Design and Commercialization Critics of Batik Lasem

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the new creation of batik Lasem versus commercialization critics from four critics from different fields. Using the design thinking process, the writer was finally able to create five new pattern designs involving five steps which were research, analysis, ideation, experimentation, and implementation. The town of Lasem and batik Lasem were chosen because the town held an important role, as the producer of a particular batik in Indonesia that was influenced by Chinese culture. Despite the rich and deep-rooted heritage this particular Batik is now dying along with the younger generation lack of interest in the creation or promotion of the Batik to preserve their culture. This research could be used as a base to create a new style derived from the existing motif that had been analyzed. By interviewing and analyzing four experts from different fields, the writer developed the new and fresh motif design that had both the culture and commercial value and could be accepted by the new millennial generation to achieve preservation batik tulis Lasem.

Keywords: Critics, gen millennia, Lasem, new design motif, preserved batik

INTRODUCTION

Lasem is a small town in Central Java. It is considered as the evidence of acculturation between the Chinese ethnics and the Javanese, becoming an example of how different cultures in one area can exist in harmony. The town is titled The Little Tiongkok or Le Petit Chi noise in some literatures for its similarity to a Chinatown with the abundant amount of peranakan style houses and Chinese temples. Based
on a report by Liong (2006), the locals believed that Bi Nang Un together with his wife, Na Li Ni, brought the resist technique which was more advanced than what the locals were familiar with, and introduced the technique to locals. Lasem batik industry experienced a golden peak in the 1970’s. In between 1950’s and 1980’s, about 90% of the population in Lasem, especially women, to work as a batik craftsman. However, at this time less than 10% of the population of women are still working as batik (Wibisono, 2006). This is caused by a number of bankrupt businesses that threaten the business and culture of batik Lasem. It is estimated that the number of small businesses batik Lasem has fallen sharply from about 140 units in 1950’s into only 20 units of small businesses at the end of July 2006. The younger generation prefers to work in the modern sector, both inside and outside of Rembang (Indonesia, 2006). According to Liong (2006), this leads to two critical issues:

Reduced employment and income for the population in poor rural areas and the threat of cultural extinction Batik Lasem because of the declining competitiveness of the industry.

The difficulty of the regeneration of employers and workers Lasem batik (Liong, 2006). This leads to our current situation with the perilous possibility of batik Lasem extinction. With the lack of interest by the younger generation in succeeding and learning the techniques of the trade, batik Lasem is slowly fading out along with the last few longstanding batik artist remaining.

**The Four Main Characteristic Motif Designs of Lasem**

**The Great Post Road (road from Anyer - Panarukan) and Watu Pecah Motive.** The great post road or *De Grote Postweg* is a road that spans from West Java in Anyer to East Java in Panarukan along the northern coast of Java. The road was built in 1808 during the reign of Herman Willem Daendels who decided on the construction of the road due to his concern of the British Invasion ("IndeArchipel.com, 2013). During this period, many of the residents in the areas passed by the road construction were recruited as stonebreakers and death count were rising rapidly especially due to the outbreak of plagues such as Malaria and Influenza (Buana, 2013). Seeing such conditions batik artists in Lasem create a motif representing their deep sympathy toward the situation. Moreover, it is to reflect their loyalty and respect for their comrades struggling and suffering while working as stonebreakers. The motif is called *watu pecah* or sometimes it is also called *krecak* or *kricak*. It can be seen in Figure 1. These shapes resemble the stones that had been hand broken using traditional tools and served as a reminder of the people’s hardships in building the road from Anyer to Panarukan during that time (Gunawan, 2013).

**Kawista Fruit and Bledak Kawista Motive.** Kawista is a fruit tree that grows abundantly in Lasem. The shape of its fruit is round. The fruit is hard on the exterior but having soft and paste-like consistency on the inside. Kawista plants are considered
Design and Commercialization Critics of Batik Lasem

rare in Indonesia because of its nature of thriving in dry/hot areas such as Lasem and Rembang. They also processed the fruit into drinkable syrup and a kind of carbonated drink resembling the western colas and thus, it is dubbed as Java Cola or Kola Jawa (Batik Art, n.d.). The attachment and constant interaction between the locals and this particular fruit plant inevitably lead to a creation of batik motif that is derived from this unique plant. The motif is called Bledak Kawista. The shape of the motif symbolizes or resembles the shape and texture of Kawista fruit is the stylization of the real fruit itself. Motif Bledak Kawista can be seen in Figure 2 below.

