

# The Esthetic Adaptation of Batik Makers to Socio-Cultural Changes on Banyuwangi's *Gajah Oling* Batik

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**Abstract.** Batik is very adaptive as it develops and follows the changing of times. Therefore, it is always consistent with the socio-cultural development. Although the development of batik in some regions influenced each other, *Gajah Oling* batik from Banyuwangi had its own history and uniqueness. To survive, the culture and society must always adapt to life changes. Socio-cultural changes are influenced by factors like technologies and times. Originally, *Gajah Oling* batik was only used for sacred purposes, but it is now a favorite in the creative industry and has huge challenges in the community. The method used to explore the esthetic adaptation of batik makers to socio-cultural backgrounds is qualitative research supported by culture studies. *Gajah Oling* batik motif still remains and is used in Seblang dance and as uniforms. Besides being produced by the Osing tribe, *Gajah Oling* batik has also been produced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

**Keywords:** Esthetic Adaptation, Batik, Socio-Cultural Changes

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia consists of a variety of ethnic groups with their distinctiveness in cultural arts. Every ethnic group has many amazing works of art and regional cultures. Cultural orientation nowadays is not only a regional and national issue, but it extends globally with a new set of values and norms, and localities seek to 'redefine' themselves in an effort to see how cultural identities reposition themselves. A 'tradition', whether we realize it or not, is always changing [1]. These traditional work of arts develop in an area and have distinctive cultural arts because of the different environmental conditions, traditions, and skills like tenacity and hard work for decades. One of the works of art and culture is batik. Batik art is one of the branches of art rooted in Indonesian culture which has a high value and emphasizes its Indonesian's characteristics [2].

The anthropologists argue that all socio-cultural systems are constantly changing. None of the socio-cultural systems are truly static. It is in line with [3] who stated that universally, there is no culture that does not change and is not adaptive to various forms of changes. This is what causes cultures to be dynamic and adaptive. Cultural dynamics and adaptation happen because of the changes that surround human life. It is either physiological, demographical, or social changes. Hence, there are different habits between generations in terms of the ways of thinking and acting between one community and another.

As a form of culture, batik has a number of dimensions like ideas, behavior, and artifacts. In terms of ideas, batik was created from a certain value system [4]. Change is a necessity, either the socio-cultural changes or changes which are influenced by several factors in technological development and times. In order for people to survive, culture or society must always adapt to life changes and this happens to batik in Indonesia, especially in Banyuwangi district. Batik is currently experiencing a global market so the challenges and opportunities that exist in society are huge and so competitive. The development of batik industry, as a form of creative economy, is increasingly promising. The creative industry has become a new favourite to increase people's living rates as well as to strengthen the joints of the national economy.

This study intends to understand and explain the phenomena on the development of Banyuwangi's Gajah Oling batik motifs and its adaptation to socio-cultural changes. In details, the objectives in this study are formulated as follows (1) Analyzing the forms of Gajah Oling batik motifs and their changes, and (2) Analyzing Gajah Oling batik makers who adapt esthetically to socio-cultural changes in the expression of the creation of motifs. The main motif of Gajah Oling batik is not only found in clothes, but it has become an icon at many gate entrances, both entrances between villages and subdistrict borders, at sub-district and district offices, pavilions, and also at the main entrance gates as well as the front gates in Banyuwangi district. It is possible that Banyuwangi district wants to build its identity through the main motif of Gajah Oling batik. This indicates that the meanings they want to build is aesthetic ideology formed through the implementation of the aesthetic adaptation.

## **2. Methodology**

This study focuses on the efforts to identify qualitative understanding and explanation of the problems. According to [5], art studies are carried out through deep involvement in the field or real-life situations. Based on the theoretical studies and frameworks presented, the method in this study uses a qualitative approach, which is holistic, integrative, descriptive, and qualitative analysis of a cultural phenomenon in a society.

