

## THE ROLE OF BASIC DESIGN COURSE IN THE INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL CULTURE VALUES

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**Abstract:** Indonesia has been known as a country which upholds cultural values and philosophy through artworks media. One of those is presented in batik. No other cloth in the Indonesian archipelago, perhaps in the world as well, contains so many symbols and meanings. But sadly, as the globalization emerges, there is a tendency to exalt developed country's culture, and our young generation no longer cares about our own country's cultural values. Batik is considered obsolete, not fancy, and only suitable for the old generation. In the modern design world, basic design subject may be a good tool to introduce local values while the young learn to compose the elements and design principles as design sensitivity training. One of the tasks is making a pattern composition using local content, and batik is a complex local pattern that is commonly used as inspiration.

**Keywords:** *basic design, local content, batik*

## PERAN PEMBELAJARAN MATA KULIAH DESAIN DASAR DALAM PENGENALAN DAN PENGEMBANGAN NILAI BUDAYA LOKAL

**Abstrak:** Indonesia telah dikenal sebagai negara yang menjunjung tinggi nilai-nilai budaya dan filsafat melalui media seni. Salah satu contohnya diwujudkan dalam batik. Tidak ada kain lain di Indonesia, mungkin juga di dunia, yang mengandung begitu banyak simbolisme dan makna. Sayangnya, seiring dengan globalisasi dan kecenderungan untuk mengagungkan budaya negara maju, generasi muda kita menjadi tidak lagi peduli dengan nilai budaya negara mereka. Batik dianggap kuno, tidak keren, dan hanya cocok digunakan oleh generasi tua. Dalam dunia desain modern, matakuliah desain dasar dapat menjadi alat yang baik untuk memperkenalkan nilai lokal sambil mahasiswa belajar untuk mengkomposisikan elemen dan prinsip desain guna melatih kepekaan desain mereka. Salah satu tugasnya adalah membuat komposisi patra dengan menggunakan nilai lokal, dan batik adalah patra lokal kompleks yang seringkali digunakan sebagai inspirasi.

**Kata Kunci:** *desain dasar, nilai lokal, batik*

### INTRODUCTION

Culture is a pattern of meaning that is thoroughly intertwined in symbols and transmitted historically (Abdullah, 2006:1). Culture is often considered a blue print that has become guidance in the course of human life which affects their behavior. Furthermore, culture is a system of inherited conception in the form of symbol that in this way people can communicate, preserve, and develop knowledge and attitude towards life. Culture may come in the form of physical and non-physical objects.

Human beings are social beings who require socialization and communication with each other day by day. They may communicate verbally and symbolically to deliver their ideas or intention and to teach their next generation about life values. Our ancestors used to imply their means in some kinds of media, one of which is through batik process making, besides its etiquette and pattern symbols. The technique of batik making is generally delivered through informal ways and becomes daily activities.

The Javanese word "batik", commonly, refers to a piece of cloth which has been decorated by a wax resist technique. However, batik initially referred to a technique to create a pattern by using wax as resistance, which allowed it to be applied in any kind of materials such as fabrics (cotton, silk, and drab in common) as cloth, wood as furniture or partition, or even paper as decorative elements. This wide range of material possibilities should be responded as an opportunity to develop batik even more.

To enter the era of global market, the industry of creative media began to be ogled as the industry with a broad market share. Our local designers are those who are expected to be able to sustain this industry. Designers are creative groups who are expected to be able to apply and develop batik especially in the global market era by 2015. Unfortunately, young Indonesian designers tend to see batik as obsolete things to do and too ancient to compete in the modern era. However, the claim of batik as Malaysia's heritage awoke Indonesians to preserve batik and develop it. As a response to introducing batik to the young designers and allow them to develop batik in their creations, batik is now implemented as one of the subjects to learn especially in basic design course.

## **METHOD**

This research has been done by using a qualitative method. Researchers did observation, literature studies, and interview to collect information. Observation was made by observing students in basic design studios (during pattern making subject) while interviews were done to the lecturer and tutors for this basic design studio, the students who had done this pattern making subject in basic design studio, batik

makers, batik experts, and batik workshop owners in Surabaya. This research used basic design studio in Interior Design Department Petra Christian University Surabaya as a sample which included 1 lecturer, 3 batik experts, 10 tutors, 123 students of class 2010 as respondents excluding some batik makers and batik workshop owners in Surabaya. The information will be arranged and presented descriptively.