**Gunung Ringgit Motive.** Gunung Ringgit is considered as classic/ancient motif in Lasem as it can be found in the early development of batik Lasem. The motif bears the symbolic meaning of heaps of riches. The philosophy behind the motif itself is to find and build riches, although by means that are not prohibited by law. Aside from its philosophical meanings, the motif gunung ringgit is most likely influenced by the geographical condition of the town of Lasem that is surrounded by mountains, one of them being mounted Lasem. Motif Gunung Ringgit can be seen in Figure 3.

**Latohan Motive.** Latoh (Caulerpa racemosa) is a type of seaweed from Chlorophyceae, or green algae (Nuraini, 2006), that thrives in Lasem area. The particular algae are popular locally as food sources. People in Lasem usually cook the algae in a local cuisine called urap. As latoh seaweed is easily found in Lasem, it was then naturally implemented into the local’s

*Figure 1. Motif Watu Pecah (Basiroen & Lapian, 2016)*

*Figure 2. Motif Bledak Kawista (Basiroen & Lapian, 2016)*
creation that then called *Motif Latohan*. Motif Latohan can be seen in Figure 4 below.

**Problem Identification**

Batik work in Lasem is seasonal. Batik artists were generally women farmers who used their spare time between planting and harvest time to supplement the family income through batik creation. In 1970, Lasem batik took off and the industry became one of the main economic pillars of almost all households in Lasem city and villages. The period 1997 - 2006 marks the start of hardship in the industry of batik Lasem due to economic crisis and political instability in the country (Indonesia, 2006). In 2007 batik Lasem started back in the form of small businesses and this time many small businesses and batik entrepreneurs of Lasem combined their marketing effort to create a new market for Batik Lasem. While the new marketing effort is a sufficient start in the revitalization of batik Lasem it does not solve the problem of the overused and obsolete existing style or motifs (Basiroen & Lapian, 2016). The writer expected that this paper would be able to be used as a base to create a new style derived from the existing motifs that have been analyzed and critiques. And by creating more contemporary motif, the writer hoped that the interest in batik Lasem would increase and resulted in the improvements of the economy of the Lasem batik artists. The growth in batik industry would be hoped to attract the interest of younger generation in or near Lasem area to return and develop both the batik culture

![Figure 3. Motif Gunung Ringgit (Basiroen & Lapian, 2016)](image3.png)

![Figure 4. Motif Latohan (Basiroen & Lapian, 2016)](image4.png)
and business, reducing unemployment and reducing poverty in rural areas of Rembang.

OBJECTIVES

1. To create new motif designs that could be accepted by the younger generation who was born in generation Millennial.
2. To evaluate & analyze the critics on the motifs. By interviewing and analyzing of the four experts, the writer develops the motif design required that become suitable and match with the gen millennia and the new design has the commercialization value.
3. To revise and improve the visual into the new design motif that suitable for the target market and the capability from the batik crafter to make the motifs.

Theoretical Foundation

Design and Age (Millennial Generation). Demographers William Straus and Neil Howe define Millenium’s as people born between 1982 and 2004. According to Howe and Strauss, this group is poised to become the next great generation, one that will provide a more positive, group-oriented, can-do ethos (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Jean Twenge attributes Millenium’s with the traits of confidence and tolerance but also identifies a sense of entitlement and narcissism based on personality surveys that showed increasing narcissism among Millenium’s compared to preceding generations when they were teens and in their twenties (Twenge, 2014).

According to Alina Wheeler, a Brand Identity Design specialist, eighty million Millennial is the first generation to have grown up in a digital culture. They’re also the first generation of digital natives, and their affinity for technology helps shape how they live and communicate (Safitri & Evelina, 2018; Wheeler, 2013). Millennials have come of age during a time of technological change, globalization and economic disruption. In relation to design style, millennials have a freestyle that is simple, digitized and unique, but still has a sense of the motif itself. The researcher aimed to generate interest in the youth of Lasem town to return and preserve their traditional cultural heritage by creating batik Lasem with contemporary motifs and simplified and unique designs.

Colour Theory. Colour is a fundamental part of how we experience the world by means of interaction. It is the basic guidance to colour mixing and the visual effects of colour combination, which includes a large group of definitions, concepts and design applications. Although the effect of colour projected onto people varies in terms of several factors, from personal and psychological perspectives to cultural background, colour theory in itself is a scientific study (Chapman, 2010).

Colour Psychology. Most commonly and widely used in designing and branding, the study of hues to determine human behaviour influences human perception and emotion. There is, however, a difference between
colour psychology and colour symbolism with the latter referring to our “conscious associations we are conditioned to make”. For instance in Lasem, red getih pithik (chicken blood red) is considered lucky, it is produced from natural dyes that colour the roots of noni tree, indicating the presence of nature.

**Semiotic Theory.** Semiotics is the study of meaning-making, the study of sign processes and meaningful communication. A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable. It would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology (Danesi, 2004).

