

Conference Paper

Malaysian and Indonesian Batik: The Best Practices

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Malaysian artisans continue to produce crafts and visual art based on a well-trying formula: an inherited framework determined by tradition. However, new ideas and expressions are constantly being developed—with the only real limit being the imagination of the artist/craftsman. Batik sits uniquely in Indonesian culture as it has been declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as its cultural heritage and has been awarded ‘Best Practice’ in its education and production of batik (Kepres, 2009). Indonesia also celebrates its National Batik Day on October 2nd every year. The word batik in Malaysia generally describes the process of decorating cloth using the block printing (cap) or hand-drawn (canting) techniques, or a combination of both. The method of dyeing and coloring varies with the use of materials of various textures, such as cotton, silk, rayon and organza. It may also be identified by the range of traditional designs and motifs used. Batik has become a symbol of national pride and a form of attire for all races. Batik is ingrained in Malaysian culture. Indonesia is aggressive in its efforts in promoting batik as a national identity. The love for batik is instilled through batik-related subjects offered at primary and secondary school levels. In Malaysia, education about batik is introduced at the secondary level.

Keywords: Malaysian and Indonesian batik, best practices

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1. Introduction

Malaysia is characterized by its great culture and ethnic diversity, with its population comprising of Malays, Chinese, Indians, Orang Asli (the numerous indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak), and others. The Malay Peninsula’s location adjacent to the Melaka Strait was one of the world’s most important maritime trading routes thus resulting in the country’s multicultural demographic landscape. The growing number of Malaysia’s population from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds have spurred rich cultural, arts, and craft practices [1]. The location of Sabah and Sarawak across the

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South China Sea from Peninsular Malaysia has led to distinctive and unique arts and craft products. The early inhabitants of Malaysia, being preoccupied with survival in a tropical environment, understandably were more concerned with creating functional and practical objects, such as for hunting or for protection from the elements, rather than those that were aesthetically pleasing [2]. Excavations provide evidence of this: crude pottery items, tools, megaliths, and grave decorations have been found as well as simple cave paintings that were used to record daily lives and events. These primitive crafts and art forms gradually developed, over thousands of years, until artisans mastered the production of more sophisticated vessels, weapons, stone and woodcraft, cloth, and personal adornments [3].

As the aesthetic value of objects became more important, specialists in the various art forms developed their skills to make objects as visually pleasing as possible, take design beyond an object's utilitarian roles. A balance between the elements of form, space, and the inherent natural qualities of the materials was required. The resulting creations reflected the skill of the artists or artisans at producing balanced works, without any elements overpowering another.

Foreign influences affected the development of Malaysia's visual art tradition. Hindu and Buddhist influences from Indonesia and India played a large role in artistic development, particularly in weaving, metalwork, and woodcarving. The conversion of faith among the Malays to Islam led to the embrace of ornaments based on the use of figure-less vegetal forms. This was apparent particularly in Malay pottery, textiles, metalware, woodcarving, and stone carving products [5]. The Chinese and Indian immigrants, and to a lesser extent of Europeans, brought with them their visual art traditions, some of which then were integrated and assimilated into the local crafts. Malaysian artisans continue to produce crafts and visual art based on a well-tried formula: an inherited framework determined by tradition [6]. However, new ideas and expressions are constantly being developed with the only real limit being the imagination of the artist or craftsman.

2. Textiles

Barkcloth and woven cotton were the earliest materials to be used as textiles. But as more varied and 'superior' imported materials became available through trade businesses with India, China, and Europe, there was a gradual shift of their use. The availability of luxury items such as silk and metal thread enabled weavers to produce prestigious materials for the elites and the upper class of the society. Influenced by the Indian weaving and design methods, weavers all over Malaysia adopted the use of the

backstrap loom. Later, the floor loom was introduced from Europe, which allowed for more freedom of development and enabled weavers to produce wider cloth than those made on the backstrap loom. To this day, the indigenous groups of Borneo still use the backstrap loom and the use of natural dyes is a feature of the muted, natural colors of indigenous textiles, particularly the Iban Pua Kumbu of Sarawak. Besides the basic function of using textiles to cover the body, textiles are also often used as arts.

3. Motifs

Concerning motifs, the traditional Malay Muslim designs can be found on houses and palaces carved on pulpits (mimbar) in mosques woven into mats, engraved on kris and other weapons, or adorning pottery, batik, and other textile types. They are largely floral and geometrical or a combination of the two. A set of motifs is susceptible to repetition, elaboration, and distortion, styled in curvilinear scrolls and convolutions. Repeated patterns are a strong element in Islamic art; the repetition signifies continuity—no beginning and no end. Floral designs may be interwoven in continuous coiling spirals of leaves; they are smooth and uncluttered, emitting a classicism imitated by contemporary designers. Holy Qur'an are frequently used as decoration on coins, ceramic ware, metalware, carpets, tombstones, books, woodcarvings forms, and motifs of Malay woodcarving') and as architectural features, particularly in palaces and mosques. It is also used extensively in modern Malaysian art.

