

Forming Process of Batik Indonesia One Type of Forming of National Culture in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article about batik is aimed at referring to invention of nation culture and Indonesia nation building from traditional cultural aspect. That is “Batik” from Javanese one to nation one. Generally, it was considered to be quite impossible that a traditional culture of a certain ethnic group in a multi-ethnic nation has been raised to play a role to unite a nation, especially for the clothing culture. Because it was formed that was strongly based on spirituality of certain ethnic group. Therefore the author considers that Indonesian batik is so rare case of transformation from regional (Javanese) culture to nation (Indonesian) culture. The island of Java based on two different cultural and political spaces. The first, it is the interior area that can be called “the world of inland”. The interior one is the world succeeded in tradition of Hindu-Java kingdoms like Jogjakarta and Solo. The second, it is the northern coastal areas that can be called “the world of sea”. The coastal one is the area with international atmosphere, facing the Java Sea as the Silk Road of sea. In the former area, batik with the motifs which was based on the brown Soga and Indigo blue dye colour was grown. Its motifs was reflected the Priyayi philosophy. In the latter area, batik with creative motifs which had multi-colour and was Javanese culture into external culture was grown. It was strongly reflected Creole Character. When Indonesia became independent, this different Javanese World was needed to be done reunification into the new political space of Indonesia. Sukarno attempted to rediscover the “ethnic culture” which rooted in the Indonesian traditional society and transform it into “nation culture” which all of the newly created nation would be able to share together by appealing strong nationalism to the people. Sukarno tried to mix and fuse designs and colours which developed native to each Javanese region in an attempt to weaken to the extreme the Hindu Javanese element. It was “an expression of hope towards unity in newly born, the Republic of Indonesia”.

Keywords: Batik Indonesia, Hindu Java, Priyayi, Alus, Creole, Nation Building, Sukarno

A. Introduction

The Republic of Indonesia officially became independent in 1949, the ex-Dutch East India colony being its territorial base. The land consists from more than 17,000 islands of various size which scatter from south to north 1,880km crossing the equator and east to west 5,100km. It is the largest island state in the world. The population is approximately 230,000,000 today and is the fourth populated country in the world. More than half of its population is concentrated in the Java Island which only occupies less than 10% of the whole land. Much of the inhabitants are Malay although in many of the islands live more than 300 ethnic groups. These ethnic groups have cultivated their own culture in thousands of years of its long history of communal society and therefore possess different language, custom (Adat), and social structure depending on each region and their social characters are diverse. These indigenous cultures still exist in all parts of Indonesian region and are important and indispensable structural elements in Indonesian society and they still survive lively especially in traditional ceremonies, crafts and arts of villages of each region.

However, the cultural diversity of Indonesia does not only come from its ethnic diversity. In various parts of Indonesia, several external cultures came in such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Catholicism and these cultures were accepted in several forms and layers covering the basic indigenous cultures forming complex and diverse cultural transformations in each region. Especially the Dutch colonialism applied “divide and rule” principle which accelerated the conflict between different ethnic groups and impeded the development of unified languages and the tendency of the diversity of Indonesia became stronger than ever.

The ethnic and historical diversity of Indonesia mentioned above, have influenced the clothing culture and the aforesaid major ethnic groups have all developed their own ethnic clothing. Therefore, their materials and forms have developed in diverse ways to the extent that Indonesia is referred to as “living museum” of ethnic clothing. All the cultural and historical diversity is reflected in batik (wax resist dyeing) motifs which have developed in the Javanese society: the cultural center of Indonesia.

B. Javanese Court Culture and Batik

1. Ancient Hindu Javanese Kingdom and the Art of “Alus”

a. Hindu Javanese Culture and the Court

During 1st to 3rd century A.D, religion (Hindu and Buddhism), language (Sanskrit), literature, art, architecture, and ruling system were brought in from India to Java and Sumatra. In the latter half of 7th century, the Buddhist kingdom of Sriwijaya was established in the region of Palembang in Sumatra. On the other hand, in Central Java Mataram kingdom was established in mid 8th century and constructed Hindu temple complex such as Prambanan. Under the influence of Sriwijaya was formed Sailendra Dynasty in Central Java which constructed the world’s largest and most famous Buddhist site: Candi Borobudur. Then, Hindu tradition continued until the Majapahit kingdom (1293-1520) was at the height of its prosperity.

