

Creative Responses of Cirebon Batik Craftsmen towards Free Market Competition

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the creative responses of Trusmi batik Craftsmen towards free market demand of Batik motives in terms of their novelty and innovation. Ethnographic study was conducted with field observation and interview as the research instruments. The participants involved are seven people including craftsmen and business men who lived in Trusmi village (Batik industry center) as the research site. The data were analyzed using visual design approach covering aesthetic elements and philosophical meanings. The findings from observation reveal that there are three batik keraton motives identified; classical, semi-classical, and contemporary motive which have different ornament characteristics. Those characteristics are indicated from the structure, colors, and shapes of the ornaments of using *wadasan* in the batik motives. In terms of philosophical meaning, each ornament brings different meaning one to another which is related to their cultures and beliefs. Due to, the increasing demand of batik, it shows that the craftsmen and business men have different creative response to sustain their business in competitive market. Some of them showed their creative response through creating more various motives, while others creatively response through creating some programs of batik education center where many visitors can learn in their gallery.

Keywords: Classical, semi-classical, contemporary, Innovation, Creative Response, Keraton Cirebon Batik Motives, trade market

1. Introduction

Indonesian batik exports to United States have been running since 1999 and it had increased rapidly after UNESCO declared batik as a cultural heritage of Indonesia (Nuryana, 2015). Besides that recognition, Indonesian people's consistency in wearing batik cloth either in formal and informal context may give a positive impact to increase the market demand and promote batik. The increasing demand and good promotion of batik can be seen from the higher number of export indexes. For instance, Indonesian batik market in United States is relatively high and dominated since Americans prefer to choose the Indonesian batik although other countries like China and Malaysia also export batik to this country. This is due to the various motives and good quality of Indonesian batik can fulfil the customers' preferences.

The high number of Batik export to United States can give some benefits to the government of Indonesia due to increasing income of foreign exchange, supporting batik industry development, and all parties who involve and commit to the improvement of batik product quality as well as improving quality of human resources. Such foreign exchange income can support the export value that provides more financial income to Indonesian people because it can open more job vacancies. In addition, it supports establishing international business networks which can promote overseas investors to join in this business (Nuryana, 2015). However, this improvement does not only bring positive impacts especially to industry and trade development but it also leads to negative ones. One of the high risk impacts is increasing number of foreign investors which will dominate in the business. As a result, batik trade monopoly cannot be avoided (Critorou, 2012).

Based on the data from Ministry of Trade in 2014, it was reported that the export of Indonesian batik to foreign countries has a considerable impact on the country's foreign exchange. US market share reached 42.97% of total of Indonesian batik exports. In addition, data from Ministry of Trade (Ministry of Trade) also revealed that from 2006 to 2010, Batik export market share to United States stayed in the first rank meaning that in 2010, Batik export market share to the United States reached 32.22% with a value of US \$ 22.3 million. Then, in the period of January to June 2011, it was noted that the value of Indonesian batik exports to United States reached US

\$ 24.6 Million so that there was a growth of 10.21% in 2011.

Moreover, in the period from January to July 2014, Indonesian batik exports to United States increased significantly to US \$ 85.5 million (an increase of 24.13%) compared to the same period in 2013, which only reached US \$ 68.8 million. This data proves that Indonesian batik export is able to contribute a large foreign exchange to Indonesian government. The other data from Ministry of Trade also show that Germany, with the value of batik sales of Indonesia from US \$ 2.68 Million increased to US \$ 4.52 Million. Meanwhile, South Korea is in third rank, reaching export value up to US \$ 1.8 Million increased to US \$ 3.94 Million (data until the end of March 2013, in the same period).

However, in the era of free trade market and global competition, every batik company should prepare themselves to be ready in strict business competition. This is due to competition is increasingly competitive so that the consumers should be more critical and smart in choosing the products either in terms of choosing the motives or quality of the products. To fulfil the costumers' expectations the craftsmen and business men have to carefully consider what product preferred by the customers and what price is affordable for them (Nurhayati, 2014).

In line with this, Nur Khamidah (2005) states that the success of a product will lead to its marketing performance. From its performance, a product will be considered by the consumer whether the product has other advantages and more qualified compared to similar competitor products in the market. The characteristic of product innovation is analysed as a relative advantage that appears to be product characteristics. Moreover, the companies are required to explain their concepts and reasons why they want to achieve their goals in giving a good quality of products and promote the products well (Nur Khamidah, 2005).