## **BASIC DESIGN**

### **Design Elements**

Every design may consist of some elements to be developed and composed in every creation that is called design elements. Design elements are basic units of a visual image. The design elements are: *spot, line, shape, color, texture, form/mass (3 dimensional object), and pattern*.

Elements of the existing design are a work of art that is automatically formed. Every artwork must have a certain form, which, when simplified, will become a competition of spot, line, or shape with the use of a certain color to bring depth. In every shape, it may include the use of size, direction, colors, and textures, which occupy a space of design whether in 2D or 3D (Sanyoto, 2010:7). These elements can be found in batik since batik is an example of Indonesian complex patterns.

### **Design Principles**

The design principles are concepts used to organize or arrange the structural elements of design. Good application of design principles in composing design elements may come up to a good design which we call it has achieved the "unity". According to Sanyoto (2010:7), to achieve unity, design principles that can be used are: *balance, proportion, rhythm, emphasis, clarity, and simplicity*.

## INDONESIAN BATIK

Batik is one way of making a fabric. Besides, it may also refer to two definitions. The first one, this term may refer to a process to give color to a fabric by using wax to prevent color staining to other portion of the fabric. In international literature, this process is often called as wax resist dyeing. The second definition refers to batik as fabric and clothing made with this technique including the use of certain motifs which have peculiarities (Efianingrum, 2011:9).

The Indonesian Batik has been designated by UNESCO as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009. According to Ani Bambang Yudhoyono (2010: 111) the Indonesian Batik has been considered to fulfill three out of six UNESCO requirements which are:

- 1) Indonesian Batik involves a tradition where knowledge and wisdom have been passed down orally for hundreds of years.
- 2) Indonesian Batik is a social practice where symbolism inherits in the art pertains to the social roles and the structure of social relations.
- 3) Indonesian Batik contains noble values that were created to honor traditional customary ceremonies.

The interaction between each culture at various levels may raise the possibility of rivalry and elimination. Those cultures that are often exposed may stay preserved rather than those cultures that are less exposed. For example, there are some cultures in Indonesia that are better known than others namely Javanese, Betawi, and Batak cultures.

In the global discourse, local cultural resistance is present as a form of opposition

to global culture. The focus of this local resistance identified in popular culture and lifestyle of the community comes from the effects of modernization. In order to increase young generations' resistance to the influence of global culture that incessantly invades, some efforts and strategic steps are needed by involving various related institutions.

The need to continue preserving the Indonesian batik is our collective responsibility as a nation regardless of ethnicity or culture. Even though Indonesian Batiks were earlier better known as a heritage coming from the land of Java, now it becomes our nation's responsibility to keep. Since the Indonesian batik was declared by UNESCO as world heritage, it has become part of our national culture to preserve.

### Batik Making Processes

The process of making traditional Indonesian Batik can be defined as "the work of many hands" because making a piece of handmade batik will need a group of artisans. In this case, as an example, to make a single piece of batik cloth, the traditional batik process involves an extended network of some specialist such as:

- 1) spinners and weavers of cloths;
- 2) cloth priming specialist;
- 3) designers and motif owners;
- 4) pattern artists;
- 5) a mix of canting artists with different specialties in wax application;
- 6) natural dye makers;
- 7) wax removal specialists, using scrapping or boiling techniques which may need to be repeated to produce the design's color scheme; and
- 8) Batik cloth finishing specialists (Yudhoyono, 2010:13)

By knowing those specialists involved in making a piece of handmade batik,

it is easily understood that batik is never a work of a single person. It has always been about network, communities of creative workers, who work silently together as equal partners, in bringing a piece of batik to life (Yudhoyono, 2010:13).

