

EFFORTS ON DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION OF SURAKARTA'S TIGA NEGERI BATIK FROM HANDMADE TECHNIQUE TO COLD WAX TECHNIQUE.

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ABSTRACT

A piece of batik cloth contains philosophical values, symbolic meanings, traces of events, ethnic identity, social stratification, spirituality, and records of the journey of civilization. Tiga Negeri batik is evidence of cultural assimilation and acculturation in Java. Tiga Negeri is the nickname for the three places from which batik is made from the process of designing, drawing (*mbatik*), and onto coloring. This batik, which is closely related to Chinese culture, originated in Lasem, then during its spread to Surakarta, the motifs and color schemes became richer due to the assimilation between coastal batik and inland batik, and thus it eventually became Tiga Negeri batik from Surakarta. However, recently this unique Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik is losing its prestige and requires revitalization efforts to sustain its sustainability.

Keywords: Batik, Tiga Negeri, Cold Wax

A. INTRODUCTION

Batik, among the Chinese community in Surakarta, is not considered a new thing for them considering that they have lived since the era of Islamic Mataram Sultanese back when it was still centered in Pajang, West Surakarta, around the year 1588 to 1680s [1]. Among the typical Surakarta-styled batik, there appears one type of batik whose originated from a Chinese descent. The first is Indonesian Batik, which is the work of Mr. Go Tiek Swan, which was started in the 1960s. The second is the Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik, which was initiated by Mrs. Tjoa Giok Tjiam around 1910. These two types of batik are a combination of inland batik and coastal batik. If Indonesian batik is better known for the inspiration of Surakarta's classical motifs combined with bright colors typical of the coast, then Tiga Negeri batik is better known for its *sogan* colored or yellowish-brown color with a typical coastal batik motif.

The Tiga Negeri handmade batik business in Surakarta, which was founded by Mrs. Tjoa Giok Tjiam, was last managed by its third generation, namely Mr. Tjoa Siang Swie. The owner of this batik business decided to close its business in 2014 due to the difficulty of finding skilled batik artisan around Surakarta and the competition with imitation batik products. This was such an unfortunate decision as it impacts on the extinction of Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik style.

B. METHOD

This research focuses on the pattern of Tiga Negeri batik which developed in Surakarta,

which was created based on a combination between inland batik and coastal batik. The purpose of this research is to find alternatives to create sustainable production efforts and to anticipate the extinction of Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik style. The data obtained were processed by analytical and descriptive research methods.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The northern coast of the island of Java is not only known for its port cities, which its main activities are most commonly filled with trades, but also known as its several kingdoms that was once resides on that area, including the Kasepuhan and Kanoman empires of Cirebon, the Demak empire, and the Kalingga empire, which was based in Jepara. In addition, the north coast area was once under the control of Mataram around the 15th century. The batik tradition which is thought to have emerged during the Majapahit period around the 12th century also spread along with the expansion of Mataram to the north coast [2]. Its role as a trading center made the northern coast of Java not only visited by traders from around Nusantara, but also from overseas.

Trades and the presence of the empires on the northern coast gave its own color to coastal batik, especially in its motifs and colors [3]. In ancient times, dyes were obtained from nature, namely in the form of plants that could be made from fruit, flowers, leaves, and bark. *Indigofera* or tilapia, for example, is a native African plant that was introduced to Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. Shrubs that grow in hot humid areas produce a blue color like what's in the coastal batik in Pekalongan. Lasem is also famous for its red color which is obtained from the noni plant. Meanwhile, the yellowish-brown color is obtained from jambal, tegeran, and tingi bark that grows around Surakarta [4]. The biological richness of these natural dyes helped pioneers the existence of Tiga Negeri batik. In addition to natural dyes, the discovery of synthetic dyes also help provides other colors to coastal batik. The presence of artificial dyes was brought by traders from Europe. The result is much brighter and the ability to have more than 3 colors in one batik. This is very possible because synthetic dyes are much easier to use than natural dyes. The number of colors with quite a lot of gradations makes coastal batik more attractive and different when compared to inland batik which tends to be dark in color.