With regard to product innovation, Critorou (2012) argues that an innovation is an action that gives new resources power and ability to create prosperity. An innovation begins with raising new ideas. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2001) a product is all things that can be offered to the market. Meanwhile, the consumers can notice, own, or consume it. Therefore, a good quality of product is intended to give a satisfaction as well as suit the consumers' desires in choosing batik. Tjiptono (2002) asserts that a product is a subjective understanding of the producer to produce something that can be offered through hard effort to achieve the goals. More specifically, the producers always keep trying to fulfil criteria and desires of the consumers in accordance with the competence and capacity of the organization and purchasing power. An innovative product commonly points out to introduce and develop new products in order to achieve good and successful marketing (2002).

According to Kotler & Bes (2004), a new product is developed based on some major methods namely; Modulation-based innovation that involves altering a basic characteristic of a product or service, by increasing or decreasing these characteristics which generally refer to functional or physical characteristics.

Moreover, since a market demand of batik in Indonesia, particularly Keraton Cirebon batik motives encourage the craftsmen to make motive innovations. Innovation of batik craftsmen is based on their response to increase foreign markets so that the batik craft community in Indonesia is better nowadays (Kudiya, 2014). Such a good market situation has changed batik business man to have a modern transaction model although some of them still keep using the conventional ones. One of the modern transaction models is done by applying online transaction through e-banking, e-invoice, credit cards, etc. According to the craftsmen stated in the interview, those types of transactions so far have contributed to them in a matter of time efficiency and low cost of transaction. The practical transaction is considered to be one factor to support the craftsmen's eagerness to run their business maximally. This new innovation needs to be taken into a consideration for further research to conduct their study.

Referring to the result of problem identification, it indicates that batik company in batik industrial village in Indonesia is always innovative which offer a new product novelty and innovation. As stated by Raharso (2006) who claims that advanced organizations must know about structure of building an innovation-based organization. Through individuals who experience in this phenomena, they could develop a composite description of the essence of experience for all individuals. This description consists of what they experience and how they execute it (Moustakas in Cresswell, 2014).

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to get an overview of craftsmen's creative response toward free trade market in Trusmi industrial village Cirebon focusing on novelty and innovation. The novelty of batik motives is indicated from aesthetic value and philosophical meaning given by the craftsmen. The aesthetical value includes structure, colours, shapes, and ornaments used in the motives. Meanwhile philosophical meaning of the ornaments is given based on cultural and beliefs of the craftsmen as the member of the societies. In contrast, innovation can be identified from main materials to produce batik, technical equipment used to produce batik, and marketing program offered to public and customers.

2. Literature Review

Keraton Cirebon batik motive is one of Indonesian traditional batik motives that is very popular today even become an icon of Indonesian Batik which is well known in foreign countries. The motive was emerged freely in the national batik market in the 1970s which is previously recognized by public community as Keraton batik motive (Casta, 2007).

Dharsono (2006) in his research entitled "The symbol and meaning of a living tree painted on classical batik as an expression of Javanese culture" discusses this issue. The findings of the study reveal that all ornaments poured in the motive are presented in the form of living trees as cultural artefacts which have meanings of essential life. Each motive has a meaning that can represent the human behaviour and need to be respected by the community, particularly Javanese community. On the other side, the results presented in the form of living trees in batik motive are intended to lead human behaviour to understand and behave as instructed in their previous generations of Javanese which is based on Javanese philosophy and ethics called as "semi-nunggak". Consequently, it can be references which are able to contribute for scientists and researchers in the field of science development, especially as an enrichment of insight into the meaning of art and cultural life as a reference of research and publication in the same area. In addition, it is also expected to display innovative works that is handed by local excellences craftsmen.

The other article is written by Tita Borshalina (2015), in IICI (The 6th Indonesia International Conference on Innovation) entitled: "Marketing Strategy and the Development of Batik Trusmi in the Regency of Cirebon which used Natural Colouring Matters". Her findings show that the customers' trend nowadays in choosing batik inspired to their desires to enjoy the old traditions which are very natural and classical.

These statements are supported by Borshalina (2015) who proves that there is an effect of market orientation toward innovation process of Batik entrepreneurs specifically for those who are categorized in low and medium level. Their involvement to batik marketing performance is significantly determined by customers' desires and need.

