefully made by thick pink outlines followed by *isen-isen* called ‘*rambutan/rawan*’, which depicted the wavy hair of qilin. While the faces are filled with larger ‘*rambutan/rawan*’ *isen-isen*. The qilins lower body and legs are filled with Lasem origin *isen-isen* called ‘*watu kricak*’ in white color, which look like some neat arrangement of small round stones. Half of each leg is outlined with thick white lines, which accentuate the direction of the leg. Behind the thick white lines, we can see ‘*rambutan/rawan*’ *isen-isen* that looks like wavy lines in yellow and blue, and ‘*cecek*’ *isen-isen* that looks like small white dots on a blue background. These *isen-isen* represents qilins hair. It is the same *isen-isen* that is being used to depict the qilin face.
- c) Color This 2nd tok wi cloth has more colors in it (white, blue, greenish brown, light pink, and red), which means the wax-resisted dyeing process was more complex and took longer time. The use of color helped creating foreground effect of main components on the dark red background. The contrast of white color is used to accentuate directional lines as mentioned above.

4.2 Analysis on the inner grammar

4.2.1 1st Tok wi cloth

General Description

If we look closely, the big qilin and other four smaller qilins are being the foreground of the composition. Each qilin surrounded by few things that scattered nearby. Things scattered around the qilins are similar to some of the eight symbols of Buddhist immortals or ‘babao’ in Chinese, which likely to be associated with good fortune. There is a tortoise below the big qilin, depicted from above, so it seems like a plate. Tortoise (sometimes entwined with a snake) is often depicted together with qilin and symbolizes the direction of north. It also represents longevity since tortoises live up to thousand years (*Mythologies: A Polytheistic View of The World*, p. 106). The tortoise is filled with filler component called ‘*ceplok truntum*’ that symbolizes love. Each qilin is also depicted adjacent to a cuttlefish, which is located on each corner tip of the cloth. Cuttlefish is one of Chinese Lunar New Year festive dishes that mean continual abundance. It might indicate that this tok wi cloth was being used for Chinese Lunar New Year ancestral veneration ritual and represented to send prayers hoping for continual abundance

of the ancestors in their other life.

The *tok wi* has edging panel that framed the components composition within. This edging panel is filled with linear geometric pattern (triangle) and strand of flowers. The end of each edging panel formed square corner panel filled with single flower. However, it seems like the images on the edging panel does not represent any symbolic meaning other than its decorative function.

- a) Expression of 3-dimensional space The expression of 3-dimensional space was created through the circling arrangement of main components: the center part is the closest depiction to the audience in terms of time and distance, while the surrounded circling objects are farther depiction. This logic correlates with the expression of time-space expression and expression of center of interest, which pictured one same qilin dancing around in a 3-dimensional space.
- b) Expression of movement, Expression of movement in both of this *tok wi* cloths can be seen from the circling direction of main components: the qilins and objects scattered around them. The filler component of small white waves (or clouds) in various directions on the background of main component images also indicate dynamic movement.
- c) Expression of *time and space*, Multiple qilin images in Chinese original textiles or other two-dimensional form are rarely found. Most qilin images were not pictured in-group, since qilin itself was known as a solitaire creature. Even if a qilin had to be pictured in-group, usually it comes in the formation of “The Four Heraldic Animals” (together with phoenix, tortoise, and dragon), pair of symmetrical gatekeeper, or as “Three Celestial Guardians” (together with dog and lion). Based on this unusual manner of qilin depiction, we argued that the four smaller qilins probably was the same qilin in the center, which showed up on different time and space.
- d) Expression of the center of interest The big qilin on the center (with the surrounding things nearby) is depicted as the largest among others. This means that this group of image is the most important part of the composition. Regarding the expression of time-space, the big qilin might show up the first or the last, symbolizing continuity.

4.2.1 2nd Tok wi Cloth

General Description

The 2nd *tok wi* cloth almost alike to the 1st *tok wi* cloth. The main and filler component images used are the same. However, there are few differences between both *tok wi* cloths, which are: 1) the *isen-isen* used to fill the blank spaces within the main components and 2) the images used to fill the edging panel.

This 2nd *tok wi* cloth also has edging panel. It used lines of peonies and half circle pattern as filler component. The end of each edging panel formed square corner panel. Like the 1st *tok wi* cloth, the images on edging panel in this 2nd *tok wi* cloth might not represent something symbolic and only functioned as decorative elements.

- a) Expression of 3-dimensional space The description on the expression of 3-dimensional space is the same as the 1st *tok wi* cloth.
- b) Expression of movement, The description on the expression of movement is the same as the 1st *tok wi* cloth, since the 2nd *tok wi* also used identical main component images as the 1st *tok wi* cloth.
- c) Expression of *time and space*, The description on the expression of time and space is the same as the 1st *tok wi* cloth, since the 2nd *tok wi* used identical main and filler component images as the 1st *tok wi* cloth.
- d) Expression of the center of interest The description on the expression of 3-dimensional space is the same as the 1st *tok wi* cloth, since the 2nd *tok wi* used identical main component images as the 1st *tok wi* cloth.

5. Conclusion

The research result indicate that:

1) Effort to make sure the image readability was clearly shown on the way of image used in each batik *tok wi* cloths. We can see that both cloths used typical angle of view to depict the qilins. They are dynamically depicted with each legs pointed to different directions as if it is dancing, which are the same depiction as the former traditional image from main land China. The entire angles of view of the qilin body and legs are from the side, while the heads are from the front. Meanwhile, there are variations found on: 1) the use of filler components, 2) more significant on the use of *isen-isen* with typical Lasem batik lines and dots, and 3) the use of blocked colors to form foreground and background. Those three components are different from the original version of mainland China.

2) The inner grammar of qilin depiction in batik *tok wi* cloth is also different from the former traditional image from main land China. We found depiction of multiple qilins in batik *tok wi* cloths. On the original version, qilins are never depicted in multiple images. We argued that the reasons behind this qilin multiple image depiction were probably: 1) the need to express 3-dimensional space and movement, and 2) because of the characteristic of “filling spaces” as batik decorative principle and its essential concept of “writing dots”.

Hence, based on the visual language analysis of batik *tok wi* cloths, we propose that batik *tok wi* cloths should be carefully and strategically preserved. It is because of these batik *tok wi* cloths have distinguish visual language that differ from the original version from mainland China. We believe that the Indonesian Chinese diasporas has developed its own distinguished unique culture, especially in Lasem. Thus, this article encourages Lasem batik producers, Indonesian Chinese diaspora cultural activists, and the local government to document Chinese ancestral veneration ritual as cultural activities, including its batik *tok wi* cloths as artefacts of rich Indonesian syncretized culture.

We also suggest further study to analyze other batik *tok wi* cloths, particularly on the visual language of traditional Chinese symbolic images depiction within overall batik *tok wi* cloth composition. It is important to study the visual language to further develop distinguished characteristics of Lasem batik *tok wi* cloth, with appropriate depiction of traditional Chinese symbolic images. Through this article, we also suggest Tabrani’s visual language method as an approach to find distinguished symbolic image depiction on Indonesian batik products.

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