In this long historical process, Indian culture as a foreign culture mixed with Javanese traditional culture and transformed into what is now called Hindu Javanese culture and formed the cultural base of the Republic of Indonesia today. Hindu Javanese culture has Javanese own value system which places Keraton (the palace) in the center of the universe as its social and cultural base. There, the authority of Keraton was not maintained by the political activities but by the concept that Keraton was the center of culture and art. As a result, diverse art developed as Javanese original court culture such as wayang (shadow puppet), dance, gamelan music, song, batik, kris and other gold and silver crafts.

However, from 15th to 16th century, Islamic culture influenced the region through the Indian and Arabian merchants and Majapahit kingdom starts to decline. Since Islam which was spread in Java was Sufism systemized in Persia and India, this new religion was accepted in multi-layers connecting easily with the Java Hindu cultural concept that already existed in the island. Therefore, traditional Javanese culture did not only decline by the Islamic influence but further evolved with great diversity maintaining strong relationship with its past. For example, the story of Wayang Kulit (shadow puppet theatre) was formed by Javanese traditional animism connecting Indian epic poem, “Mahabarata” and “Ramayana”, but the content changed greatly by the influence of the Sufism concept. The same phenomenon can be observed in the traditional crafts such as batik, sculpture, and silver craft being influenced by the Islamic culture but maintaining Hindu Javanese cultural motifs.

In 1755, the powerful Mataram Islam kingdom was separated its royal family into Sultan family of Jogjakarta and Susuhunan family of Surakarta by the Giyanti Peace Treaty led by the Dutch military power. In 1757 Surakarta family was further separated (the Pakubuwana family) and in 1817, the royal family of Jogjakarta was also forced to be divided. The four royal families which were taken away their political and military power by the Dutch, competed one another in cultural aspect by actively reconstructing the traditional Javanese culture in an attempt to maintain the authority and to justify the sovereignty. The consequence was that they competed the subtle difference in the cultural style and each family formed its own and different style.

b. The Character of Court Culture and the Art of “Alus”

In the course of historical change what characterizes the Javanese court culture is the value of royalty and aristocrats called “Priyayi” which has been pointed out by Geertz as “the Javanese religion” (Geertz, Clifford, “The Religion of Java, 1960). Priyayi is different from the ordinary people in that and the greatest objective of life is the pursuit of spiritual nobility as inner value is

more important than superficial and materialistic value. Thus, Priyayi requires absolute self-control as a spiritual training in order to comprehend manifold meaning of the world in a mystic way. Only in this effort can a noble attitude be formed important value which supports the court culture and its content signifies everything included in the concept of “refined” in general dome of which are purity, sophistication, elegance, politeness, elaborateness, heavenliness, intelligence, subtleness, peace, and harmony. This “art of Alus” developed gradually as a result of spiritual concentration by Priyayi in the course of time. The representatives of this “art of Alus” are Batik, Wayang, Gamelan (traditional music of wind instruments), Kris (sword), dance, poem, gold and silver- craft, and wood sculpture. These are indispensable important structural elements that support the court culture and included in the system of Priyayi philosophy. This character of court culture was later maintained unchanging its nature even after court was Islamized.

2. Batik for the Court and Its Character

a. Batik for the Court and Priyayi Philosophy

Batik which was the important art supporting the court culture was placed under special protection as a high class hand craft which were only permitted among the women of the aristocracy inside the Keraton of ancient Hindu Javanese kingdom. According to Clifford Geertz, this is because the production process of batik which takes months to complete. Creating patterns and designs, drawing, and dyeing, was considered as spiritual training by the “great inner concentration” in order to bear the value of Alus. Therefore, batik production which is an expression of Hindu Javanese cultural value was only possible by the work of people who belonged to sophisticated highly intelligent Priyayi class. As a result, the production technique gradually became elaborated and its design was also developed to the revel of art. When we see the Hindu Javanese design in batiks for the court, it can be understood that the basic nature of batik design was perfected as a reflection of Hindu Javanese value in considerably earlier period than the Islamization of the ancient kingdom in Java. Batik was truly a power and symbol of Keraton as the cultural center of Hindu Javanese kingdom.

b. Batik for the Court and the Prohibited Motifs

Batik which was strongly related to the Priyayi class and developed gradually became to be produced among the masses after the 17th century. As a result, batik which was a monopolistic craft of the court and the symbol of power began to be produced among the ordinary people. Additionally, what determined the proliferation of the batik to the populace was the brown Soga dye colour which was discovered in the early 17th century. Its original brown colour brought a great change to the traditional blue and white batik colour tone and influenced the center of batik in the interior Surakarta (Solo) and Jogjakarta.