4. Batik Craft and Industry

In Indonesia, the term batik is said to be derived from 'ambatik' and 'tritik'. In describing batik, several authors have put forward several definitions. Deperindag viewed batik as the product of artwork on textile with the use of wax as its main agent. On the other hand, Hamzuri described batik as a form of visual painting that is created through a process called 'canting'. A more comprehensive definition is provided by Djoemena who regarded batik as an art form created through the use of 'canting' as its designing tool.

Djoemena added that 'canting' is represented by various sizes and the design is achieved through careful selection of size and the fine details of the lines or dots produced. Batik sits uniquely in Indonesian culture as it has been declared by the

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as its cultural heritage and has been awarded 'Best Practice' in its education and production of batik. Indonesia also celebrates its National Batik Day on October 2nd every year.

The word batik in Malaysia generally describes the process of decorating cloth using the block printing (cap) or hand-drawn (canting) techniques, or a combination of both. The method of dyeing and coloring varies with the use of the material of various textures, such as cotton, silk, rayon, and organza. It may also be identified by the range of traditional designs and motifs used. Batik has become a symbol of national pride and a form of attire for all races. Batik is ingrained in Malaysian culture. Nagaoka proposed several steps in batik preservation effort as an intangible cultural heritage. The author indicated that in preserving batik, one needs to identify, document, research, preserve, protect, promote, enhance and transmit the knowledge and understanding of batik through formal and informal education as well as the revitalization efforts of batik as a heritage.

5. Development and Forms of Batik

The vision and entrepreneurial spirit of Haji Che Su of Kelantan and Haji Ali from Terengganu laid the foundation for the local production of the Batik Sarong in the 1920s. Javanese batik, on the other hand, was available in peninsular Malaysia from the early 19th century. This entrepreneur was also behind the early attempts to produce batik-type cloth locally, creating experimental, textile prints, without wax with a pattern stamped on the cloth using wooden blocks. This was commonly known as 'batik pukul' (stamped cloth), but as also being called 'kain batik Kedah' due to its popularity in that state. Haji Che Su and his sons later utilized the stencil or silkscreen process to produce batik sarongs with motifs reproduced in the pekalongan style of Javanese batik, characterized by large floral bouquets with intricate geometric background pattern, usually consisting of traditional motifs of central Java. The business of making and exporting this form of inexpensive batik known as 'batik jawa' expanded with the formation of their family business known as Samasa Batik with silk screen batik is still made by the family today. This is the impetus for batik-making as a cottage industry in Kelantan, one of the states in Malaysia. Subsequently, the making of batik spread into the neighboring state of Terengganu, where Haji Ali founded a family business making batik sarongs.

By the 1930s, batik makers on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula were already making batik blocks using wax and metal blocks. Initially, copper blocks were imported from Java for this purpose. Later, brass, and tin ones (recycled from old tin cans) were

made locally. Motifs used were steel cloth hacking to the design of Javanese batik-for the central panel of the sarong designs included floral bouquet and other motifs such as peacocks and ducks. During the Japanese occupation (1941-1945), batik production ceased. After the war, batik design changed with the incorporation of local themes and motifs.

In the 1940s, there were as many as 60 batik factories in Kelantan with several in Terengganu [1]. Increased government support for the industry came with the establishment of the Rural and Industrial Development Authority (RIDA). In the mid-1950s various bits of help were provided to develop small rural cottage industries and the development of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) in the early 1960s further advanced the batik industries. MARA encouraged the development of new uniquely Malaysian motifs as well as different production techniques, for instance instead of the traditional two-meter batik sarong, hand-printed batik by the yard was introduced. Later, innovations such as the 'crackle effect' and the discharge method of coloring were used. This style of batik became popular as it could be made into clothing and garments for casual and formal wear. Furthermore, the use of different textiles such as cotton, lawn, voile, and handmade made batik ideal for tropical climate.

The process of cultivation of change and product improvement resulted in the eventual adoption of the hand-drawn technique known as batik canting or 'batik tulis', commercially produced since the 1970s. While the canting tools (a copper stylus with an attached container filled with melted wax) was used following the traditional Javanese method, experimentation in Malaysia led to new ways of applying color (brushing instead of immersing in dye) on different types of cloth (voile, silk, cotton lawn and duck cloth).

5.1. Patterns and Motifs

Malaysia's tropical forest, flora, fauna, vegetal, and plant life have inspired designs in the styled form on batik fabrics [4]. Marine life and geometric patterns are also part of the repertoire of batik pattern motifs. Besides, sometimes company logos, association emblems, and special, commemorative designs are also incorporated.

1. Popular batik motifs include:
2. National flower (Hibiscus Rosa-Sinensis)
3. Ylang flowers (Canadium Ordarata)
4. Magnolia (Magnoliaceae)

5. Yam leaf
6. Birds and branches
7. Golden betel leaves

In Indonesia, the patterns and motifs are influenced by several aspects:

1. Geographical elements which detail the area from which the designers were from
2. Lifestyles of the people from the area
3. Local beliefs and traditions
4. Expression of the world, flora, and fauna
5. Acculturation with designers from other areas.