The elements of motifs and colors that are influenced by coastal culture come from its natural wealth and cultural acculturation. As is the case wherever traditional Nusantara fabrics are made, batik is no exception, including coastal batik, where they always take the idea for the shape of the motif from what's around them, whether it was from flora, fauna, or any forms that can be found in their daily lives. In its development, the arrival of foreign nations and its culture, merged to every sector of everyone's life in the coastal areas. One of them also includes batik motifs made in coastal areas. The emergence of floral motifs or known as a bouquet is an influence from Europe. There are also coastal batik motifs inspired by European plants and animals, such as tulips, grapes, roses, various types of birds, and so on [5]. Besides being influenced by European culture, coastal batik patterns are also influenced by figures in Chinese mythological stories, such as dragons, phoenixes, lions, and types of plants that grow in China, such as peonies. Apart from its decoration pattern, the color of coastal batik which tends to light up is also adapted in Tiga Negeri batik, such as red which is the favorite color of the Chinese people and blue which is favored by Europeans [6].



Image 1. Coastal Batik with dragon motifs (left) and phoenix (right) in Laseman color

In addition to coastal batik, inland batik also influences the pattern of Tiga Negeri batik. Inland batik is developed from the empire environment located in Surakarta and Yogyakarta. The result is also known as Keraton batik or classic batik. This type of batik was specifically made for the empire itself, that includes a wearable attire for the king, his family and relatives, as well as his courtiers. It can also be said that this batik has the function of indicating the social status or social stratification inside the empire environment. Therefore, it is known that there is a batik named batik Larangan inside the Surakarta and Yogyakarta empire, which is only intended for the king and his relatives to use. Another function of classic batik is to complete ceremonies in around empire environment, including ceremonies to commemorate the life cycle of the Javanese people. The usual color for inland batik revolves around white, yellow, brownish, dark blue, and black [7].



Image 2. Batik intended only for the king: Parang Barong Surakarta (left), and Parang Huk Yogyakarta (right)

In addition to inland batik made by empire's artists, there are also inland batik made by the commoners. If Keraton's batik has symbolic motifs and only used by selected individuals and only in predetermined time, then the inland batik made by the commoners has a motif that revolves around its artisan's environment. It does not have any meaning and can be used by anyone regardless of their social status. This batik is often also referred to as farmer's batik or rural batik. Meanwhile, there is also a batik named Saudagaran batik, which is a batik produced because of the resistance of batik artists from merchant circles towards the empire by making patterns taken from batik Larangan. The *larangan* motifs from Keraton's batik was modified to a motif that could be used by the commoners. This idea arose when people outside the empire saw Keraton's batik which known as *larangan*, having a strict rule in order to use them, and at the same time, the demand for batik cloth for batik clothing was increasing. The batik artist outside the empire who are part of batik merchant group, were taking initiatives to modify the *larangan* motifs by adding supporting

ornaments and decorative ornaments (*isen-isen*), so that the shape is no longer the same as the motifs inside the empire [8].



Image 3. Saudagaran batik

Tiga Negeri batik was first created at the northern coast, namely Lasem, a place where the process of acculturation and assimilation of Chinese culture and local culture runs harmoniously. The closeness of their cultural values results in mutually beneficial cooperation and avoids inter-ethnic conflicts. Initially, the Chinese community made batik cloth as a complement to ritual ceremonies, such as altar cloth (*towie*), table cover cloth (*muklie*), and hanging altar decorations. Over time, batik cloth is also used as clothing material. This batik, better known as Chinese Peranakan batik, consists of three colors, which is Lasem's red, Pekalongan's blue, and Surakarta's *soga* brown. Initially, these colors were given in the three cities using natural dyes. The red color in Lasem comes from the roots of the noni plant. The blue color made in Pekalongan comes from the indigo plant. While the *soga* brown color made in Surakarta comes from jambal, tingi, tegeran, and *soga* plants. In addition to the coloring technique, Tiga Negeri batik also relies on the skills of local batik artists from the three regions.

The term "negeri" in Tiga Negeri batik, refers to the regional designation that was granted autonomy rights by the Dutch colonial government at that time. The three regions that were given the power of autonomy, as well as being centers of batik production on the island of Java, were Pekalongan, Lasem, and Surakarta. The existence of Tiga Negeri batik cannot be separated from the coastal batik culture of the Lasem, Pekalongan, and Cirebon areas and the inland batik culture of Surakarta in terms of color and motif [9].

The motifs that appear in Tiga Negeri batik are related to the mythological characters of Chinese beliefs. Flora forms such as peonies, for the Chinese are believed to be flowers of prosperity and happiness. The shape of fauna in the form of dragon is believed to be a symbol of truth, luck, goodness, strength, and prosperity. Likewise, the shape of the hong bird or phoenix, is believed to be the king of all birds, which symbolizes honor. The long tail on the various bird species means a long life. Other fauna form motifs such as butterflies, deer, and various marine biota, indicates that the coastal batik artisans live near the seashore. In its development, the colors of Tiga Negeri batik are no longer fixed between red, blue, and *soga* brown. The patterns are increasingly diverse with the

appearance of various new colors such as green, yellow, and even orange [10].



