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Revealing the Intangible Values in Lasem Batik Motif

Christine Claudia Lukman¹, Yunita Setyoningrum², Sandy Rismantojo³

ABSTRACT

The intangible value of life visualized in Lasem batik is a cultural code in arrangement of various signs. This value of life is also a geographical indication factor that gives batik Lasem a particular characteristic. Illiteracy of cultural code will bring incorrect signs arrangement so that Lasem batik loses its geographical indication, especially in batik with motif design innovation. This qualitative-descriptive research using semiotic analysis to reveal Lasem society's value of life, which is implied in the visual style of batik motifs. Each visual sign has an individual meaning and will form a text (series of meanings) when the signs are combined. Purposive samples based on typology of batik motifs style that is Chinese, Javanese, and combination of the two styles. Through analysis on three purposive samples, it can be revealed that the ideology implicit in batik originates from the life values of the multi-ethnic Lasem society, which comes from the ideology of Taoism, Confucianism, and Javanese value of life.

Keywords: Design innovation, geographical indication, intangible life values, Lasem Batik.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Lasem is a region that has particular social and cultural characteristic. As a former major harbor that was visited by various ethnic groups, Lasem people are accustomed to ethnic and cultural diversity (Nurhajarini et al, 2015, p. 1-2, 4). It can be said that Lasem was one of the earliest Chinese settlements on the north coast of Java. Inter-ethnic marriages between Chinese men and Javanese women at that time generated 'Tionghoa Peranakan' society with their unique hybrid culture (Gumulya et al, 2017, p. 12). One of the artifacts from this 'Tionghoa Peranakan' culture is Lasem batik (Utomo et al, 2018, p.22). 'Tionghoa Peranakan' used Lasem batik for various purposes such as 'tokwi' (ancestral altar tablecloth), 'muili' (curtain cloth for door), cloth for carrying a baby, and also for women's clothing. Thus it can be said that they used batik for various aspects of their lives, so it is not surprising that they use batik designs (motifs, colors, composition) to document their hopes and values visually. The motifs were

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originating from Chinese visual styles as phoenix, dragon, and chrysanthemum (Rahayu, 2014, p.42), but then combined with local motifs such as 'latohan', 'lunglungan', and so on. The color schemes are 'bang-bangan' (red motif on broken white background), 'kelengan' or 'biron' (blue motif on broken white background), 'bang-biron' (combination of red and blue motifs on broken white background), and 'tiga negeri' (combination on red, blue, and brown). Lasem batik originally used natural dyes such as noni (*Morinda citrifolia*) root skin, jambal (*Pelthophorum ferruginum*) wood, and tingi (*Cerriops tagal*) wood; but then synthetic dyes.

Lasem batik industry, were pioneered by 'Tionghoa Peranakan' entrepreneurs in the early 19th. Originally they made batik to be used for family needs, but later to be traded ((Nurhajarini, Purwaningsih, & Fibiona, 2015, p.80). In the first half of the 19th century Lasem emerged as an important batik production center (Veldhuisen, 2007, p.58). The heyday of Lasem batik industry continued until the mid-20th century. Javanese entrepreneurs also began producing Lasem batik in small quantities using their own motifs such as 'Sekar Jagad', 'Kendoro-Kendiri', 'Latohan', and 'Gunung Ringgit', whose design also have symbolic meaning.

The changing lifestyles of Indonesian women, who prefer modern clothing, and cultural disruption during the New Order (Orde Baru) period that were anti-Chinese culture cause the Lasem 'Tionghoa Peranakan' batik industry to decline in the 1980s to early 2000s. The batik industry of Javanese entrepreneurs also suffered the same fate, mainly due to changes in the style of women's clothing in Indonesia.

At that time the Lasem younger generation did not want to continue their family's batik business. They prefer to work in other professional fields outside Lasem (Maulany & Masrurroh, 2007, p. 6). It was only after Unesco recognized Indonesian batik as masterpiece of intangible heritage of humanity on October 2, 2009, Indonesian people became proud to wear batik again. This made younger generation of Lasem entrepreneurs returned to Lasem to continue their family business. Thus batik industry began to revive. This momentum was further strengthened by Presidential Decree No. 33/2009 concerning National Batik Day. Nevertheless the cultural disruption and decline of Lasem batik industry for 20 years made younger generation of batik entrepreneurs and their craftspeople lost the ability to understand the intangible values that were embedded in Lasem batik design.