Once the batik with court design was widely produced among the populace, the court established motifs exclusively used for the court and prohibited the motifs to be used by the ordinary people. Within the court, a strict regulation was established related to the wear of batik depending on one’s birth.

3. Batik for the Court and Regional Community

The fact of the establishment of prohibition of some designs by the royal court indicates that in the latter half of 18th century, batik with motifs created in the court were widely spread among the populace and in the batik production, distance between the royalties and the masses became very close. In other words, batik itself could not maintain the glorious power of the royalties, and monopolizing some motifs with special meaning as symbols of being a royalty was the only way to distinguish them from the masses.

On the other hand, many of the motifs which were not prohibited and created in the court were widely accepted among the ordinary people in every parts of Java. Consequently, the special meanings that batik motifs possess became to connect closely with the common law framework

which is the social model of regional communities. Batik symbolic motifs which differs among each community was related with ceremonies of various communities and is also related deeply with the wearer's whole life such as birth, marriage, pregnancy, happiness, disease, and death.

This meant that batik which used to be only a symbol of power of the royalties and the nobles expanded its role as a cultural symbol of the kingdom and communal society. This phenomenon is similar to that of the Wayang Kulit as a court art expressing the Priyayi philosophy which became an important structural element of the lives of the people in village communities. Batik is ordered within custom law framework of the communal societies of each region and by being worn by the ordinary people who are the structural members of the society, it truly becomes a cultural symbol of regional community and transforms in various ways. For example, many characteristic batik centers in the southern region such as Banyumas, Klaten, Ponorogo, Imogiri, Wonogiri, and Pacitan can be comprehended as the above mentioned phenomenon. Moreover, its influence reached to Ciamis (Sunda), Tasikmalaya, and Garut which were originally out of the Javanese cultural sphere. (fig.1)



C. Northern Coastal Areas of Java Island and the Popularization of Batik

1. Batik and Foreign Cultures

Java Island can be divided into two different world; northern coastal areas with international atmosphere facing the Java Sea which was the important strategic point in trade and the interior areas surrounded by mountains with strong tradition of Hindu Javanese mysticism (Jogjakarta, Surakarta). This division has been traditionally referred to by the Javanese as follows;

Agama datang dari laut — religion (culture) comes from the sea

Adat datang dari gunung — custom comes from the mountains

Several cities in Javanese northern coastal area developed dramatically from the 15th century to the 16th century, when the Chinese, the Arabian, the Dutch, the Portuguese, the Turks, the Persian merchant came to trade. In consequence, these several cities began to enforce their independence against the kingdom in the interior areas using their international trade as their power. In these areas, each power was small in its scale but developed original power and culture and formed a multi-centered world. Therefore, cities in northern coastal areas formed cultural tradition with international character exchanging not only merchandises but languages, religions and cultures through sea trade, and this resulted in social equality and cultural generosity in contrary to the strict social status system of the interior Hindu Javanese kingdoms.

Cities of northern coastal areas such as Cirebon, Tegal, Pekalongan, Semarang, Kudus, Juana, Lasem, Geresik, Sidoarjo, Mojokerto, and Madura are all important production center of batik(fig.1), and they were apparently different in their batik tradition from those of Surakarta (current Solo) and Jogjakarta which were the center of Hindu Javanese kingdoms. Especially, when

these batik centers are compared to the interior from the geographical point of view, the former area were much more flexible in adopting new ideas. Hence, in each center, they actively accepted the external influences, like China, and created original batiks with individual colours and motifs of each region.

In the early 18th century, batiks with multi-coloured on dark red based were produced by the Chinese craftsman and became popular through the northern coast mainly in Pekalongan, Lasem, Semarang, and Cirebon. This proves deep penetration of the culture among the masses and is also a sign which indicates the new regional expansion transcending various indigenous consciousness of each batik community's value.