According to Ani Bambang Yudhoyono (2010:94), there are some grades of quality determined by its fabric materials. It is divided into 4 categories which are *primitissima* cloth (the best), *prima* cloth (medium quality), unbleached cotton (low quality), and gray unbleached cotton (poor quality). A batik making process generally consist of the following steps in order.

### **Ketel**

A cloth is primed before it is deemed viable to be waxed and dyed. Some prepare the cloth by boiling it in a mixture of water and rice straw. Sometimes peanut oil is added into the mix to smoothen the cloth's texture, soften the body, and even out the threads. In the village of Sukapura, Tasikmalaya, West Java, priming a piece of cloth involves the regiment of soaking and rinsing up to 15 times.

### **Nyoret**

*Nyoret* is drawing the pattern onto the cloth with pencil. Some batik designs, such as geometric patterns or visual narratives require this additional step prior to the *nglowong* step.

### **Nglowong**

This is the first application of wax using a cap (hand stamp) or a canting (the traditional Javanese wax-pen). The application of wax on one side of the cloth is called *ngengreng*.

### **Nembok**

This is the application of the second layer of wax. It reinforces the blocking effect of the first layer after the second dye-dipping. The wax used in this step is usually thicker and adheres more securely to the cloth.

### **Medel**

This is the first dip in the dye. In the case of classical batik of the interiors, *medel* refers to dyeing in deep blue dye (indigo) to set the background color and define the outline of patterns. In contemporary batik, *medel* can use any color since traditional rules no longer apply.

### **Ngerok or Ngelorod**

This is the step to remove the wax with *cawuk* (dull knife), a brush or some other scraping tool, referred to as *ngerok*. Removing the wax by boiling the cloth is known as *nglorod*.

### **Mbironi**

This is the third application of wax in the purpose to emphasize the pattern. *Mbironi* only covers those parts of the pattern which are to remain dark in color.

### **Nyolet**

This is the additional application of color using a small brush over areas of pattern which have been outlined with wax. This is intended to give colorful effects to the design or to create accents on motifs. This treatment is used mostly in coastal area batik.

### **Nyoga**

This is the second immersion of dye. The term is derived from the word *soga*, a type of hardwood. The bark of its branches

is used to obtain the brown color characteristic of the batik of the inland.

### Etiquette of Batik

Talking about batik, then it will never be separated from traditional Batik which came from the old Java. Batik for the old Javanese has a communication function.



**Figure 1. Parang and Sidodrajat Motifs**  
(Source: <http://abduh1.blogspot.com/2011/01/mistik-dan-mitosseputar-batik.html> and <http://batikshuniyya.wordpress.com/batik-tulis-khas-kabupaten-batang/> )

The classical batik, which originally came from the ancient Javanese royal courts, is essentially an array of symbols and codes stipulated by the monarchy (Yudhoyono, 2010:107). It represents a hierarchy/status in social life which also includes a person's blood-range, rank, and affiliation.

As it functions to represent social status, there was a code of using batik in old Java. The strict boundaries set by the code were most dramatically illustrated in the exalted batik motifs reserved exclusively for some monarch and their successors, so that some batik motifs may not be worn by the civilians. As it functions to communicate, some motifs may also contain historical values (even only for a particular group).

As an example, in Solo there are two types of batik, *Batik Kratonan* and *Batik Saudagaran*. *Batik Kratonan* is batik consisting of motif that should be only worn by the royal family in certain events. For example, *parang* motifs, according to this etiquette, should only be worn by *Sentono Dalem* (son of the queen); *sido drajat batik* shall only be worn by the law families for the wedding ceremony. (<http://forum.upi.edu/v3/index.php?topic=12675.0>).

On the other hand, *Batik Saudagaran* is batik consisting of motifs that can be worn by civilians and available for trading. Modern batik freely traded nowadays may be included in this type of batik. Modern batik can be seen from several points of view. First it may be considered modern batik from the sense of motif (as if making a new pattern or modifying previous traditional motifs). Second, it may be the reason from the technique it is made (modern stamp or even print). Modern batik generally has more "pop" motifs and mass-product oriented which may neglect some values in traditional batik making process.