Image 4. Lasem's Tiga Negeri Batik with peony flower as its motifs (left) and Lasem's Tiga Negeri Batik with new color variants (right)
(Personal collection of Tjoa Siang Swie)

In Surakarta, there were two types of batik that were developed and initiated by Chinese batik entrepreneurs, which motifs and colors were a combination of inland and coastal patterns. The first type of batik is known as Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik, which was first produced in the year of 1910 in Sorogenen by Tjoa Giok Tjiam. While the second one is known as Indonesian batik made by Go Tiek Swan, which was first produced in the year 1960s per request from President Soekarno. After the passing of Go Tiek Swan, who was known among the Keraton Surakarta as Kangjeng Hardjonegoro, Indonesian batik is still being produced by his successors in the form of batik replication made by order to this day.



Image 5. Surakarta's Tiga Negeri Batik motifs produced by Giok Tjiam with isen ukel as its background and color pattern resembling Sido Mukti.
(Personal collection of Tjoa Siang Swie)

Having a variety of motifs and colors that are different from the typical Tiga Negeri batik of Lasem, the characteristic pattern of the Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik produced by Tjoa Giok Tjiam always includes a bird motif with a long tail and is often represented only by the shape of a long tail that resembles a long sticking leaf. According to the successor of Tjoa's business, a long tail means long life, prosperity, and happiness. In addition to that, the background used is taken from the idea of classic Sido Mukti batik, namely the batik worn by the bride and groom in traditional wedding ceremonies in Surakarta and Yogyakarta. The culture of wearing Surakarta and Yogyakarta-styled classic batik is also carried out in Tjoa's extended family when they marry off their son and daughter. However, the classic batik pattern is combined with typical Chinese motifs such as a phoenix or a peony flower, both of which also have a noble meaning and hope for the wearer, namely to be useful for others. The method of developing the batik pattern that being carried out by Chinese descendent batik entrepreneur is actually almost identical with the Javanese batik entrepreneur. The difference is, the Saudagaran batik pattern adapts the dark blue and brown colors typical of inland batik, while the Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik leans towards adding shades of red typical of Lasem and blue which is typical of Pekalongan.



Image 6. Surakarta's Tiga Negeri Batik using bird and long tails as its motifs with *soga brown* colored *isen ukel* as its background

(Personal collection of Tjoa Siang Swie)

This *isen ukel* as a background is found in almost all Surakarta's Tiga Negeri Batik produced by Mrs. Tjoa. Several other types of settings or decorative ornaments are *galaran*, *pasiran*, *remukan wonogiren*, and their proudest decorative ornaments which is used for backgrounds named as mosquito repellent or pearls. Products with this decorative ornaments background are very popular among consumers, especially consumers from the West Java region because visually, the *soga brown* color is not too flashy and looks more like a white color.



Image 7. Surakarta's Tiga Negeri Batik with isen pearl as its background.
(Personal collection of Tjoa Siang Swie)

Tjoa Giok Tjiam's Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik business was successfully managed and passed on to the third generation, namely Tjoa Siang Swie, but then went out of business in 2014 due to difficulties in finding skilled batik artisans. Before closing its door, this Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik had attempted to keep producing batik even with fewer artists. Human resources are often the inhibiting factor for the development of batik [11].

An alternative that can be done to seek sustainable production for Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik is to utilize cold wax print technique. This creativity emerged in line with the crisis of regeneration of handmade batik in Surakarta and the adjustment of market demand. The utilization of filter printing with cold wax aims to replace the batik artisan's technique from initially using *canting* or writing technique to produce the main and its supporting motifs. If screen printing utilizes pigment, then in this cold wax technique, a cold diluted wax is used. The filter surface for this purpose is rougher than the filter surface for the filter printing technique. After the screen-printing stage is complete, the writing technique with *canting* is then applied to complete the decorative ornaments.

The process of producing the screens for the cold wax technique is just the same as making screens for other screen-printing techniques.