After the 16th century, when the Islamic power became rapidly strong through the Indian and Arabian merchants and the traditional Hindu kingdoms began to decline and this also accelerated the diffusion of batik among the populace. Since Islamic religion prohibited idolatry in its dogma, the expression of human figure designs was extremely restricted in batiks. This Islamic influence created potential of distributing and transforming Javanese batik among people in other island where Islamic culture was stronger.

2. Popularization of Batik and Cap

a. The Advent of Imitation Batik and The Crisis of Batik

As mentioned above, batik centers which are more than 20 in Java can be divided into two; the interior areas which reflected the Priyayi culture of Hindu Java, and the northern coastal areas where there was full of entrepreneurship strongly influenced by the foreign culture such as Islamic culture. The culture of the interior areas was where there existed strong tendency of indigenous culture and anti-Dutch, despising the pursuit of economical benefits while the culture of the coastal areas is more Islamic and the same time opened to occidental ideas and respected the importance of economical benefits. Therefore in the 19th century, when the Dutch rule became more capitalism centered, it was the northern coastal areas which corresponded rapidly to this social change.

In the early 19th century, when England took over the Dutch rule temporarily (1811-1816), then exported cambrics from their homeland which today are used for batik fabric and drove away Indian cotton Cloths from the market. At the same time, England began to export imitation batiks to Java which were produced in their country. Later, various European countries such as Holland, Switzerland produced imitation batiks and competed in exporting them to Java.

The inexpensive imitation batiks from Europe were welcomed by the masses and expanded the demand but resulted that the batik industry to get into difficulty which had been relying on the traditional technique.

To compete with inexpensive imitation batiks, it was necessary to invent the method to lower the cost of batiks maintaining the quality of traditional batiks. The Javanese populace was not satisfied to buy tasteless low quality imitation batiks. They rather depended on attachment or love to the traditional batiks by acquiring low quality European imitation batiks. In other words, it was a rediscovery of their ethnic cultural value.

b. The Advent of Batik Cap

The batik entrepreneurs of the northern coastal areas attempted actively to invent new methods in order to correspond to this situation and their efforts have paid off in two methods. The first was the introduction of synthetic dye. The use of synthetic dye imported from Europe short-ended the dyeing process and furthermore, it became possible to produce richer colours than that of traditional batiks. This consequently weakened the collaboration aspect in their production process which the traditional batiks had been possessing as a matter of course.

The second method was the invention of batik cap and it was not a mere production method but became a cultural revolution in the entire batik production. Cap is a copper stamp with designs

engraved and appears from around 1850. Thus there was no need to hand draw using canting (pen) but simply press onto the fabric which shorted the time of production and the laborers did not have to be artisans but unskilled workers. As a result of the advent of cap, it enabled simplification of production process, great reduction of production time, large quantity of laborer supply, and mass production. Thus lowered greatly the batik price and expanded the demand in Java and exportation. To correspond with this new expansion of demand, in 20th century the entrepreneurs of the northern coastal areas competed in introducing cap and thus began the age of industrial production of batik. It was also an important revolution that batiks became to be by the mass.

The commercialization and the expansion of market as a consequence of inexpensive batik cap expanded further crossing the limited batik center territory which had specific regional and cultural background. The distribution system as a base of market expansion was already established through the distribution of imitation batik from Europe. Especially from 1870 to 1880, railroad service started in purpose of transporting imported goods and in reverse, large quantity of batik products mainly batik caps spread rapidly throughout Java. This change combined with the opening of railroads all over Java and became to form a common cultural base which connected and each communal society one another that had been isolated for a long time. Regions such as Jogjakarta and Surakarta where Hindu Javanese cultural tradition is strong and is conservative suffered to confront the stream of batik popularization. Thus, batik production using cap and its consumption rapidly expanded throughout Java concentrating on northern coastal areas.

3. 20th Century Colonial Period and Popularization of Batik

a. The Completion of The Dutch East India and The Expansion of Batik Spatial Distribution

The economical and technological revolution which was a mass production using batik cap in factories became an element to cause a more important cultural revolution to batiks themselves.