Actually a piece of batik is not just a fabric with meaningless decorative motif but implied hopes and wishes, which come from the value of life. In the past, Lasem society could understand the implicit meaning of batik motifs based on their cultural code. Illiteracy of the cultural code will make the signs arrangement in new design to be incorrect so that Lasem batik loses its special characteristics based on its geographical indications. At this time some Lasem batik entrepreneurs make 'innovative designs' merely by combining motifs from Lasem and other regions without considering its geographical indication.

Geographical indication is a sign used to identify the origin area of the product due to geographical environmental factors including natural factor, human factor, or combination of the two factors that giving a certain reputation, quality, and characteristics to the product (wipo.int/geo_indications/en/). The geographical indication of Lasem Batik must be kept so that it still has a particular reputation, quality and characteristic.

Unfortunately, now many people consider the geographical indication of Lasem batik only from tangible natural factors. Thus they are making innovation design motifs without consider the intangible value of life, which is a cultural code that regulates the arrangement of motifs.

1.2 Problem statement

Lasem batik entrepreneurs, both Tionghoa Peranakan and Javanese, have lost their cultural code to understand the intangible value inherent in batik designs because of the vacuum of batik industry from the 1970s to early 2000s. They need to understand the intangible values of the multi-culture and harmonious Lasem society so as not to lose their batik's geographical indications.

The purpose of this research is to reveal the life value of Lasem society as a cultural code that can be used when making innovation batik design which still has its particular characteristic quality.

2. Literature review

2.1 Cultural code

Chandler (2007, p.147-148) argues that the meaning of a sign depends on the code within signs make sense, thus a sign only function within a code. Through code the signs are arranged into a meaningful system that connects signifier with signified. Thus code is an interpretative framework used by producers and sign interpreters. Code goes beyond single text, linking it together into an interpretative framework. A text is made by selecting and combining signs in relation to familiar codes to limit the range of possible meanings that the reader might make. The selection and compounding of signs involves paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis to produce a certain ideological meaning. In the reading the text, sign is interpreted by referring to the code that seems appropriate. Usually the right code is determined by all types of contextual cues. Signs in the text can be seen as manifestation of the cues in appropriate code to be interpreted. In applying a code into the text, it is possible that in reading process the code is revised and transformed; so that continuous reading with the same code might produce different text, which in turn can changes the code used to read it (Chandler, 2007). Basically, according to Eagleton (1996, p. 125), the dialectical process is limitless, and this often devastates the assumptions about the code that is considered appropriate for a text.

In case the relationship between a signifier and its signified is quiet arbitrary, then it is obvious that interpreting the conventional meaning of signs requires familiarity with suitable sets of conventions. The conventions of codes represent a social dimension since code is a set of practices that are familiar to media users, which operating within a broad cultural framework.

Stuart Hall (1973, p. 131) states that a discourse can only be understood by means of code operations, thus society itself depends on the existence of signifying systems. From this statement Chandler (2007: 148) resumes that as studying cultural practices, semioticians treat any objects or actions as signs if they have meaning to members of the cultural group. They also searching to recognize the rules or conventions of the codes which underlie the production of meanings inside that culture. Therefore Hyatt and Simons (Eagleton, 2005) stated that cultural codes are symbols and systems of meaning that have specific relevance to certain groups of society. Shipunova et al (2017: p. 694) confirmed that “cultural codes based on sign-oriented symbols form a semantic matrix that communicates basic orientation in the physical and sociocultural space to an individual’s subconsciousness. This invisible framework, determined by a sign-oriented form, ensures transmission of a socially significant meaning that is necessary for mutual understanding of people, social control of their actions and thinking”.

Revealing cultural codes is not an easy thing, because it is an accumulation of long periods of experience rooted in historical traditions. Cultural code as ideology can only be revealed if we have the ability to understand the encoding and decoding of texts in particular cultural contexts. Thus, Chandler (2012, p.150) suggests three kinds of knowledge required by interpreters of a text, namely social knowledge, textual knowledge, and modality judgments.

