

# The Philosophy in the Motives of Classical Hand-Drawn Madurese Batik

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**Abstract**—The aim of this paper is to uncover of the philosophy contained in the main motive and the background motive of Madurese classical hand-drawn batik. This paper use qualitative descriptive method, in which the researchers act as reseach instrument by interviewing batik craftsmen, which include Pamekasan batik, Tanjung Bumi batik, Sumenep batik and Sampang batik. Data analysis is performed by inspecting the motives from batik photographs displayed in their galleries, and relating it to the result of the interviews and written theories. Findings and discussions reveal that the main classical batik motives of “*sabet rante*” and “bamboo” contain the moral philosophy about the tradition of proposing to the bride and of living courageously. While the *beras tompa* (spilled-rice) and *panji susi* (swastika) background motives in Madurese batik contain the philosophy about thrifty and balanced living.

**Keywords:** Madurese batik, philosophy, hand-drawn, classical

摘要— 本论文主要是揭示马都拉岛经典手工艺蜡染布中的首要与背景花纹中所表达的人生哲学观点。本研究使用定性描述研究法，由笔者亲自到场地调查并访问马都拉的手工艺蜡染布厂老板，把发现带有哲学意义的经典花纹的蜡染布的信息与理论之间的关系逐一分析。分析结果得知马都拉古色蜡染布带有哲学意义的花纹是称之为“*sabet rante*”与“竹子”，即哲学意义是表示女性的道德以及坚韧不拔的生活精神。至于它的背景“大米洒落”花纹哲学意义则表示勤奋并节省生活，“纳岁”花纹表示平衡的生活方式。

关键词： 马都拉， 哲学， 手工艺， 经典

## 1. Introduction

In this globalization era, a discussion on a local phenomenon of a country has become a trending topic, especially that which concerns the local philosophy. It is already known that the Madurese people have unique cultural characteristics which include their way of living and their life philosophy which is reflected in their batik patterns. This forms an interesting topic of discussion. Human life cannot be separated from philosophy. According to *Kamus Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian Language Dictionary), philosophy is the knowledge and search of the mind about everything which exists, their cause and origin; and the laws or theories which form the foundation of the human mind or activities (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 2005:242). Kattsoff (1992) states that philosophy will bring us to a more appropriate understanding and behavior. Philosophy gathers as much human knowledge as it can obtain, and criticizes and evaluates that knowledge to find its essence. Thus, the activity of philosophy can be considered as a strict thinking process (Kattsoff, 1992:4).

According to Ali (2010:89), the Madurese people have unique characteristics namely plain-spoken, spontaneous, and open to new phenomena. Their men’s self respect is so high that when a man’s self respect is offended he will defend it even to murderous fighting. The Madurese people value politeness of behavior and they cannot be separated from the principles of Islam. These unique way of living is also reflected in their batik patterns. This is the background why this paper discusses the philosophical content of the Madurese batik patterns.

## 2. Research Method

The research of this paper uses the qualitative method and descriptive data analysis. We use the qualitative method because we ourselves act as research instrument and carry out open interviews and take photographs of Madurese batik of several hand-drawn batik craftsmen in Pamekasan, Tanjung Bumi, Sumenep, and Sampang. We take the samples of batik from these four areas because of the similarities and the differences in their batik patterns. The respondents are purposively selected, as in the research of Karsono (2014:5-10), who are the young generation of Indonesian Chinese. The data analysis is performed with the help of the theory given in the bibliographical analysis of Karsono (2014:24) which is titled “The Application of Cooperative Learning Concept in Teaching Literature Through Budi Darma’s Novel *Orang-Orang Bloomington*”.

## 3. Bibliographical Analysis

### 3.1 The Bamboo Symbol

The Chinese philosophy believes in the phenomena called *yīn* 阴 and *yáng* 阳 which control everything, both good and bad, in the universe. *Yīn* 阴 represents all that is cold and dark. Because of this philosophy the Chinese people believe that there are certain plants which can exorcise the devil (Ong, 1995:95).