As batiks with designs which possessed specific meaning and objectives in the history of each kingdom and community were spread all over Java, they began to be work from the aesthetic point of view by people from the other region who did not understand the meaning or the beauty of batiks and cultural taste of the sophisticated Javanese people. The batiks without originality produced in Jakarta existed upon this base. In consequence, batik which limited the people who wrote it and which was connected with spiritual world by the meaning of designs, have weakened and the importance of the meaning became vague. Thus, batiks began to change its original character as symbols of certain kingdoms and communities.

From the late 19th to early mid20th century, it became possible to produce rich colors by use of synthetic dye. Therefore, expressions on batiks became more liberated and in studios where the Dutch, the Chinese, and the Arabian were concentrated in northern coastal areas like Pekalongan, Cirebon, Lasem, and Kudus began to produce many high quality batiks with new motifs. For instance, some of the pieces that are called "Batik Company" include motif "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Snow White" which are motifs of European fairy tales and also modern sceneries, trains, boats, and solders. Chinese studio produced motif from Chinese traditional objects and designs. Arabian studios produced motifs that are more fit to Islam belief. However, in this period, the most abundantly produced was the flower bouquet motif which is known as "flower sarasa (buketan)". E.v. Zylen from the Dutch studio in Pekalongan and Oye Soe Tioen from the Chinese studio in Kedongwoeni village both became famous for expressing this motif with the best technique.

On the other hand, as a result of rapid development of batik technique in northern coastal areas, batik enthusiasts increased among the regions outside Java such as Jambi and Palembang of Sumatra or Ujunpandang of Sulawesi, and large amount of orders were made to these region.

This batik transformation and expansion is not unrelated to the completion of colonial state of Dutch East India. The process of this completion was the dissolution of two politically different words which were Hindu Javanese kingdom of the interior and northern coastal areas and the reunification into new political space called the Dutch East India. This meant that the traditional space where people moved and exchanged or where traditional ethnic cultures distributed cross the

small frame of traditional communities and Java and expanded into new political space of Dutch East India. Thus, in 20th century, batik went out of the framework as a symbol Javanese ethnic culture and expanded into new political space of Indonesia.

b. Abolition of Prohibited Motif and Popularization of Batik

The popularization of batik which expended rapidly by the economical and technological revolution of cap and in the new political space called Dutch East India became even more decisive under the Japanese military rule during the Second World War (1914-1945). After the First World War, Japan had been exporting 85% of all the cambric imported to Indonesia which was used as cotton materials to produce batiks through under the Japanese military rule, Japan stopped almost all the export of cambric to Indonesia. However, in the northern coastal regions such as Pekalongan, they produced batiks intricate and beautiful designs adopting some images of Japanese kimono. These batiks were called “Hokokai (Java houkokuai)” and “Java Baru (new Java)” and this indicates the high adaptability and flexibility of the batik studios of this region. Thus, designs that derived from general images of Japan such as Mount Fuji, Geisha, fans, and Japanese fans were used in these batiks.

On the other hand, Javanese royalties fell into an abnormal economic difficulty under the Japanese military rule and they had no other choice than to sell valuable batiks to ordinary people. For the first time, traditional motifs that were prohibited and only been used by the royalties and the nobles were permitted to be worn by the ordinary people. Thus, wearing prohibited motifs became popular among the ordinary people all over Java. When the phenomenon of “the lower class imitating upper class style “became widely popular among the masses by the inexpensive batik cap, the traditional social status system became more vague and the mysticism that was possessed by the motif became a mere and its original meaning was forced to be transformed.

The batik culture which was formed as a symbol of power of Javanese court transformed into a popular culture and became an important factor to connect with the concept of people of Indonesia as a sovereign nation which was newly born from the political apace called the Dutch East India as its base.

D. The Birth of the Republic of Indonesia and Formation of Batik Indonesia

1. Sukarno and Batik

After the Second World War, plantations of Asia and Africa achieved independence as a result of ethnic independence movement based pm the concept of modern principle called ethnic independence. However, once they were independent, the people were not necessarily unified in their actual conditions nor did there exist a base of unification as one nation. Therefore, the first subject these countries that achieved independence had to deal was a “Nation Building” which was to unify each people who were separated and to create a single nation in order to establish modern nation states. Indonesia, one of world’s eminent multi-ethnic nations was no exception.