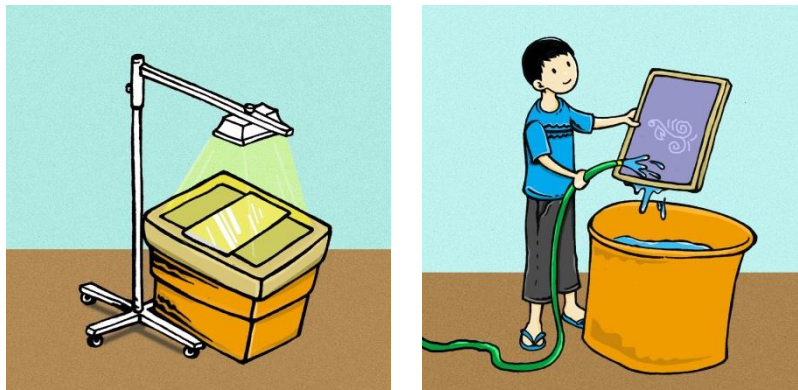


Image 8. The screens production method for the cold wax technique is just the same as for the other printing technique.

Similarly, the manufacturing steps are exactly the same as the filter printing process, with a difference that it uses liquid wax with cold temperatures.

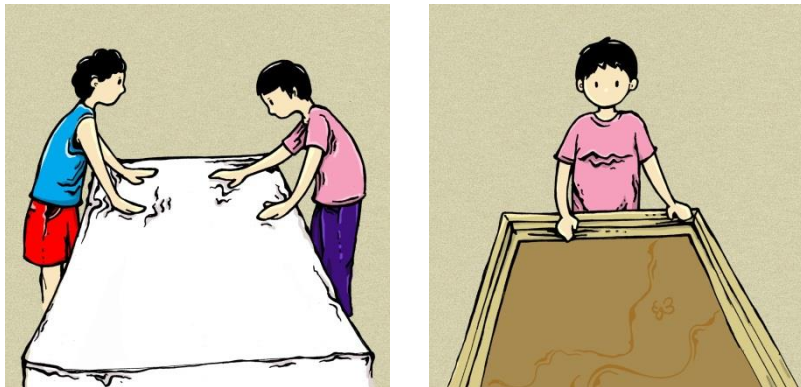


Image 10. The liquid cold wax is being poured to be printed onto the cloth.

Batik artists are still required in producing with the cold wax techniques. They will be tasked in affixing the decorative ornaments, as well as tracing the shape of the motifs produced through the screens printing process on the back of the cloth. However, in general the cold wax liquid should have penetrated on both sides of the cloth's surface during the screen-printing process.



Image 11. Batik artisans affixing isens on the print with hot wax.

The pattern of batik with cold wax technique can be similar to handmade batik albeit with

cheaper price, as the production process is shorter and does not require as much labor as handmade batik.

This phenomenon of creative idea in utilizing cold wax has been commonly practiced for a long time. Initially, it was invented by several passionate batik activists in Bali for the purpose of introducing batik to children. The raw material used for the cold wax or the barrier agent is similar to flour derived from previously extracted tamarind seeds (*gutta tamarin*). In West Java, a batik artist Doddie Permana introduced a cold wax made from seaweed, CMC and glutinous rice flour. Meanwhile, Jalidin, a batik artist in Pilang village, Sragen, Central Java, uses filter screen printing technology to replace the drawing process with *canting* as normally done in handmade batik. This method is used to create the main motif and the supporting motif, however the decorative ornaments will still be done manually using *canting* just like in a handmade technique.

The visuals of batik patterned cloth made with the cold wax technique are just as the same as the visuals of handmade batik in general. This technique is being utilized to create the basic framework or *klowongan* batik motifs, which in handmade technique, is done using *canting*, stamp, or brush. The making of decorative ornaments will still utilizes the skill of batik artisans using *canting* and batik wax. The term cold wax indicates that there is still an element of batik wax in the recipe for the color blocking agent. The wax used is black wax or *tembokan*, gondorukem and damar. The wax used for cold wax technique uses pertalite gasoline in order to make them more liquified. In addition, as for the color locking or color fixation, it uses raw water glass and sodium hydroxide, mixed with water.