The results of Borshalina's research (2015) indicate that the price of batik with Natural Dye Substance is higher than the synthetic colour one since it uses environmental friendly materials derived from natural dyes. It aims to keep the quality of the product so that the customers meet the material as they need. Considering this reality, it proves that the company also provides some benefits for the people surrounding since they can work in their company and earn to finance their family. Increasing numbers of Batik producers lead to the increasing numbers of Batik businessman who indirectly promote their village to be the center of buyers either locally or globally. Even, those batik centres offer the customers to be guests or tourists who enjoy the motives. In this case, SMM Batik Trusmi tries to provide inputs for the workers on batik company with natural dye (Borshalina 2015).

Casta (2007) adds that traditional Indonesian batik has been marginalized due to market hegemony. The condition of Batik crafters in 2004 is still facing the limitations of infrastructures related to basic materials and capitals to get strategic places. Consequently, it invites investors to share their capital to establish some batik marketing places such as batik gallery, ware house, show room, or even batik home industry which can recruit the people around to work in it. Instead of new business marketing innovations, this condition motivates some marginalized craftsmen to take a part in batik business since they get financial contribution from the investors. Principally, the goal of this business activity is to get a problem solving in daily problem. It is done because all stakeholders need to understand all related aspect to do their business- not only about financial support but also cultural understanding one. Therefore, those two aspects can support each other to create a good business.

From those several studies mentioned above, it is clearly found that batik motive shows a local identity and originality discussed in some studies have led to the development of batik market business that finally can create positive response of batik itself. This is because creative responses of batik crafters could be only achieved through some innovations in all aspects supporting good development of batik market- innovative motive, modern transaction culture and considering cultural aspects in their business.

Some evidences in batik market transformation are running rapidly due to UNESCO declaration recognizing batik as a cultural heritage brings a positive effect especially in marketing (Nuryana, 2015). Batik is not only enjoyed and used by local people but also by the overseas ones. In terms of motive, there are many demand from the costumers depends on their choices. Some of them prefer to have traditional keraton Cirebon motive, some others choose semi-classical motive and the rests appoint contemporary motive. Their choices are based on their interpretation toward the meaning of keraton Cirebon motive related to their life and its environment (Dharsono, 2006). The motive choice is not always done by the craftsmen, nowadays it is changing because many consumers come to the craftsmen and request their own motive and interpretation. Craftsmen with good

understanding in cultural background of keraton Cirebon motive tend to serve their own customers request easily. This is considered as a supporting factor to develop batik market either locally or globally.

3. Research Methodology

This study is one of qualitative studies with an ethnographic design. This design was employed through two instruments to collect the data namely; field observation and interview with craftsmen and business men. The subject involved two craftsmen Trusmi, two business men. The need of data is obtained from three Keraton in Cirebon namely Keraton Kasepuhan, Keraton Kanoman and Keraton Kacirebonan Palace, village of batik industry Trusmi, museum, and tourism department in Cirebon. The field observation was conducted by using an observation guide in order to investigate craftsmen's attitude to respond toward changes in trade market demand. Meanwhile, the interview was done with all respondents to find out deeper information related to how the craftsmen response toward free trade market which deal with two components namely novelty and innovation. Novelty is identified from variety of using visual aesthetics including structures, colours, and shapes. Meanwhile, innovation covers how craftsmen produce batik by using innovative materials and equipment. Innovation relating to how craftsmen market their products in several programs and strategies are also included as questions in the interview and items to be observed directly in the side. In addition, the document analysis was used to identify new batik motives obtained from some documents such as fabric, photo, and artefacts by using visual design approaches. The collected data were processed through transcribing, categorizing, analysing and interpreting to answer the research questions.

The followings discuss findings and discussions of this study that cover the existence of Keraton Cirebon batik motives in the past and present as a part of novelty. In addition, creative response is also realized by innovation which can be seen from main materials, technical equipment, and marketing strategy.

5. Findings and Discussions

Based on data collected from field observation, it was investigated that in general Keraton Cirebon batik motive may be divided into two types namely: the classical motive (old) and the contemporary one (modern). All motives showing *wadasan* as the main motive which has certain philosophical meaning. According to the craftsmen statements *wadasan* motive describe the strength of Cirebon palace and the society (Casta, 2007). In contrast, the contemporary one is characterized by putting many kinds of motives although *wadasan* was still used- as the fillers not the main motive which brings various philosophical meaning depends on the craftsmen notion and tendency.