2.2 Life values of Lasem society

As clearly expressed previously, Lasem society is a harmonious plural society. In everyday practice, life values that guide their behavior come from Javanese, and Chinese values. Gunawan Sumodiningrat and Ari Wulandari (2014) stated that Javanese life values refer to six dimensions of life, namely:

- (1) Divinity value is related to obedience to religious teachings, religious attitudes, and faith.
- (2) Humanitarian value concerns tolerance, mutual respect, social care, and justice.
- (3) Spiritual value related to sincerity, submission, acceptance, generosity, and patience.
- (4) National values are support for democracy, love of the homeland, nationality spirit, harmony and unity spirit, and maintaining nationality and homeland.
- (5) Family values are sacrifice, loyalty, obedience and devotion to parents.
- (6) Worldly value (human attitudes while living in the world), including being confident, caring for environment, simplicity of life, and modesty.

The life value influencing Chinese people originated particularly from Confucianism and Taoism. The value of Confucian life is harmony, virtue, truth, politeness, wisdom, honesty, loyalty, and filial

piety, while Taoism is a virtue so that humans can have a good life represented by three gods called Fu Lu Shou Sanxing. The three gods represented good luck (fu), wealth (lu), and longevity (shou).

3. Method

The method that can be used to reveal the intangible life value in batik is through semiotic analysis. In semiotic, the intangible life value that visualized in Lasem batik design is a cultural code in arrangement of various signs. Each visual sign has an individual meaning and will form a text (series of meanings) when the signs are combined.

This study uses semiotics to reveal the intangible values (ideology), namely the life value of Lasem society, which is implied in a piece of batik cloth as a text. Meaning is constructed through an ideological sign system on batik, so that semiotic analysis is an ideological analysis.

Textual analysis of Lasem batik is an imperative method that operates at two levels of analysis: individual sign analysis, and groups of signs that make up the text. In language structuralism context, signs cannot be seen individually, but must be in relationships and their combinations with other signs in a system. Sign analysis based on a systems or its combination involves rules consisting of two axis, which are paradigmatic and syntagmatic.

Paradigmatic is the relationship of language elements in speech and is in the vertical axis. The paradigmatic relationship takes place by comparing language elements that have the same position, while the syntagmatic is the linear relationship of language elements in speech. Syntagmatic relations occur by analyzing the language elements in one speech without any comparison with the other. The method of combining these signs is based on the shared code in a society so that a message can be communicated.

Textual analysis is based on the polysemic principle or diversity of connotative meanings that are always related to the code of values, and social meaning. Text is a combination of syntagmatic signs, which through a social code produce certain connotations. The interpretation of its meaning is based on various levels of signification as stated by Barthes, that are denotation, connotation, and myth that enable to reveal the intangible ideological value. Ideologies are codes that reinforce or are congruent with structures of power and works by creating forms of “common sense”, or of the taken-for-granted in everyday life.

The purposive sample in this study came from Lasem batik motif, which has been recognized by its geographical indications through Indonesian Intellectual Property Rights certificates. Selected based on three visual style typologies that are thought to imply certain intangible values. Signs are analyzed individually and in groups expressing ideologies related to the intangible values of Lasem society.

4. Analysis

The analysis was conducted on three purposive samples of Lasem Batik that were certified, which represented a Chinese visual style, Lasem local visual style, and a combination of Chinese and local Lasem visual style.

4.1 Lasem penutup pintu lokcan

The creator of Lasem Penutup Pintu Lokcan was the late Naomi Susilowati. Lasem Penutup Pintu Lokcan batik is a “muili”, which was used in the past as a door curtain, has a Chinese visual style.