**Figure 2. Modern Batik Motifs**  
(Source: <http://techno.okezone.com/read/2009/10/02/56/261908/batik-fraktal-kawinkan-seni-batik-dengan-sains>)

### **Batik Values**

Talking about batik values, people tend to talk about batik motifs philosophy. For example, the *kawung* motifs represent purity and human relationship with the cosmic universe. However, the depth of our cultural identity is not merely determined by the choice of motif and imagery sheer clothing. According to Efianingrum (2011:10), there are things more substantial inside traditional batik that should be highlighted, such as:

- 1) The ethos
- 2) The spirit
- 3) The culture
- 4) The service
- 5) The sincerity to serve.

Based on those substantial batik values and how it is made, then to produce a good quality of batik, batik artisans are required to have these characteristics.

### **Patience**

Batik pattern comes from a deep thought of its creator. For example, in Keraton Surkartan Sultanate, before creating batik, the artisan needs to undergo the process called *lelaku* where she contemplates an event and observed her surroundings. It causes each curve motif, and each scratch of canting to have a deep meaning if dissected (<http://forum.upi.edu/v3/index.php?topic=12675.0;wap2>).

### **Calmness, Fidelity, and Accuracy**

e.g.: to make batik fillings (*isen-isen*) the artisan needs to be calm enough and not in a rush, but in good fidelity, and accuracy. So the fillings can be neatly made.

### **Notions of Hierarchy**

Traditional batik motifs are made by considering their users afterward according to their social status and gender. A

batik artisan needs to understand the batik etiquettes.

### **Willingness to Serve**

Talking about batik making, we will not talk about economic orientation. For some artisans, they make batik to please their soul and as a dedication to preserve their previous generation's heritage.

### **Great Work Ethos and Working Spirit**

Traditional batik is not a fabric that can be done instantly by manufacturing process. To produce a batik cloth the artisans need to devote their time and attention.

### **Creativity**

Nowadays, since batik comes to industry, batik makers need to be more creative than before. They need to come up with new patterns to compete with other batik makers as well as to compete with imported fabrics. Their creativity is also needed to conserve batik and attract the young generation as their new market.

### **Able to Work in Team**

It has been explained in the previous part that batik is not "a work of many hands". It takes groups of artisans to complete a whole batik cloth.

### **Good Networking**

To compete with other modern and imported fabrics also printed batik, traditional batik artisans need to have a good networking to market their creation and protect their community.

## **BATIK AND EDUCATION**

Education is a civilizing process, and therefore, the development of national identity through education means that this process occurs within the scope of a culture, as

revealed in a statement on the importance of the following concepts:

- 1) Education about culture requires the transmission to younger generations through various forums.
- 2) Education in the culture requires the transmission in social cultural context, rather than happening in a vacuum environment.
- 3) Cross-cultural education in a pluralistic society requires an attitude and way of life of mutual respect.

Cultural change can occur through a revolution in the field of education (Huntington & Harisson, 2000). Traditional education aims to prepare young people to integrate themselves with the community or environment. Education is nothing but a tool of socialization, the kind of education system that emphasizes more on the conservative function as cultural transmission/maintenance and less on developing transformative function learning as an innovative culture/innovative learning (Efianingrum, 2010: 12). Studio base learning process enables students to develop their way to crate and understand about design through trial and error method which is in accordance with innovative learning.

### Batik Pattern Modification Process in Basic Design Studio

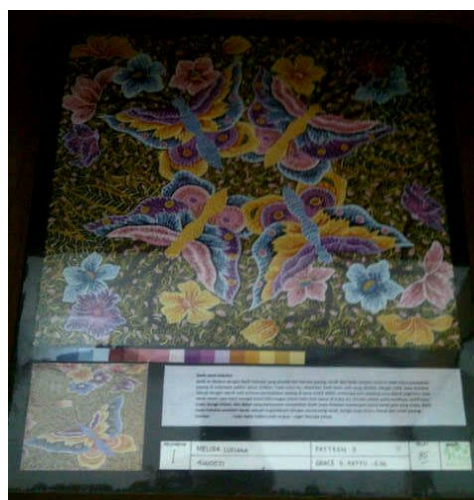
In the learning process of batik which is done in the studio base learning process, the students are advised to recognize that there are several types of batik in Indonesia. From the selection of batik the students are expected to understand all the processes of batik making, such as the batik origin, when it will be worn, the reason of pattern used in batik, philosophy of each pattern they choose, selection of colors, and development possibilities.