Moreover findings from field observation, it is seen that Keraton Cirebon batik has developed rapidly and it is influenced by some factors such as the market demand, government types. Historically, classical *Wadasan* as a part was firstly found as Keraton Batik (Casta, 2007; Kudiya, 2016). This is due to the people's recognition that this type of batik belongs to palace family and ordinary people could not have it. In line with this, classical *Wadasan* batik is typically developed through putting cadas stone as single ornament in the motives. Cadas stone becomes the main ornament of the design mostly colored by keraton colors such as black, brown, white (Kudiya, 2016; Katura, 2011) and dark color (Kusumowardhani, 2016; Sumarsono, 2013).

Generally, *wadasan* and Megamendung are commonly compared to each other even some people might think that those have a similar design. However, *wadasan* and meagemendung are derived from different objects although both of them belong to keraton batik motives. *Wadasan* is taken from "batu cadas" found around Cirebon beach, while megamendung is a picture of heavy clouds which will drop rain water. Megamendung was firstly used to show the power of king who always protects his people so that they feel safe and cool. Considering the power of the king to make his people feel cool as Megamendung. As one of the society members, the craftsmen followed what the king asked for as their loyalty and dedication to their king. This motive can be seen from the following pictures.

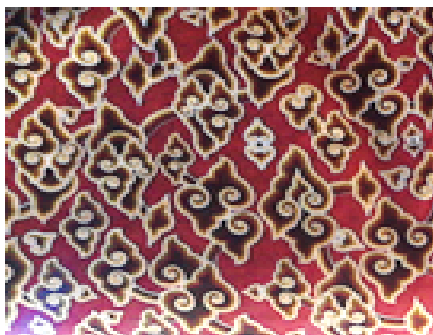


Figure. 1 Classical *Wadasan* motive

Wadasan is developed variously through different motives style in which Wadasan is not longer to be the main ornament in the motives. Wadasan has been transformed to function as a complementary ornament in the motive. It is characterized by additional ornaments showing some objects of Keraton and its surrounding. Such ornaments found are Gapura (Keraton Gate), Lotus Park (Taman Teratai), and Kereta Kencana Singabarong used as the symbols of palace belongings (Irianto, 2009). According to the craftsmen stated in the interview, each ornament in the motive gets different meanings particularly philosophical meaning related to the power of Keraton as an authority person in his government. For example, an ornament of Kereta Kencana Singobarong is representing a riding car mounts Sunan Gunung Jati in preaching throughout the island of Java. Variety of three-dimensional ornaments on the Train is a motive Wadasan composed by craftsmen and Ayam Alas motive consists of three ornaments (Wadasan as the main motive, supporting motives and isen-isen motives (the fillers). The main motive: the main motive is the Ayam Alas, flora and fauna as the supporting, and also the origin of the Wadasan shape found on the head, wings, feet and tail. Another motive is Wadasan and *Kereta Singo Barong*. Wadasan is functioned to support and add aesthetic value of the main motive, Motif Batik Taman Telaga Teratai. This batik motive can be seen in the following three pictures.

However, a raising demand of the products due to current global market has triggered Trusmi craftsmen to develop their ideas and creativity as their creative response toward those market rapid changes. Creative response is done by craftsmen in order to sustain their batik product among the globalization which can be seen from two aspects: novelty and innovation (Citorou, 2012).

Novelty is referred to combination of old motive of Wadasan classic and contemporary design which creates a new contemporary batik motives as can be seen from several points: first the use of ornament in the motive is various and rich. This type of batik motive has left completely the rules of making the classic batik patterns because the objects poured in the motive is already out of the palace environment - but the environment outside which is free and complex. Mostly, those objects have less cultural philosophical meaning such as Angklung (West Java Traditional instrument), Bee hive, industrialization, and electric tower found in some of craftsmen's woks. According to the statement of contemporary craftsmen, the change of rules is done because of the market demands that tend to integrate the current situation. Second, ornaments are arranged in accordance to contemporary patterns that is totally different with traditional one. It tends to use non-geometry objects and put ornaments in free patterns so that most of the motives have unbalanced proportion between left and right side of the motive. In fact, it is constructed through asymmetry way with a single motive. And the last aspect of the novelty is color. The use of color in traditional and contemporary batik is contrary in which traditional motives are always created in keraton colors such as black, brown, white (Kudiya, 2016; Katura, 2011) and dark color (Kusumowardhani, 2016; Sumarsono et al., 2013). Meanwhile, the contemporary motives are decorated by various bright colors such as blue, green, yellow, pink, violet, etc.