Bamboo, in Latin *Bambusa arundinacea*, which is also generally known as “a plant from China”, grows in many parts of China. Because this plant needs a long time to cultivate, it is rarely found in the north of Beijing. The reference book about the usage of bamboo (*Chu P’u*), which was published in the third or fourth century, gave the details of the various types of bamboo and their usage in the olden times. Its young shoots can be eaten, while its pulp is used to make paper, its cane is used for pipes, baskets, ship’s poles, furniture, and many others. The bamboo leaves are used for raincoat, roof, wrapping, and so on. People also make decorations from the fruit and leaves of bamboo, while its roots are used as medicine. In olden times, sheets made of bamboo was used as the substitute of books (William, 1993:33).

The Chinese people like to use the drawing of bamboo, namely its physical form and bearing. Even its name with the letter *zhu* 竹 is often used to describe acts and objects related to the usage of bamboo. Bamboo leaves are generally used in the pattern of Chinese cloth. Bamboo also symbolizes long life because of its endurance and because it stays green and continues to blossom even in winter. A classical Chinese story tells of a mother who was ill and wanted some soup of bamboo young shoots in winter time. Her son who could not find bamboo young shoots cried sadly for the suffering mother, the son’s tears flowed down like rain in spring time and softened the hard ground so that it released bamboo young shoots as a present because of the son’s love to his mother (Williams, 1993:34).

On the first day of the first month in the year, the Chinese people rose when the cocks crow to burn bamboos in their yards. The burning bamboos will make sounds. The Chinese people believe that the sounds and the heat of the burning bamboos can frighten evil spirits. On the last night of the last month, bamboos are also burned until they make exploding sounds in order to awaken the *yang* of the spring time which will drive away the devil (Ong, 1999:97).

### 3.2 The Madurese Culture

Batik is an inherent part of the Madurese culture. Since ancient time batik clothes are used both in daily activities and in rituals. Since a person’s birth to his death, batik becomes a part of his life. Principally, batik represents hope, guidance for life, and prayers for prosperity, fertility, balance in life (Tulistyantoro, 2012).

The influence of the Chinese culture has existed in Madura since a long time ago. The legend of the horse Panole which fought against Dampo Awang indicates the influence of the Chinese culture on the Madurese culture. Another proof is the great impact of the riot in the Chinese region in Kartasura on the Madurese culture. The Chinese influence can also be seen in the buildings in the city of Sumenep and in the surrounding towns (Wiryoprawiro (1986:32-35).

The Madurese people believe that humans should live in a balance, namely maintaining the balance between human and God, and with other human beings. There is an expression which says “*abanthal syahadat asapo’ iman* (to have the *syahadat* for a pillow and the faith for a blanket), which emphasizes the importance of religion on which we must rely our life. The people who do not obey the commands of religion in Madura are called *edhina Pangeranna* (forsaken by his God = is not given guidance for living). In social life, the balance should start from our own selves. *Jhege pagharra dhibi’ ja’ parlo ajhege pagharra oreng laen* (Watch your own fence, do not watch other people’s fences) is an advice to always introspect ourselves and not finding faults with other people. *Jhile reya ta’ atolang* (The tongue has no bone) teaches us to be careful in our talks or to watch our mouth so that we will not say bad or unkind things or slander which hurt other people. *Odhi’ e dunnya akantha nete obu’* (Life in this world is like walking on a thread of hair) teaches us to guard our lives so that we will not fall into depravity and evil. The Madurese people also value good behavior in social life which is expressed in *andhap asor* (humility). *Andhap asor* represents politeness, honor, and other noble values which should exist in the lives of the Madurese people. Thus for the Madurese people, a person is not valued according his external appearance but according to his heart, as expressed in *raddin atena, bhegus tengka gulina* (when a person’s heart is good, then his behavior will also be good) (Zubairi, 2012).

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

The result of the interviews with the respondents shows that nowadays the Madurese people make batik without consideration of their life philosophy. This is different from classical hand-drawn batik. Both in Tanjung Bumi and in Pamekasan we find batiks with philosophical meaning, such as the *sabet manik* motive, which is also called *sabet rante*. This motive is specifically made for marriage proposal ritual. This batik is given by the future bridegroom to the future bride. The philosophical meaning of this batik is that the gentleman has bound the lady in the marriage bond. In the Chinese culture prevailing in Indonesia, this philosophical meaning is represented in the gift of necklace from the gentleman to the lady, which symbolizes that the lady is bound by the gentleman in the marriage bond. Both these symbols show the illustrative language which say that the lady is bound by the gentleman who asks for her hand in the proposal ritual. In picture 1 we can see Pamekasan batik with *sabet manik* motive. Here we find the motive of chain which symbolizes the bond by which a gentleman binds a lady in marriage.