Meanwhile, the research approach uses culture studies with the area of study of culture, art, and identity. Culture studies uses an interdisciplinary approach that tries to see cultural phenomena extensively from various influential factors. In this case, the influential factors include education, economy, social, politics, industry, tourism, and so forth.

The research was conducted in Banyuwangi district at the center of the home batik industry and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In conducting the research, data collection techniques are needed with observation techniques, interview techniques, and document techniques. The source triangulation technique is the most appropriate data validity technique used. The qualitative data analysis model that is considered suitable to be used in this study is an interactive analysis model.

## **3. Results and Discussions**

### **3.1 The Shape of *Gajah Oling* Batik Motif and Its Changes**

According to [6] Batik is a result of culture in a society. The shape of the original or traditional *Gajah Oling* batik motif is different from the modern one. The traditional one has

its patent in color, size, number of basic ornament forms, and the making process. In the past, *Gajah Oling* batik was colored in white background batik and a black motif used for the Seblang / Gandrung dance ceremony in Banyuwangi district. But now, unlike the past motifs, there are various colors (red, green, yellow, blue, etc.).

Black, white, and red are common colors in pre-modern Indonesia. Originally, white or yellow represent the symbols of the sky (the upper world), red is the symbol of the human world (or middle world), black as the symbol of the earth (the underworld). In the third batik art, the colors become white, blue or blackish blue, and brown (red). During the Hindu times in Java, the three colors switched their meanings to the symbols of Brahma (red), Vishnu (black), and Shiva (white), as seen in the Prambanan temple complex. But perhaps it still carries the primordial symbol of Indonesia [7].

The following is a variant of the main motif of *Gajah Oling* batik:



**Fig.1.** A Variety of *Gajah Oling* Batik Motifs with White and Colorful Backgrounds

(Source: Author's Documentation, 2009)

From some of the main *Gajah Oling* batik motifs on both the original (Black and white) and the colorful one, it can be concluded that *Gajah Oling* main motif always has the following criteria: its very own *Gajah Oling* motif, three *dilem* leaves, three *manggar* flowers and jasmine flowers with five petals. The motives identified above are the original or traditional *Gajah Oling* batik motifs. These original motifs are still often used in the Seblang ceremony and are used for Gandrung dancers and other cultural ceremonies in Banyuwangi district.

In its development, *Gajah Oling* batik motif has been modified, and its principal motifs contained in it have begun to decrease in number. The modification, for instance, can be seen in one main motif in which there is only *Gajah Oling* ornament, the *katu* leaves and jasmine flower, without any *manggar* flower ornaments. Besides, the amount of *manggar* leaves is inappropriate since there are only two flowers instead of three.

*Gajah Oling* batik motif is originally derived from the basic variant of the letter S, which is an ancient pattern of letters that once existed in Indonesia. [7] stated that the letter motif "S" is the oldest motif in Indonesia, because the motif has already existed since the prehistoric times. It was used as a decoration on bronze objects called *Bejana Kerinci*. In Indonesia, there are multiple gyre ornaments, similar to the "S" shape, which came together with the bronze culture and were known as European bronze culture [8].

Aside from the changing on the shape of *Gajah Oling* motif, the naming element has also changed. Despite using a different name, the main motif of *Gajah Oling* batik still remains. The motif, though, uses different names like *Klabangan*, *Gedegan*, *Sembruk Cacing* motif, and so forth.

### **3. 2 *Gajah Oling* Batik Makers Adapt Esthetically to Socio-Cultural Changes**

Batik makers are very adaptive, so they always interact with the socio-cultural changes in the society. Besides, the socio-cultural changes also influence the area of batik distribution and the batik motifs. The art and batik skills grow and develop according to their characteristics. Although the development of batik in some regions could influence one another, batik in Banyuwangi and even in some other regions in Indonesia have its own history and uniqueness. According to [9] cultural changes can arise due to the changes in the community's environment, new discoveries, and contacts with other cultures.