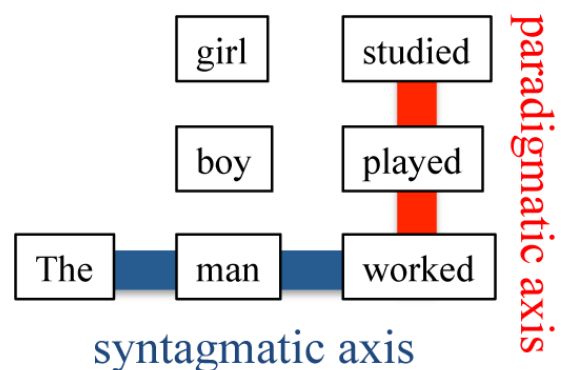


Figure 1. Sign combination and selection based on paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis.(source: developed from Daniel Chandler’s paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis diagram, 2007)



Figure 2. Batik Lasem Penutup Pintu Lokcan.(source: Dinas Perdagangan, Perindustrian, Koperasi dan UMKM Rembang, 2018)

Analysis of sign meanings, individually and in groups, on batik as text can be seen in the following table.

Table 1.

Analysis of meaning and ideology of visual signs on Batik Lasem Penutup Pintu Lokcan

BATIK LASEM PENUTUP PINTU LOKCAN			
SYNTAGMATIC AXIS			
VISUAL SIGNS			
Main motif	Complementary motifs	Isen-Isen /Texture	Color
Carp	Peaches and fans, bamboo tubes and staffs, swords, castanets, pumpkins, flutes, flower baskets, lotus.	-	Black and white combination
MEANING OF EACH SIGN			
In Chinese traditional culture, carp as fish means abundance and prosperity.	In Taoist teachings, these complementary motives are 8 lucky signs (longevity, wealth, spiritual strength, health, harmony, inclusion, and purity)	-	In Taoism, the combination of black and white represents the union of yin and yang
TEXTUAL MEANING			
Prosperity, longevity, and luck in harmony of yin and yang unity.			
IDEOLOGY			
Fu Lu Shuo, the life value of Chinese people based on Taoism, which means having a happy life blessed with luck, wealth, and longevity.			

Carp, as the main motif, is a sign that belongs to the category of symbol, whose meaning is determined by society conventions in a particular culture. In Chinese culture, fish means abundance and prosperity. The meaning comes from the homophone “yu”, which means fish as well as abundance and prosperity. Complementary motifs are eight good luck signs in Taoism: peach and fan symbolize longevity and wealth, bamboo tubes and staffs symbolize longevity, the sword symbolizes the power of chasing away evil spirit, castanet symbolizes inclusion in starting a business, pumpkin symbolizes health and longevity, flute symbolizes harmony that can repel negative energy, flower basket symbolizes wealth, and lotus symbolizes purity and compassion. The combination of black and white represents the union of yin and yang.

Overall, these signs are arranged on syntagmatic axis according to the cultural code of Chinese society in Lasem, which is influenced by Taoism. The whole meaning in text is prosperity, longevity, and

good luck in the harmony of ying and yang unity. This intangible value, which is life value, adopted by some Chinese society in Lasem.

4.2 Kendoro Kendiri Ukel

The creator of Kendoro Kendiri Ukel is Anisa, a Javanese woman in Lasem. This motif is a development of the classic Kendoro Kendiri motif that has Lasem’s local visual style. In the old days batik with this motif was worn by Javanese brides in Lasem.



Figure 3. Batik Kendoro Kendiri Ukel. (source: Dinas Perdagangan, Perindustrian, Koperasi dan UMKM Rembang, 2018)

Analysis of sign meanings, individually and in groups, on batik as text can be seen in the following table.

Table 2.

Analysis of meaning and ideology of visual signs on Kendoro Kendiri Ukel Batik

KENDORO KENDIRI UKEL BATIK			
SYNTAGMATIC AXIS			
VISUAL SIGNS			
Main motif	Complementary motifs	<i>Isen-Isen</i> /Texture -Kendoro-Kendiri	Color
Flowering vines		-Ukel	Combination of dark brown and red
MEANING OF EACH SIGN			
A beautiful family relationship	- Symmetrical relationships	-Fertility	Brown symbolizes solemnity and spiritual attitude, while red symbolizes ardor
TEXTUAL MEANING			
Proper family relationship and dignity can generate happiness and prosperity.			
IDEOLOGY			
The value of Javanese society’s life, which is “memayu hayuning bebrayan” (embellishing life through togetherness).			