The first president Sukarno perceived this fateful subject which Indonesia possessed from the beginning of his period. Sukarno attempted to rediscover the “ethnic culture” which rooted in the Indonesia traditional society and transform it into “nation culture” which all of the newly created nation would be able to share together by appealing strong nationalism to the people. By, this, he tried to established an identity as nation based on a common emotion and reliance of a single nation in the consciousness of Indonesian people.

As one of its element, Sukarno took notice of batik as a representative of Javanese remarkable ethnic culture and made an effort to pull it up to a nation level by strongly promoting the policy of upbringing and protecting of batik industry.

To the nationalist Sukarno, ethnic culture should also play a roll corresponding to the “Nation Building”; Indonesia’s most important political subject. In order to do so, he used his strong political leadership and attempted to reorganize the regional ethnic culture into the framework of

nationalism. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) was indeed the national ideology which put together this idea of Sukarno.

2. Formation of Batik Indonesia

Sukarno tried to mix fuse designs and colours which developed native to each Javanese region in an attempt to weaken to the extreme the Hindu Javanese elements. This was to make Javanese batik which had been expanding to the outer islands into a representative of the entire Indonesia. It is a very rare case in the world that a traditional culture (Batik) of a certain ethnic group (Javanese) in a multi-ethnic nation has been raised to play a role to unite nation. Moreover, its classic tradition was formed in the court of Hindu Javanese kingdoms which is completely different from the religion (Islam) believed by the majority of the people. It can be said that Sukarno's insight to the culture was very correct. It was "an expression of hope towards unity in newly born, the Republic of Indonesia". Sukarno also led all the primary, secondary, and high school students to adopt shirts with batik designs and the government also obliged the employees to wear batiks as well. As a result of this government policy, from approximately 1953 there was a boom of new establishment of batik factories and in 1955, the number of batik production companies doubled to 10,000 compared to 1950. In 1978, when the author visited the Waigapu of Sumba Island which is famous for ikat, the author saw the local bank's employees all wearing nice batiks and was surprised for his throughout going policy.

This ethnic clothing policy of Sukarno was succeeded by all the other presidents after Suharto, and therefore achieved a brilliant success. In occasions of small ceremonies of villages throughout the country to the national ceremonies which take place in Jakarta, women wear batik kebaya and men wear hem batik and comparing to the time when people were wearing different ethnic clothes, Indonesian cultural unity and national integration was strongly appealed inside and out of the country. Observing photos of this time, four wives of Sukarno are always wearing batik kebaya and even Dewi Sukarno who is Japanese is wearing batik kebaya in most of official occasions. However, for some reason, Sukarno in the photos is mostly in military clothes even he was not a military officer and as far as the author knows there is no photo of him wearing batik. This was probably a result that as a president he was strongly conscious of the existence of government troops which was an important part of Indonesian politics and is contrary to some of the ex-military president such as Suharto wearing batik very often. Owing to Sukarno's point of view of clothing which considered clothes as also something political, Javanese batik transformed into Indonesian batik and acquired an Indonesian nationality as the core of Indonesian national costume.

3. The Situation of Batik Centre and Its Problem

In spite of this batik protection by the government, consciousness towards clothes has changed dramatically with the modernization of the society mainly among the urban population and younger generation. Western clothing began to be widely spread. When the author began to visit the country from the end of 1960s to early 1970s, even in Jogjakarta which is located in the interior, western clothing were common already. It can be imagined from the old photos that this tendency already began from around the early 20th century especially among men. The reasons of young women keeping away from batik kebaya are firstly, it is not adequate for moving freely, secondly, difficulty of wearing, and thirdly, the costly price. These are common problems that national costume of the world confront and Japanese kimono is no exception to this, As a result, wearing batik kebaya to be limited to participation in special occasions such as weddings and the great social change and arrival of consumption society which was caused especially by the economical development after 1980s' accelerated this tendency. In consequence, each batik center of Java was cornered economically and the number of batik studios decrease rapidly. It is not a rare case that among some 10 studios which existed in the 1960s, only one survived. For example, in Kedoengwoen, the only artist who conserves the tradition of the studio is the third generation of Oey Soe Tion and most of the artisans who works there are teenagers. This tendency is common

among the northern coastal large batik centers such as Cirebon, Pekalongan, and Lasem where they have been corresponding with flexibility to the time change.

