

The Batik Kompeni from Indonesia

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Batik *Tulis* production has gone through a period of decline, due to the penetration and application of new printing techniques, which are commercially more attractive, being less time consuming and more efficient in quantities of production. Yet, *batik tulis* has proved to be a technique that can adapt to changing eras. It has even become an exclusive, and highly appreciated product, and has its own economic value that continues to increase. Batik also received world recognition as a Masterpiece of Intangible World Heritage by UNESCO on 2 October 2009.

One of the most unique batik styles is the "Batik Kompeni," which was developed during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia, in the early nineteenth century. During those years, Dutch entrepreneurs played an important role in developing the batik industry, especially in Java. Batik production increased, and new patterns and motifs were created that reflected the blending of Eastern and Western (Indonesian and European) visual elements. This process led to a new style that is called *Batik Kompeni*. Batik was first produced in Cirebon in northern Java, one of the main traditional centres of the batik industry. It continued to be developed by traditional Cirebon batik artists, inspiring modern batik artists until the present day.

Early development of Batik Kompeni

In 1799 the position of the VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) in the Dutch East Indies was taken over by the Dutch state. This transfer of power led many Dutch people to migrate to Indonesia, and most of them settled in Java. At that time, the importation of Indian textiles to the Dutch East Indies had stopped due to various unfavourable conditions. Due to this development, the Dutch switched to local workshops for producing textile fabrics, and became an opportunity for batik craftsmen in Java to increase production and widen the market for batik products.

At that time, the batiks in Java were grouped into two main commodity styles, namely "Palace Batik"/"Batik Istana" (produced in the center of Java) and "Batik Pesisir" (produced along the northern coast of Java). *Batik Istana*, also known as *Batik Vorstenlanden*,

Batik represents an age-old technique for applying decorative motifs to traditional Indonesian fabrics. The motifs of *Batik Tulis* (hand-drawn batik) are worked with wax that is heated and applied upon the hand-drawn lines of a motif to form a liquid barrier between the colours being applied. This technique is still being worked today in Indonesia, and it is widely used and studied by artists, craftsmen, and others in various countries. The technique is not only used for making cloth motifs; artists and craftsmen also learned and practised this technique as a medium of artistic expression.

was made mainly for the aristocracy in Solo and Yogyakarta. *Batik Istana* is characterised by the standard patterns and symbols that were often used for traditional ritual occasions. Coastal batik or *Batik Pesisir* – was more widely used by ordinary people. It was far more diverse and more likely to change over time.

The *Batik Kompeni* style was developed from the *Batik Pesisir* that includes new motifs developed to meet the tastes of the Dutch. Several local batik craftsmen cooperated in making batik and started to join business groups, many of whom were led by Indo-Dutch (women) entrepreneurs. The *Batik Kompeni* style is unique because it often reflects popular European folk tales, such as "Snow White," "Little Red Riding Hood," [Fig. 1] and "Cinderella." (Fig.2). *Batik Kompeni* also depicts the lives of the *Kompeni* soldiers armed with rifles, as well as the lives of Dutch settlers. [Fig. 3].

The Batik Kompeni style and the role of Dutch batik entrepreneurs (1800-1900s)

From the early nineteenth century, European art and culture were massively introduced in Java. Local Indonesian artists and craftsmen have studied Western drawing techniques, such as the use of perspective and realism. This development led to a hybrid style of Javanese and Western traditions, which can clearly be seen in the *Batik Kompeni* style that was worked by Cirebon artists and craftsmen [Fig. 4].

The production of the *Batik Kompeni* style soon spread across Central Java and East Java, but especially along the coastal areas of North Java. This was clearly the golden period of Dutch-style batik. Indo-Dutch entrepreneurs were collaborating with batik craftsmen to develop their businesses in various cities in the north of Java. Batik centres were developed and built in Semarang, Ungaran, Banyumas, Pacitan, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta. In 1910,

the Javanese *Batik Kompeni* also appeared in Banyumas, in southern Java.

Pekalongan was an important centre for the batik industry of Central and North Java. In this city, the batik craftsmen and entrepreneurs came up with the labels and names of specific *Batik Kompeni* motifs, that were often named after themselves, such as the *Vansolen/Zuilen* motif (from the name Van Zuylen) and the *Panastroman* motif (from the name Van Osteroom). In addition, the so-called *Frankemon* batik also became famous for the "green colour *Frankemon*" (from the name von Franquemont).

Dutch batik entrepreneurs have also produced batik with animal and plant motifs, such as storks that appeared in the midst of water plants. In addition, traditional patterns were also enriched with European or, specifically, Dutch nuances and decorative patterns.

Apart from the Dutch's, Chinese and Arab batik entrepreneurs have also appeared, and they played a huge role in the development of *Batik Kompeni* to meet the ever growing demands of the market. Initially the batik business was still an indigenous home industry, but the production process was later then transformed into industrial scale by the batik entrepreneurs. However, by 1942, when the Japanese occupied Java, most of the Dutch in Indonesia had either returned to the Netherlands or were interned by the Japanese, so that almost all of the Dutch batik companies in Java stopped their production.

Challenges and opportunities for Batik Kompeni

Modern batik production in Indonesia adheres to various styles and traditions, with different motifs, materials, techniques, and functions. Creativity in the production of modern batik designs is very diverse and functional. The diversity of product creations and batik motifs today has made it hard to

recognise the roots of the cultural traditions. In the past, batik products were sacred, functional, and valued collectively. Whereas now, the making of batik has increasingly responded to market imperatives like consumer demand and profit margins.

In the current situation, various aspects of cultures are in a crisis caused by the meeting of local and foreign influences. However, many artists and craftsmen, especially those producing traditional batik, have become engaged in the preservation and promotion of their own culture. Creativity and persistence of batik designers and craftsmen will always be needed in facing many challenges.

The growing regional autonomy in Indonesia has lent support to the preservation of traditional local arts and crafts. Information is being collected, and local potential is being developed as an asset for the future. Batik production is also changing, answering market demands, and new batik designs are being developed with the help of artists and designers creativity. Batik that contains of ethnic values has also emerged, with a new face and forms that most people call modern and contemporary.

Globalisation is a challenge that must be faced with care in order to maintain local values and local identity. Indonesian batik designs are based on norms, values, traditions, and innovations that have developed over centuries in the archipelago. The *Batik Kompeni* style, which has the potential to further inspire the development of batik, tells a nuanced story that is simultaneously global and Indonesian.

The development of new motifs, especially in the contemporary *Batik Kompeni* style, has become a great success because of the excellent quality and high economic value of the product.

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Fig. 1 (above): *Batik Kompeni*, batik pattern depicting the story of "Little Red Riding Hood", Colonial Period 1980-1940. (Source: Museum of Danar Hadi, Surakarta).

Fig. 2 (right): *Batik Kompeni*, new batik pattern depicting scenes of "Geusan Ulun, Hero of Cirebon War", 1980-2020 (Source: Photo Documentation by Nuning Y. Damayanti A).

Fig. 3 (far right): *Batik Kompeni*, batik pattern depicting epic scenes of "Pandawa dan Kurawa, Mahabharata", 1900-1940. (Source: Photo Documentation by Nuning Y. Damayanti A).