The “lung-lungan” motif (sprouts or buds of the vines) is a symbolic sign that can only be understood by its aesthetic and culture code of Lasem society. This motif symbolizes the intimate and expanding family ties, while the blooming flowers symbolize the beauty and happiness of marriage. Flowers are also a symbol of a famous reputation. Kendoro-kendiri is a complementary motif in the form of a pair of symmetrical curved lines. The name of “Kendoro-kendiri” motif comes from the term “Kendono-Kendini” which means a pair of man and woman in Javanese. The shape of “ukel” refers to rice grains that are ready to be harvested, so it can be said that “ukel” symbolizes fertility and prosperity. Brown symbolizes solemnity, while red means enthusiasm in Javanese culture. The textual meaning is that proper family relationship and dignity can generate happiness and fertility. All signs are

arranged on syntagmatic axis by cultural code that is influenced by Javanese principles about the importance of family relationship. The ideology, which is the intangible values of batik, originates from Javanese principles concerning human values, namely “memayu hayuning bebrayan” (embellishing life through togetherness).

4.3 Lasem Lerek Parang Sekar Srengrengan

The creator of Lasem Lerek Parang Sekar Srengrengan batik is Paul Susanto, a man of Tionghoa Peranakan descent. This batik uses a combination of Javanese and Chinese visual styles.

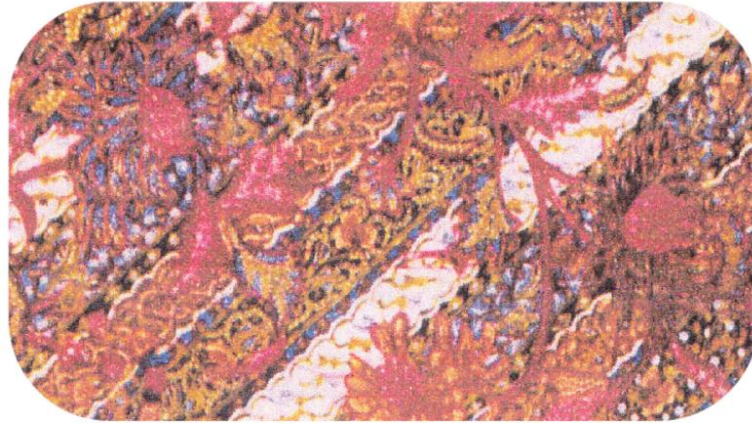


Figure 4. Lasem Lerek Parang Sekar Srengrengan. (source: Dinas Perdagangan, Perindustrian, Koperasi dan UMKM Rembang, 2018)

Analysis of sign meanings, individually and in groups, on batik as text can be seen in the following table.

Table 3.

Analysis of meaning and ideology of visual signs on Lasem Lerek Parang Sekar Srengrengan Batik

LASEM LEREK PARANG SEKAR SRENGRENGAN BATIK			
SYNTAGMATIC AXIS			
VISUAL SIGNS			
Main motif	Complementary motifs	Isen-Isen /Texture	Color
Chrysanthemum	“Lerek Parang”	-	Combination of color with red and purple
MEANING OF EACH SIGN			
Chrysanthemum flowers mean elegance, courage, and longevity in Chinese culture.	Continuous efforts to achieve goals such as waves at sea.	-	Brown symbolizes solemnity and inner outlook in Javanese culture, while red symbolizes joy and luck in Chinese culture.
TEXTUAL MEANING			
Continuous and steadfast endeavors to achieve life’s goals of happiness and prosperity to old age.			
IDEOLOGY			
“Sabar sareh mesthi bakal pikoleh” (the diligent one will surely achieve his goals) from Javanese life value, which is in accordance with Chinese life value namely honesty and endurance to face the hard situation.			