5.2. Block Printing

Block printing or Batik Blok is the techniques of stamping or 'terap' (application) of batik cloth using metal, copper, or wooden block is used to produce block – printed batik. The making of block printing involves wax being melted in a large wok [2]. The batik printer dips the metal block into the hot wax and shakes off the excess. The waxed cloth is then dyed by immersing it in a wooden trough, either in one, two, three, and four layers of colors according to the design. A roller might be used to dye a large amount of cloth so that color is applied evenly. The cloth is laid on a table covered with damp banana trunk fibers. The cool fibers assist to solidify the wax when stamping the block on the fabric, making a clearer impression of the design. The block is stamped onto the cloth with a steady hand and meticulous care must be taken during stamping to obtain a continuous flow to the pattern.

5.3. Hand-drawn Batik

Hand-drawn batik is a piece of white cloth that is stretched taut on a frame so that certain motifs can be drawn onto it using a canting (stylus) or brush dipper or poured with wax [2]. The making of hand-drawn batik involves the cloth being stretched across a frame to keep it taut. Hot wax is carefully applied to the cloth in fine lines to create the outline of the desired pattern using a copper stylus (canting) filled with melted wax. Colored dyes are applied to the cloth using a brush which requires care and skill. Background colors would first be applied.

5.4. Finishing Process

The finishing process in batik making requires some steps need following through. The cloth is boiled in a large wok-shaped vat of water to melt and remove the wax. It is then slapped against a smooth concrete slab to remove the last particles of wax. The batik then is washed in detergent and hung out to dry completely.

5.4.1. The Role of Education in Promoting and Enhancing Batik Industry: Indonesia's Education System

Indonesia is proactive in making sure that batik is appreciated even among its youngsters, among others, through the commitment of its education system. Numerous efforts and programs have been designed and carried out, both with short-term and long-term goals in increasing the roles of batik within the local society and in the promotion of batik to the school students. The followings are the efforts taken:

The integration of batik education into the curriculum, co-curriculum, and extra-curricular activities. Creative education concerning design and batik coloring process. Increased batik quality. Education of philosophical values involving batik and as the national heritage. Roles performed by the Indonesian government generally, and the Ministry of National Education specifically, in seeing the implementation of best practices in batik in the government schools across Indonesia.

The integration of batik as part of the lifestyle in its compulsory wear on specific days and during festivals. Batik-driven programs such as batik design competitions, batik drawing competitions, etc. The roles of batik-based school uniform in instilling the love for batik. The exhibition of batik-related artwork by the students. Batik-related courses offered by museums to visitors Partnerships with the industry and government agencies in promoting batik.

5.4.2. Batik as a Subject in Indonesian School System

Indonesia is aggressive in its efforts in promoting batik as a national identity. The love for batik is instilled through batik-related subjects offered at primary and secondary school levels. In Malaysia, education of batik is introduced at the secondary level. The following tables present information about batik education at both primary and secondary schools in both Indonesia and Malaysia.

Batik subject in Malaysia through Visual Arts Education subject ‘

TABLE 1: Batik education in Indonesia's government schools

No.	School	Class/Semester	Topics
1	Primary School (Sekolah Dasar)	Class V semester 1	Background motif on the cloth
		Class VI semester 1	Batik making with middle level technique
2	Secondary School (Middle School)	Class VIII semester 1	Planning of batik making with archipelago-based technique and pattern. Employing the textile-production skills with archipelago-based technique and pattern.
		Class VIII semester 2	Employing the textile-production skills with archipelago-based technique and pattern.
3	Secondary School (Upper)	Class XI, semester 1 (IPS)	Planning of artwork production skills with the emphasis given on the designs that can be found in archipelago territories. Production of artwork with the emphasis on designs found in archipelago territories.
		Class XI, semester 1 (IPS)	Planning of artwork production with considerations on archipelago utility and designs. Production of artwork with considerations on archipelago utility and designs.

TABLE 2: Batik education in Malaysia's schools

No.	School	Class/Semester	Topics
1	Primary School (Sekolah Rendah)	Not offered	NIL
2	Secondary School (Sekolah Menengah)	Form 3	Batik history and batik types
			Equipment, materials, and production method
			Making of batik-related artwork
		Form 4	Batik history and background
			Types of batik materials and production methods
			Batik production
			New dimension of batik
		Form 5	Batik history and background
			Types of batik materials and production methods
			Batik production
			New dimension of batik

6. Conclusion

Malaysian and Indonesian Batik: The Best Practice has to look at the education system. How Indonesia Maintains the Batik as important an art and culture by cultivating Batik in the education system from the beginning of schooling (Primary Education) until Tertiary education. The Education and training in Indonesian Batik intangible cultural heritage

for elementary, junior, senior, vocational school and polytechnic students. Having batik in school curricula very much supports the tradition, as the spirit and condition of the students to create their idea development and making Batik.

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