The majority of Banyuwangi residents, working as farmers and fishermen, still have an active life in arts such as performing Seblang arts, kebo-kebo, gandrung, angklung, batik crafting, and other handicrafts making. Social life in Banyuwangi is a blend of three cultural elements: Java, Bali and Madura. They formed the Osing tribe's culture in Banyuwangi, which has its own peculiarities and uniqueness.

There are around 30 batik motifs in Banyuwangi, but the most distinctive and traditional as well as the oldest one is *Gajah Oling* batik motif. Batik is produced by the crafters and the people from the Osing tribe. Once upon a time, batik was only produced by the women from the Osing tribe who made batik in front of their homes in Tumenggungan village, Banyuwangi district. The making of batik at that time only used the old writing technique and batik was made for sacred purposes, either as the costumes for the dancers or the complement during the traditional ceremonies in Banyuwangi. But now, in Tumenggungan village, there is only 1 elderly woman who is still making batik in front of her house. Her name is Mrs. Kulsum (89 years old) and she remains loyal in using the old writing technique. However, because of the increasing market demand and the community's demand, the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for batik industry in Banyuwangi are increasing and spreading throughout the Banyuwangi district. At the present, there are around 15 SMEs in Banyuwangi that are producing batik. They produce batik not only by using the writing technique, but they also use stamp techniques, printing and semi-writing techniques. This is to anticipate the needs and demands of the people who are more likely to use batik.

*Gajah Oling* batik was originally used only for traditional ceremonies like Seblang dance, Gandrung dance, worn in wedding ceremonies and funerals, or in ancient times when there was a child who got a fever and the parent had to carry him using scarf in *Gajah Oling* motif. Nowadays, many have switched the functions of *Gajah Oling* batik to be worn during daily activities, for example as school uniforms from elementary to upper levels, teachers' uniforms, employees' uniforms, and everyday's clothes. In order to seek new dancers, every school in Banyuwangi obliges their students to dance gandrung and they usually conduct a carnival/dancing events every year. That is why those *Gajah Oling* batik motifs who originally were only black and white, the motifs now have changed to be more colorful. The changes are due to the fact that the needs are increasing and there are also various requests for colorful batik. The more the cultural events and festivals, the more batik is needed, and *Gajah Oling* batik is the most produced one. In traditional arts, for example, if you come to the ceremonial area, you should wear batik as a long cloth ( for females) and udeng (for males) because it is mandatory for all the invited guests and visitors.

The manifestation of the decomposed culture, in reality, certainly cannot be separated from one another. Culture and custom govern and give direction to human life. Both thoughts and ideas, as well as human's actions and works, produce physical cultural objects. On the contrary, physical culture forms a certain environment which keeps people away from their natural environment which influences their patterns of behavior and even their way of thinking [10].

Gajah Oling's main motif is not only on clothings, but it has become an icon on the entrance gates between villages and sub-district borders, or in sub-district offices and the pavilions around Banyuwangi district. It is possible that Banyuwangi might want to establish its identity through Gajah Oling's main motif. In addition, Gajah Oling motif is used as icons and complements in some events including the Banyuwangi Indonesia Festival, the cultural events, festivals, carnivals, traditional ceremonies, and awards. This makes the meanings contained in Gajah Oling motif are trying to build an esthetic ideology with the process of its formation with esthetic adaptation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The original/ traditional form of Gajah Oling batik motifs and the modern ones are different in terms of colors, number of principal motifs, sizes, and the namings of the motif. The main motif is identified from one main S motif, three dilem leaves, three manggar flowers, and jasmine with five petals. The identified characteristics above represent the original motif of Gajah Oling batik, which were still used in traditional and religious ceremonies in Banyuwangi.

Gajah Oling batik makers adapt esthetically to socio-cultural changes both from the aspect of function and motif. The function of Gajah Oling batik motif, originally used for the sacred purposes, has now spread for profane purposes. This motif which was initially found only as clothes has become widespread as a Banyuwangi's icon and can be found on gates, doors, poles, and banners. These socio-cultural changes are influenced by several factors such as the development of technology and times. These changes in batik motifs are also strongly influenced by cultural developments and the social dynamics of the community.

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