The chrysanthemum motif is a symbolic sign commonly found on coastal batik, which is influenced by Chinese culture. The meaning is attributed to the bloom of chrysanthemum in autumn in China when other flowers have withered. Thus chrysanthemum symbolizes elegance, courage, and strong determination to face difficult circumstances, happiness and prosperity in old age. The “lerek parang” motif originates from Mataraman (inland Java), which is a symbolic sign of continuous effort to reach goals. Overall, these signs are arranged by cultural codes from Chinese and Javanese life

values, which is continuous efforts and steadfastness face the hard conditions to achieve goals, namely happiness and prosperity. The ideology that is the intangible value of batik originates from Javanese teaching concerning spiritual value, namely “sabar sareh mesthi bakal” (the diligent one will surely achieve his goals), which is in accordance with the Confucian principles, namely the value of honesty and hard work to achieve success.

5 Discussion

Semiotic analysis of the meaning of motif, which is a symbolic sign, individually or in groups in batik as the text can reveal its ideology. Connecting the type of batik with its function in the past can do validation of the meaning.

Lasem Penutup Pintu Lokcan is a type of batik that was formerly referred to “muili”, which is a cloth to be hung on the door. The cloth, according to Ishwara (Ishwara, Yahya, Moeis, & Rambe, 2011) is decorated with auspicious symbol images to reject disaster and invite good luck. This is a validation that shows that signs at Lasem Penutup Pintu Lokcan batik means prosperity, longevity, and good luck in the harmony of “yin” and “yang” unity. Although now the batik may not be used as a door curtain but as attire, but it still contains wishes that those who wear it will get prosperity, longevity, and good fortune (in accordance with the ideal values of Taoism in Lasem Chinese society).

The same method can be done to validate the analysis result of life value on Kendoro Kendiri Ukel batik. In the past Kendoro Kendiri batik, according to Sigit Wicaksono (senior figure of batik entrepreneur) in an interview in 2017, was used as batik cloth for bride and groom in Javanese wedding ceremony in Lasem villages. This is suitable with the results of batik motifs analysis that Kendoro Kendiri motif is vines arranged symmetrically symbolizing a pair of husband and wife. The vines with blooming flowers also symbolize intimate and extended family ties, and ever-going happiness. While the “ukel” motif refers to the rice grains that are ready to be harvested, so it symbolizes fertility and prosperity. It can be said, this batik contains hope of a happy marriage that can strengthen the relationship between families, and blessed with prosperity and fertility (having descendant).

Lasem Lerek Parang Sekar Srengrengan batik does not have a special function comparable to the two batiks discussed earlier. This batik is unique because it combines inland batik motifs (“lerek parang” that is originating from Yogyakarta and Surakarta palaces) with chrysanthemum coastal batik motif influenced by Chinese visual culture. The motif of “Lerek Parang” is arranged diagonally and inspired by the waves of ocean that never stops moving, symbolizing the never-ending effort to reach the destination. The combination of “parang lerek” and chrysanthemum motif is appropriate since the flowers.

6. Conclusion

The semiotic analysis of Lasem batik motifs can be used to reveal the intangible values, which are life values of Lasem society that are not understood by batik entrepreneurs and artisans nowadays. Knowledge of batik function with certain motifs in the past can be used to validate the results of semiotic analysis.

Through analysis on three purposive samples, it can be revealed that the ideology implicit in batik originates from the life values of the multi-ethnic Lasem society. Lasem Lokcan Penutup Pintu batik purely uses Chinese visual style, which implies an ideology from Taoism about a happy life filled with luck, wealth, and longevity. Kendoro-Kendiri Ukel batik uses local visual style of Lasem, which implies an ideology of Javanese life values related to family, namely a marriage that can strengthen and expands family ties. Lasem Lerek Parang Sekar Srengrengan batik uses Javanese and Chinese motifs. These two motifs complemented the ideology of hard work and endurance in facing difficult situations to achieve goals derived from Javanese and Confucian life values.

The results of semiotic analysis revealed that ideology, which is a life value implicit in Lasem batik, originated from Javanese and Chinese life value. This value comes from the past when batik entrepreneurs and their artisans consciously encoded it through visual signs on batik. Unfortunately at this time the batik entrepreneurs and their artisans in Lasem only copy the motifs without understanding their meaning, because they unable to decode it anymore. Inability to identify the

cultural codes can cause inappropriate combination of signs in the syntagmatic axis, especially when making design innovation.

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