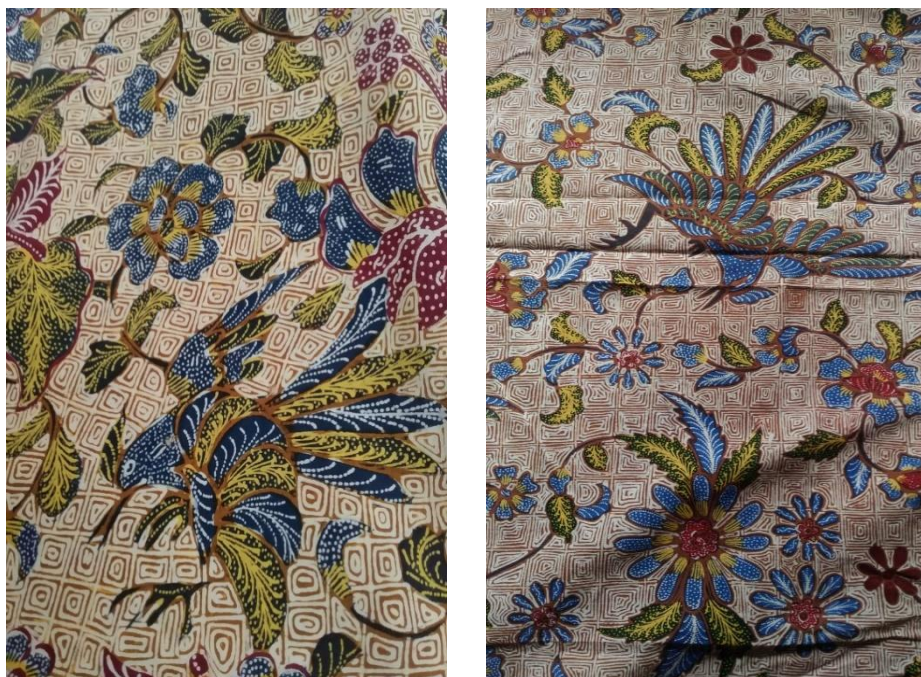


Image 12. Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik using handmade technique (left) and cold wax technique (right)

Judging from the process, the first advantage of producing batik patterns utilizing cold wax technique is that it takes a much shorter time than using a handmade batik process. The process of

creating motifs using *canting* takes a longer time, and more labor is needed to finish the process. Meanwhile, with the cold wax technique, at most, two labor are required to finish the motifs on the entire surface of the cloth, and at least one batik artisan is needed to complete the decorative ornaments. The second advantage of utilizing the cold wax technique is that it has more flexible room to adjust the motifs composition to be like the handmade batik.

These two advantages of the cold wax technique as already been written above are made to lean towards the market demand. By making the batik pattern utilizing the cold wax it will be able to fulfill consumer's large quantity demand in much shorter time. In pricing point of view, the product will be much affordable in price and will appeal to wider market. The requirement of a specialized worker which in this case a skilled batik artist can be avoided which in return, can lower the production cost needed to produce them. In the creative industry field, the cold wax technique is indeed an alternative that can be chosen, although it has been stated by the Ministry of Industry of the Republic of Indonesia through the Indonesian National Batik Standard, that this technique produces an imitation of batik.

D. CONCLUSION

Ever since the declaration of batik as Indonesia's original heritage by the UNESCO, the use of batik is no longer limited to special events, but also for everyday use as well. Various instance and institutes implemented a rule to wear batik on certain working days for their employees. However, the high price for a piece of batik cloth or batik products that use handmade technique is indeed a problem in itself as the price is quite unaffordable by the general middle class. Thus, the choice of batik-patterned cloth or imitation batik that being produced using cold wax method, is quite understandable considering that the phenomenon of handmade batik cannot be easily achieved.

The main thing that is most important when talking about batik is the pattern that gives it its own characteristics. In batik, there are various motifs that have great potential to continue to be developed so that their production remains sustainable. Based on that definition, batik is a pictorial cloth that is made specifically either by drawing or incising a color barrier in the form of wax on the cloth. What makes it more distinctive is that it uses a special wax namely batik wax, which has a very distinctive smell. As written in SNI 0239: 2014, it is mentioned that one of the categories of batik is about the "smell" element. Which the cold wax also carried out, especially for the sake of the batik products sustainability. The product made using this technique should still be called batik because the covering material still use wax as its element.

In this research study, it can be seen a comparison of Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik pattern made using two kinds of technique, namely the handmade technique and cold wax technique. The printout visually shows that in overall, the batik patterns made with the cold wax technique can be said to resemble the handmade batik, as well as its details on the main and supporting motifs including its decorative ornaments. The drawback lies in the flexibility of the motif and the limited range of lines that can be pulled, as well as the size of the decorative ornaments because the printing process causes the motifs to look identical. In the context of sustainable production efforts however, the cold wax technique is an alternative solution so that batik can still be owned by the general community at an affordable price. It is also highly possible to revitalize Surakarta's Tiga Negeri batik with the support of alternative techniques that are more in line with the market's interest.

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