

# Batik

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## Introduction

*Batik* is a resist-dyeing technique that combines waxes or occasionally rice starch which is applied to cotton or silk using a hand with *canting* or a metal stamp called *cap*. The root of batik is hard to trace because the originality of resist-dyeing and waxing to process clothing is still unknown. It was on the island of Java, that batik was emerged and became a great form of art. Some historians believe that batik existed in many cultures such as China, Japan, India, Thailand, East Turkestan, Europe, and Africa<sup>1</sup>.

Although batik was an ancient tradition, batik appeared in Java around the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. In 1516 exported painted cloths were batiked, according to a record from the coast of Malabar. Then two years later, the word *tulis* which means “writing” appeared, to show the handwritten technique. Even though batik was famously found in Java, the word *batik* doesn’t belong to Javanese, although the origins weren’t clear. The term implied to the word *titik*, which means “dots” to modern Indonesian and Malay language<sup>3</sup>.

To expand the importance of batik in Indonesian culture, I will discuss methods to create batik, the evolution of batik throughout history, and the batik products itself.

## Production Methods

The two main methods of creating Batik in Indonesia is by using a tool called *canting* to draw patterns or known as *tulis* (“writing”) and by using metal stamps to apply wax or known as a *cap*<sup>4</sup>. Historically, the process of making batik is very gender-specific, where most women would do the fine handwork and the application of

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<sup>1</sup> Inger Elliot McCabe, *Batik: Fabled cloth of Java* (Vermont: 1984), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Heidi Boehlke, *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion (Vol. 1.)*, (New York: 2005), 129 - 130

the wax. The value of this method is the bond between mother and daughter, where the design usually passed on. On the other hand, the men are responsible for the dyeing process and crafting the cap due to labor-intensive.

The process of making Batik by *tulis* can be done applying the design which was drawn on paper, and by using a pencil or non-permanent ink the design is transferred to fine white cotton cloth. Depending on with the artisans, the design may be a centuries-old traditional pattern, or it may be reflecting the artisan's contemporary aesthetic. After creating the patterns on the cloth, gliding molten hot wax from a copper stylus called *canting* is applied. Both surfaces of the cloth must be waxed and completed. After the cloth is dyed, boiled to remove the wax, then another element of the design is waxed, and the process repeats. This method would take about two weeks to a little over a month to be fully completed. *Tulis* method required lots of people. Women from the same village usually work together on one of their houses and it create bonds within the community from the time that they spent together. *Tulis* method also to this day, the most refine and expensive batik produced.

The metal stamps method was introduced from India to the world and toward the middle or end of the nineteenth century the Chinese batik makers to Indonesian<sup>5</sup>. From an economic standpoint, using the metal stamps or *cap* (pronounced chop) the production of batik for both export and domestic is much faster, which decreases the production cost and makes the finished products much more affordable. The methods of *tulis* and *cap* can be made by using a tool called *cemplogen*. The *cemplogen* is like a wire brush and used to scrape small spots of wax off the surface before it is dyed.

## **Evolution of Batik**

Batik motifs, design, and values evolve throughout times Geographically. Indonesia is located in southeast Asia, consists of 17,508 islands. Due to its location, many communities are separated from the body of waters, which created different tribes and cultures. However, regardless even though that the community within those islands

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

isolated, tradition such batik connected them. One particular island called Java had been the center of trading due to its location and population.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Indians and the Chinese were the early traders<sup>6</sup>. The spread of Hinduism and Buddhism happened and was adapted throughout Java. For example, the idea of the *caste system* which came from Hinduism created social structures within the indigenous people in Indonesia. The social structure that is based on age and ranks, and it can be distinguished through linguistic and design motifs by using the early resist-dyeing technique. Other motifs also depicted from religious figure such as *Shiva* from Hinduism, and *Buddha* from Buddhism, created a style called *Kawung*, which is the lotus with interlocking and intersecting cultural designs.

The Muslim communities had been around in Indonesia since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but not until the 16<sup>th</sup> century that Islam flourished<sup>7</sup>. At the time, the Muslims were the world-leading traders. It helps Indonesian to discover new trade routes and alliances. Batik became popular and the Muslims also added new design motif. Muslims discouraged the use of depicting objects instead, a design motif that is based on geometric patterns and calligraphy called the *boteh*, is created. It is another example of cultural diffusion to Batik design.