**Picture 1** Pamekasan batik with *sabet rante* motive

We also find *reng pereng* motive which consists of the drawing of bamboos and a pair of chickens. The batik with the motive of bamboos and a pair of chickens is meant to give an advice to a newly wed couple. The bamboo motive represents a life principle which teaches them to be courageous in facing life’s problems. While the pair of chickens motive represents an advice for the newly wed couple, namely that they need to work hard to realize their dreams, like chickens who can maintain their lives anywhere because they diligently scratch the ground to find food. For as long as they are willing to work, they will get their living anywhere they dwell. In picture 2 we can see the bamboo motive in Pamekasan batik and Tanjung Bumi batik. This motive also indicates that the

Madurese people believe that the bamboo tree has the philosophical meaning of being courageous and of not giving up easily in fighting life's difficulties, as proposed by Williams (1993:33) and Ong (1999:97).



**Picture 2** Our documentary photographs of Madurese batik with *reng pereng* motive which consists of a shrub of bamboo and a pair of chickens.

Concerning the design which forms the background of batik cloth, in Tanjung Bumi batik we find backgrounds with philosophical meanings. Below we can see the photographs of batik with different backgrounds, among others *beras tompa* (spilled rice) and *panji* (swastika) backgrounds. In Madurese batik, *panji* background has the form of the swastika. *Beras tompa* (spilled rice) background symbolizes prosperity and fertility. Rice is human's basic need, rice is even an important and highly valued commodity because it is considered to be the source of life. People in olden Java and Madura worship the rice goddess which is considered as the producer of rice. The *beras tompa* (spilled rice) background has the philosophy of hope and prayer that the user of that batik will obtain prosperity and peace. Picture 3 shows the *beras tompa* (spilled rice) background of Pamekasan batik.



Spilled rice illustration (from google)



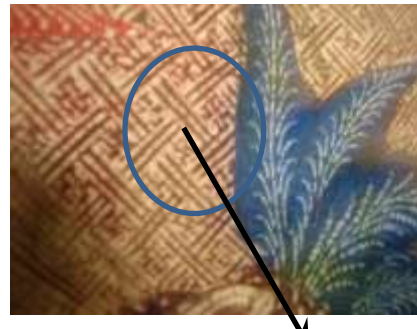
Spilled rice backgrounds motive in batik Pamekasan

**Picture 3** *Beras tompa* (spilled rice) background in Pamekasan batik

Picture 4 shows the swastika background found in Tanjung Bumi batik. This background is known as *Panji Susi*. According to Prasetyo (2014), the swastika symbol (卐) in Sanskrit means peace or balance. The symbol has long been used by the believers of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Yudaism. When the Europeans migrated to Asia, they associated the symbol with positive and wise traditional thinking of the Asians. Even in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many western people consider swastika as a symbol of luck. It turns out that the Madurese also use the swastika as the background of their batik, which means that they consider that swastika has a positive value about balanced life. (From Zubairi 2012)



Swastika symbol (卐)



Swastika symbol (卐)

**Picture 4** Tanjung Bumi batik with *panji susi* background motive.

Some of these classical batik motives still exist and are now developed into modern batik motives. The changing orientation of the people demands changes in the making of batik. However, there are still many people who love classical batik, because batik is an inherent part of the lives of the Madurese people, specifically the ladies. Therefore the custom of making batik can survive until the present time.

## 5. Conclusion

There are philosophical values in Madurese batik, both in its main motive and in its background motive. This indicates that the Madurese people highly appreciate the moral values of life. The philosophical values of the Madurese people are presented in their batik, and in the present time we can still see them in the classical hand-drawn batik of Madura, although not very often. The *sabet manik* and *panji* motives are rarely found nowadays, however these motives are still used by some communities in their rituals and ceremonies. We find that batik making is not only just decorating a piece of cloth, but presenting life's values and hopes and prayers of the makers for the users of the batik. This fact distinguishes Madurese batik from batik of other countries. Madurese batik is an inherent part of the Madurese culture which is needed in the rituals of the Madurese people.

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