**Thematic Theory.** Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2012). It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated with a specific research question (Daly et al., 1997). Thematic analysis is performed through the process of coding in six phases to create established, meaningful patterns. The themes become the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research was done through four approaches. Firstly is qualitative research through an interview with the critics, which were divided into three categories which are academic category, designers and general category. In this case, the critics were professional, entrepreneur, teacher and designer. Secondly is ethnography, a method of close observation of a given environment placing great emphasis on behaviour viewed as contextual. Thirdly is direct observation, a method of observing people gain insight into their social interactions and behavioural changes. Fourthly is semi-structured interviews, one-to-one interviews provide information about individual actions and motivations that cannot be obtained in-group discussions.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**The New Design Motif, Critics**

**Bicycle with Latohan.** The conclusion of Bicycle with latohan as seen in Figure 5, that the pattern tells a rather strong story about Lasem daily activities and through this contrast background in the design, it will be appealing to the younger market.

**Koi Fish Combined with Kricak.** The conclusion of Koi fish combined with kricak as seen in Figure 6, that shows cultural influences from Chinese and modern Dutch, which makes the young generation appreciate the cultural history and story that shaped Lasem. The painting from the combination of Koi fish and kricak motif creates a new dimension of a new fresh modern batik design that suitable for the young generation market.
### Table 1

**Meaning of Latohan Motif based on different factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert</th>
<th>Cultural Factor</th>
<th>Psychological Factor</th>
<th>Aesthetic Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert 1</td>
<td>A glance of this motif gives out very Javanese vibe. The latohan could easily spotted and recognized as a trademark of Lasem’s batik.</td>
<td>The style of illustration of the bike and warm colouring create a sense of nostalgia and calm.</td>
<td>The variation of pattern is minimum in this motif especially with the bicycle’s. The latohan motifs with its subtle difference in colour are giving the slight depth needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 2</td>
<td>The bicycle motif gave an old and rustic feeling, while there is a shape of latohan clearly visible in reference to Lasem’s trademark.</td>
<td>The design of bicycle motif gave a warm nostalgic feeling of an old era long forgotten.</td>
<td>There is no significant depth in this design especially since there are not many variations from the bicycle motif (only rotated and slightly varied in sizes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 3</td>
<td>It is a mixed motif, between one of the characteristic motif, Latoh mix with modern illustrated bicycle.</td>
<td>Striking contrast to the background design, appealing for the younger market.</td>
<td>Fine line bicycle design and latoh design with watercolour in earth tone and vivied hues on bicycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 4</td>
<td>The pattern tells a rather strong story about Lasem daily activities. It portrays a beautiful sunny day in a village of Java where shore is the heart of it all. The bicycle on the pattern showing the dynamic &amp; energetic vibe of the villagers amongst the natures</td>
<td>The combination of what comes out from the nature (Latohan) and the man-made technology (bicycles) delivers a feeling of balance yet soothing.</td>
<td>The warm colour of the bicycle gives out a nostalgic and rustic traditional feeling that matches sweetly and calmly with the greens of Latohan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. Bicycle with Latohan*
Table 2

Meaning of Koi Fish Motif based on different factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Factor</th>
<th>Psychological Factor</th>
<th>Aesthetic Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert 1</td>
<td>The Koi fish motif makes it clear that there is Chinese influence involved.</td>
<td>The choice of colour (Deep magenta/purple) and motifs (the intricate scale of the Koi and the watu pecah motif) create a sophisticated or dare I say almost a regal feeling into it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 2</td>
<td>Koi fishes was easy to identify with Chinese influence.</td>
<td>The direction of the Koi fishes in the pattern to create a closed space in the design together with the many small intricate pattern of watu pecah motif might be the reason to the overwhelmingly crowded and stuffy feeling of the design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 3</td>
<td>Mix motif seen a strong chinese influence through the koi fish motif and the red colour.</td>
<td>Detailed painting from the combination of Koi fish and kricak motif, create a new dimension of new fresh modern batik design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 4</td>
<td>Showing a cultural influences from the Chinese and the modern Dutch. It strengthen what Lasem is today.</td>
<td>It makes us appreciate the cultural history and story that shaped Lasem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Kawis Fruit.** The conclusion of *Kawis* fruit, that this fruit educates us how this rare fruit can become the source of a famous Javanese Cola drink (Figure 7). The pattern clearly shows a fruity feeling that leads us to a fresh natural mood that fits the young generation mood and character.