The Dutch reached Java by the 16<sup>th</sup> century and by 1602 established the colonization of Indonesia<sup>8</sup>. The advancement during The Industrial Revolution in Europe helps the advancement of technologies and made public transportation more accessible, especially for trading, in Indonesia. The economic contribution of Batik started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the expansion of the Dutch East India Company, introduced Batik in the western world. Batik was viewed as an exotic art form, and it became popular. The western's textile artist imitates Batik by various printing methods. This caused economic problems, because printing is less time consuming, and more economical, than hand-drawn. Not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the *cap* method was used by the Javanese was able to compete to produce cheaper products. The rise of

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<sup>6</sup> Monica Murgia, *Encyclopedia of National Dress: Traditional Clothing around the World Vol. 1.* (California 2013), 336.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 337

contemporary batik changed the traditional and formal batik styles. The outsourcing process in Malaysia and India by silkscreen, stencil, and dye becomes more attractive than the traditional batik due to the expense of handmade batik. However, the true batik still made in Indonesia and incorporated into the art. The emerges of new batik styles and motifs also occurred due to the Dutch-influenced. Bright-color synthetic dyed were introduced by the 1890s, which allowed broader ranges of colors to be made and it increases the production of Batik production in mass quantities.

The complexity of Indonesian history around the engagement of the outside world through trades and colonization created innumerable design motifs for batik. However, the most consistent motif would be flora and fauna. For example, the *Garuda*, a mythical bird, which has been around for ages considered to be favorable and is portrayed on the modern-day flag. The *Kancil* is an indigenous mouse deer who outwits dangerous animals is another heroic creature in the Indonesian culture.

### **Batik Products**

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Batik was used for clothing, where there are several ways to wear batik, which shows different identities in terms of their gender<sup>9</sup>. For unisex products, which are *sarong*, *dodot*, and, *kain panjang*. The *sarong* is typically about two yards long which consists of the body and the top of the cloth. It divided diagonally and decorated with different designs and colors. People use sarong by draping and tying it to their waist. The *dodot* consists of two batik cloths sewn together. It uses to pair with silk trouser, or folded on an overskirt. The *kain panjang* is a former style of the *sarong*. Men usually wrap the cloth right over left, and women will do the opposite<sup>10</sup>. These attires can be used for different occasions, such as marriage, praying, and other traditional ceremonies.

In terms of other gender-related clothing purposes the usage of batik clothes can be divided into different purposes. For women, batik can be made as their *kemben*, *kebaya*, and *selendang*. The *kemben* is used to wrap around their breast and paired it

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

with dodot. The *Kebaya* is a long-sleeved blouse. Women use kebaya for formal occasion. Whereas the *selendang* can be used for different accessories. The long narrow cloth can be used as a bag, a shawl and carrying a baby. Men usually use batik products as their *ikat kepala*, which translated to a headband, as part of their accessory. Nowadays, batik also made for different products such as clothing, bag, and much more.

In today's world, batik still play an important role in Indonesian culture. It fashioned into a contemporary shirts, dresses, or scarves. The *kebaya* still the standard of formal attire for women. Men also use batik for many formal occasions as well as an office attire, in fact the current president of Indonesia wears Batik most of the time. Designers such as Iwan Tirta, and Oscar Lawalata, use batik as their fashion products. In 2009, UNESCO recognized Indonesian batik as "intangible cultural heritage" and it shows the importance of batik to the Indonesian culture.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I learned the importance of batik in Indonesian culture. From what it means to people, the economic standpoints, and how it evolves throughout times. Batik has been around for a very long time. Mother-to-daughter design is being inherited, shows the personal level of tradition. Motifs and designs were influenced by many different cultures, from Indian and Chinese culture, to Middle Eastern Muslim culture, then colonization of the Dutch which impacted the way how the production changes from just hand-drawn to metal-waxing as well as the motifs of brighter colors, to now becoming one of the most important fashion industries. Indonesian batik may come from Java, and regardless how Indonesian culture is so different from one island to another. Batik shows the unity of the country traditions in terms of art and fashion. The words "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika", which means even though we are different, we are one, is the fundamental morality for Indonesian, and batik is one of them.



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