This tendency was further accelerated by the wide spread of batik shops throughout the country run by large batik merchants. In 1970s, several large companies such as Batik Keris and Danal Hadi opened large batik shops in the major cities of Indonesia and small batik shops were taken many customers by these companies. The major customers of the Batik Keris shop located in the first modern shopping center opened in Palembang (Sumatra) in the latter half of the 1970s were the women of the farming villages of this region.

On the other hand, each batik center had difficulty in employing skilled batik artisans today. When the author carried our research in the northern coastal areas in the latter half of 1980s until the early 1990s, there were still girls coming back from schools and farmers working with canting in each house as subcontractors of studio in farming village near Cirebon, Pekalongan, and Lasem. However, most of these schoolgirls today would not choose to become a batik artisan when they graduate since there are better paid jobs easily found in big cities, Same thing can be said to the batik studio owners' children. Most of the children who went to major cities like Jakarta and graduated universities choose to work in banks and other stable large companies rather than succeeding unstable batik studios. Consequently, the number of studios of each is decreasing.

While these batik centers declined, village batiks of Kerek region known as Tuban in general exceptionally became active. Until then, this batik of the said region had been weaving thick cotton cloth using traditional technique and dyed traditional batiks for self-sufficiency. After the Japanese TV (NHK) broadcasted this batik, it began to attract attention and in the 90s, they were sold in Jakarta and Bali in the name of "Tuban batik" and their sale became a important cash income to the farmers. There are 7 villages in this region although batik designs differ among each village. Some of the villages like Gaji conserve traditional production methods and motif through some other village are influenced by the batik designs of Solo. Parang designs of Solo and Jogjakarta which are royal motif are still not used nor worn as they were prohibited designs in the past. According to the villagers, even now feels uncomfortable to wear prohibited designs although only 25% of the women wore batik as daily clothes in the 1990.

On the other hand, the actual situation of Jogjakarta and Solo is basically the same as that of northern coastal regions. Especially in Solo, batik production sites located inside the town which had been carried out traditionally are now required to move out and many of the studios to the outskirts as an antipollution measure.

As we have seen, each regional government has been taking a measure device to prevent the decline of the traditional industry. However, at this moment the reality is that no one is able to find any effective solution. A policy to activate batik industry by regional governments is how to correspond to the exportation and tourism. Batik differs from Japanese kimono in that its use is not necessarily limited to traditional clothing but can be widely applied to bags, tablecloths, sofa covers, luncheon mats, and many more. Thus it is possible to expand its market depending on their effort. In tourist cities like Jogjakarta, there are goods numbers of substantial products, although it is a future subject to exploit attractive products which appeals to international market corresponding to the change of new era. It is reverse means that batik processes a further possibility of development. The effort on this issue has started in each field and especially in "Batik Indonesia", they are starting to obtain good results in recent years.

E. New Development of "Batik Indonesia"

1. Activities of Silk Batik and Batik Designers

The economical development which started from the latter half of 1970s has brought a great change in the urban areas in the 90s and people's lifestyles have abruptly been modernized. Tall buildings and apartments are built and the streets are flooded with cars and motorbikes in big cities. Almost all households have televisions and households with air-conditions are not rare anymore. Huge shopping malls with cool air-condition is full of people enjoying shopping and eating.

This development of “consumer’s society” had become to influence batik industry which was firstly, the new advent of silk batik. In the weaving tradition such as Sonket from Minangkabau and Limar from Bangka, silk was in use from ancient times while cotton cloths were generally the major materials of batiks. In the 1970s and 1980s, silk batiks were mainly produced in Pekalongan, but the dyeing technique could not possibly equal that of cotton batiks, silk was also very expensive and non-resistant to water such as perspiration therefore it was kept away when air-condition were not common.

In the 90s, there was a turning point this situation of silk batiks. Designers who have been conserving batik tradition began to produce new and attractive batiks. They are working on new projects such as organizing seminars and fashion shows in order to develop Batik Indonesia as new batik leaders. On the other hand, designers of new generation are challenging in the production of new batiks. In recent years, a one of new generation designer revived a traditional natural dye and made remarkable achievements in modern batik development. Furthermore, hand woven silk cloths began to be produced in Garut and Jabara.