For some Indonesian batik, there are regulations regarding certain colors and patterns for certain ceremonies. After understanding all the uses and character of batik, students are encouraged to modify the characters of batik into a new composition while still maintaining the values and characters that have been learned. The expected result when the process is running is that the students can experiment and dare to develop their ideas.

Here are some of the students' batik modifications based on the previous traditional batik patterns:



(a)



(b)

Figure 3. (a) reconstruction of "Batik Merak Ngigel" (b) reconstruction of "Batik Bada" designed by Interior Design Petra Christian University Students of 2010



c)



(d)

Figure 4. (c) reconstruction of "Batik Ceplok" (d) reconstruction of "Batik Hokokai" designed by Interior Design Petra Christian University Students of 2010

### Students' and Lecturers' Responses to Batik Reconstruction

Now, education centers such as families, communities, schools and even universities have experienced a lot of lost in values, such as: a sense of identity, sense of humanity, sense of community, sense of culture (values), and a sense of respect (Suyata, 2000). The introduction of cultural values through studio base learning process is expected to decrease this value lost, especially, in this paper, to decrease the sense of culture lost. By introducing batik to the young designers, it is hoped to increase their sense of belonging to the local heritage and their desire to develop it in further designs.

Among 123 interior design students of Petra Christian University for 2010 class, approximately 80% of the students know batik even better and aware that batik is included in basic design as pattern and possible to be developed as interior elements or furniture design patterns and accessories. But unfortunately only 20% of them are willing to learn batik even more

and increase their sense of belonging to batik.

According to the basic design studio educators (lecturers and tutors), it has already been expected that this process may not increase the awareness of the students about batik but merely increase the inner values contained in batik. The tight schedule may distract the students' focus on learning more about batik and only focus on learning about the reconstruction and composition. According to them process of reconstructing batik is an introduction to Indonesian culture adopted from a work of art.

Dra. Anik Rahmawati and Ir. Titien Wahono as a team of educators to Petra Christian University majoring in Interior Design state that batik courses in Basic Design is a process to enhance a sense of love for the culture of Indonesia as well as introducing a composition with a sense of the elements and principles of design. The formation of someone's character occurs because of their supportive environment. For example, if someone grows in family



which use batik daily or even making batik in daily life, the person may have a huge love and sense of belonging to batik. On the other hand, if a person grows in a total modern paradigm family which may look at batik as obsolete, this person will see batik with the same point of view. So, to develop batik in interior design, we need a subject that can sustain the implementation of batik in it.

The observations and interviews conducted during the research have obtained the opinions of some of the teaching team. The influence of basic design in terms of batik only affects a few students' character. The aspects that influence them are those such as students have a better appreciation to the works of art and culture of Indonesia. But in daily life, the value must be transferred gradually. One of the efforts that can be made is by wearing batik as daily clothes. A person's character is formed through the habit of doing something. Better education of the nation's culture through basic design needs to be done by putting it inside the other main interior educational programs. Good and humble characters can be taught from the batik process, while creativity and bravery to develop batik can be learned from the young designers.

How we use and develop batik in our modern culture shows how we respect our local culture. The preservation of batik is our collective responsibility as a nation. A collective effort must be made to preserve our long-standing tradition and to ensure that batik does survive another thousand years.

## CONCLUSION

The role of basic design course in the introduction and development of local culture values through batik may only serve

as a means of introduction about the richness of the local heritage. In this studio, students have not got their design course yet. But through basic design studio, students begin to be aware that batik is worth developing and applying in further interior or furniture designs to give a local touch.

Reconstruction of batik as the production of local to the broader public space requires the constant creation and effort. To produce future young local interior designers who have such local value awareness, the lesson about local culture one aspect of which is represented by batik, shall be given continuously and followed by continuous demand and appreciation. Therefore, batik application in interior design shall not merely become a trend but become an identity to compete in the global market.

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