![Figure 7. Kawis fruit.](image)

### Table 3

*Meaning of Kawis Fruit Motif based on different factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Factor</th>
<th>Psychological Factor</th>
<th>Aesthetic Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert 1 While the Kawis fruit is local to Lasem, the shape is general thus looks like any other citrus family fruits. I would think it will not be easy to connect the motif to its cultural root of Lasem, especially if they haven’t read or been informed about it beforehand.</td>
<td>The warm and inviting colours created a sweet and warm feeling to the design.</td>
<td>The textures of sliced Kawi’s combined with the use of various shades of orange and yellow created a great depth within the pattern. The design is definitely contemporary while still retaining the rustic and muted feeling of traditional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 2 The shape evokes no particular memory into any cultural reference.</td>
<td>The warm and rustic colouring creates warming effect.</td>
<td>The pattern is varied in sizes with different texture and colouring on each motif. This created visual depth that gives this new contemporary feeling into the design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 3 Kawis fruit is one of the Lasem most famous fruit that only could be found at Rembang area,</td>
<td>The warm colour represent the ripe and freshness color earth tone, which will work well with modern outfit.</td>
<td>Fine line Kawis design and with colour and balance composition and suitable for the commercial market.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert</th>
<th>Cultural Factor</th>
<th>Psychological Factor</th>
<th>Aesthetic Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert 4</td>
<td>This fruity pattern educates us how this rare fruit can become a source of famous Javanese Cola drink.</td>
<td>The pattern clearly shows a fruity feeling that lead us to a fresh natural mood.</td>
<td>This image of the Kawis fruit doesn’t really show the ‘taste’ of the fruit itself, it instead reminds us the look of citrus kind of fruit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ancient Lifeboat in Rembang.** The conclusion of Ancient Lifeboats in Rembang (Figure 8). This motif is inspired by the archaeological findings of one of Cheng Ho’s lifeboats that were stranded in Lasem, which makes the young generation appreciate the cultural history that surrounds Lasem. Traditional *latoh* and historic lifeboats are in harmony and balance as composition and also give the designer an option for a young contemporary style.

![Figure 8. Ancient lifeboat in Rembang](image)

Table 4

**Meaning of Ancient Lifeboat in Rembang Motif based on different factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert 1</th>
<th>The mixture of <em>latohan</em> and boat motifs complemented with the brown colouring creates that distinctive Javanese Batik look and feel.</th>
<th>The design has a strong vintage feeling.</th>
<th>A very interesting motifs that requires you to take a second or third look to truly understand and appreciate. While a glance will get you think of those old intricate batik motifs, a second look will reward you with the detailed illustration of the boat, which complement the whole design.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert 2</td>
<td>While difficult to identify at a glace the boat gave a nice cultural reference to the seas that surround Lasem.</td>
<td>The design has an old and familiar feeling of Javanese style batik.</td>
<td>While the design is pretty flat the variation of boats mixed with latohan motifs creates an interesting pattern.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lasem Farmer with Latohan. The conclusion of Lasem farmers with latohan (Figure 9). This motif is a feminine story told in the design of how the Lasem women put faith in the historical mountain that brings luck and prosperity, as influenced by the Chinese culture. It raises up hopes and willingness to keep aiming to improve welfare. It is a painting-like pattern with a vibrant set of colours. It is a fresh way of telling a history that fit for the young generation style.

Table 4 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Factor</th>
<th>Psychological Factor</th>
<th>Aesthetic Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert 3</td>
<td>This motif is inspired by the archaeological findings of one of Cheng Ho's lifeboat that was stranded in Lasem, a nice story for Lasem batik cloth.</td>
<td>Traditional latohan and historic lifeboat give designer an optional for a young contemporary style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert 4</td>
<td>It'll be a history drawn beautifully on a batik clothes.</td>
<td>It gives an instant traditional feeling in a woody appearance, warm and soothing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Meaning of Lasem Farmer with Latohan Motif based on different factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Factor</th>
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<th>Aesthetic Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert 1</td>
<td>The illustration of famers certainly relates to Javanese culture of farming.</td>
<td>The feeling that came when I saw this image is “childlike abandon”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSIONS

The writer found that moreover, the social and geographical aspects of the town of Lasem, could be a source of inspiration in order to create a new pattern of batik, combined as well as derived from the old, traditional pattern. Through the process of analyzing the point of view from the experts, the writer found that by creating and developing new and fresh motif design that had both the culture and commercial value, could evoke the interest of the younger generation. The data collected from the qualitative interview also showed that a new contemporary design could arouse
the interest of the younger generation in joining the batik Lasem conservation effort. This newly gained interest is hoped to slowly create new demand for Batik Lasem to ensure the continuation of the age-old knowledge and tradition. Throughout the research and data gathering process, the writer got a recommendation from some interviewees to put more consideration and attention into the limitations and skills in processing batik process, contemplating the feasibility of the design production from the crafter point of view.

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REFERENCES