2. New Expansion of “Batik Indonesia”

Influenced by these new courses, new progress had been made to support the development. Firstly new expansion of Batik Indonesia has occurred in outer region of Kalimantan, Sumatra, and Irian. This is a new movement of expressing traditional ethnic motifs which has been created in these regions from the past on batiks. This program has been carried out by the requirement of each regional government from the latter half of 1970s and these batiks have been ordered to studio in Java through recently unique and traditional designs of Ace, Limar design from Bangka Island, Dayak people of Kalimantan, and Papua people of Irian are produced in these regions. This is an important challenge which can be called “creation of tradition” to Batik Indonesia. If this attempt expands throughout the country, Batik Indonesia will further be able to develop as a true Indonesian national culture and the expansion of their designs might bring about new revolution to Batik Indonesia.

Second progress is the organization of “art craft fair” in big cities such as Jakarta and Surabaya in the purpose of promoting regional traditional production. Here, many new batiks are being presented and competing their fine works. There is also batik fashion shows frequently organized in Jakarta recently. These “Pameran (exposition)” lead by the government has a great effort to many of the people to depend their love towards “Indonesian Culture” and stimulate their identities as Indonesians.

The third new situation is the movement of establishing batik museums. Clothing museums in the city of Pekalongan, Dinar Hadi museum, which possesses the best collection of batiks, and Ullen Sentalu museum, which is located in the foot of Murapi Mountain in the suburbs of Jogjakarta and many of museums, are established. Museum of royal batiks has opened recently within the palace in Jogjakarta in order to conserve the royal batik tradition. Furthermore, visits by primary and secondary school students guided by their teachers are increasing recently in Museum Tekstil which opened in the latter half of 1970s. In the backyard of museum, batik painting workshop is held and children with many Japanese women who reside in Indonesia are participating. However, the problem is that there are no curators who have sufficient knowledge of batik. Considering the significance of museum in “forming the nation”, the training of curators is the urgent subject.

The forth movement is the establishment of Indonesian Batik Foundation, Wastra Prima Foundation and so on. These foundations carries out various support activities positively such as holding large-scale exhibition, publishing books on batik and organizing seminars. In the objective of developing batik as Indonesian national culture and is obtaining good results up to now.

The fifth movement is the activities by groups of batik devotees. The author has participated in these activities several times in the past and visited Tuban, Lasem, Wonogiri and Pacitan. The local society is eager to be prepared to take this movement and these sorts of steady activity are extremely significant.

These several situations which surround the recent Batik Indonesia not only possess negative aspects but rather sensed as a great possibility of new development towards the future. The expansion and development of Batik Indonesia is the surge of “rediscovery” and “recreation” toward the importance of their traditional culture and their own artistic beauty. This is nothing but a result of the recognition of important “Warisan (cultural heritage)” which represents Indonesia by its people. Thus batik becomes a national culture which can be perceived oneself as Indonesian like “Bahasa Indonesia”.

3. “Indonesian Cultural Heritage” to “World Heritage”

As mentioned above, it is clear that batik is the most important “cultural heritage” of Indonesian traditional crafts. However, batik is not just a mere Indonesian “cultural heritage”. Batik created by Indonesia is one of the best “world heritage” in the weaving and dying traditions and is the common property of human being as well. As the proof of this thing, on 30 September 2009, batik was selected as the Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO.

“Batik for the court created by the Java- Hindu tradition”, “Diverse batik of the northern coast which is a foreign cultures such as Western”, Chinese, and Japanese cultures”, “Batik with Sumatran original motifs”, “Batik influenced by Islamic culture”, and “Simple and traditional batik from Kerek region”, its diversity of designs is incomparable to clothing from any other region in the world. Moreover, traditional and original batik designs are still passed on today in Sunda region of Java and Traja of Sulawesi. Supported by remarkably diverse designs and high technique of batik which have been developed in 1000 years of its tradition, the new world of Batik Indonesia is being created.

These Indonesian batiks were widely worn Malaysian and other Southeast Asian people from the ancient time. It is also well known that there were many batik devotees in Japan and Western world which is proved by the existence of the imitation batik produced in Europe. Batik also had a great influence on Japanese kimono already from the Edo period and “kimono” and “obi (a broad sash)” made from batik are still deeply loved by the Japanese women today. In this sense, it is difficult to discover other similar example of ethnic clothing culture of batik.

(Translated by Etsuko Rodriguez)

* There is the article which was re-consisted and retouched for my paper in “All about Batik (2007)”.

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