Figure 2. *Sunyaragi* Lansecap keraton artifact



Figure 3 Wadasan stone stilation originally inspired from keraton artifact



Figure 4 Batik Motive of "Motif Batik Taman Telaga Teratai"

On the other hand, innovation can be seen from several aspects namely batik products, making process, and marketing techniques. Batik product is referred to processed batik that is currently made to supply various fashion products such as bag, shoes, hat, and painting arts. In the past, Wadasan and Megamendung as palace batik can be only used for making cloths for royal family needs. Besides, it is also found some innovations in making process of Cirebon batik. The most interesting innovation is fotonik which is a tool for drying batik fabric without using sunlight. By using this tool, a craftsman can create batik even in the rainy seasons or in the night time since it does not need direct sunlight to make the fabric dry. According to the respondents, this tool helps them a lot in producing a higher number of batik products rather than using traditional techniques before. In addition, another craftsman from Trusmi found an innovative wax formula that eases craftsmen to cover batik design which has been created in the fabric because the liquid has a good quality at which it easily dry in the fabric. Meanwhile, innovation is also identified in the marketing techniques to sell batik trusmi to customers. Traditionally, batik business was carried out through conventional way where seller and customer did direct and face to face transaction at home or gallery. However, nowadays the business is conducted in modern way that leads to a virtual transaction through using website and social media so that they can connect to a larger targeted market. Furthermore, using their creativity, some craftsmen presented their business batik in innovative ways such as creating batik supermarket and educative business batik which offer other facilities and services such as workshop point, training session, and entertainment access for customers who visit their batik store.

The new batik motives present new ideas put by the craftsmen to modify Wadasan motive inspired from the demand of consumers who come from different countries such as America, Japan, and European countries (Katura, 2011). In the interview, one of respondents believes that his novelty combining new ideas and tradition practices is intended to serve the costumers needs so that Wadasan as a keraton batik can be accepted by all parties. Those changes reveal his ideal reasons to keep the cultural heritage of Wadasan as the symbol of Keraton power that must be respected. Meanwhile, the innovation found was proposed to show to the world that Wadasan batik rapidly will reach the globalization program. It is in line with the statement of Ocvirk (1975) who states that material objects in art work is a communication tool which is highly influenced by emotional responses,

social and political action. Another scholar (Casta, 2007) argues that art work can reflect on social reality, analyzing the way in which their success has been shaped and influenced by the context-specific processes of visual aesthetic consideration.



Figure. 4 Creative Response of Craftsmen through Motives “Angklung and Wadasan” and “Wadasan Ayam alas” (Raharso,2012)

5. Conclusion

Considering the data analysis results, some conclusions can be presented. Trusmi craftsmen so far have made some creative responses through their novelty and innovation in doing batik business in free trade market. Cirebon batik motives at present have two types – classical and contemporary motives. this motives are demonstrated by the craftsmen through their novelty in terms of putting *wadasan* as fillers in batik rather than using *wadasan* all the time as the main motive. The classical type is characterized by using original *Wadasan* as the main ornaments without any modifications. This motive has a meaning to respect the power of the king which is identified from *Wadasan* motive as represented from Megamendung. The second type is a contemporary motive which has mixed-ornaments of *Wadasan* and ornaments-original *Wadasan* and new ornaments telling objects around the palace. This motive means that the craftsmen still keep the original motive of *Wadasan* as respect of the king authority. Meanwhile, the fillers of objects surroundings the palace show that the motives are developed and changed as well as the globalization. In addition, a contemporary motive also leaves all characteristics of original *Wadasan* motive since the focus of ornaments described the object outside the place which are various and complex. This motive aims to figure out the real situation of community outside the palace. Those three changes directly reveal that *Wadasan* batik motive is dynamic and innovative which is developed based on the situation of community at present and the demand of batik market which is globalized.

Meanwhile, another aspect of creative response is innovations of the craftsmen. It can be seen from several points such as variety of batik products, production process, and marketing techniques or strategies. Deal with the innovative equipment, *fotonik* is used to make batik production process more quickly in a big number of products. Instead of this, it can produce anytime without depending on the seasonal condition like the rainy season or dry season. Using a new wax formula is also an innovation since it can improve the quality of batik product particularly in making batik color to be more interesting and long-lasting. In terms of marketing, the craftsmen create some strategies through making educative batik warehouse, batik gallery, and batik supermarket which is all supported by modern technology. All of them show evidences that the craftsmen have contributed some creative responses in various ways to the free market competition.

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