The Face of Traditional Cloth Tradition of Tuban Society, East Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

Tuban area in East Java, Indonesia, has a role as one of international ancient trading ports since 11th century. For that role, Tuban has accepted many foreign cultures that are brought by other nations, such as Tionghoa and Gujarat. The improvement of Tuban that involves international relationship clearly influences the forms of tradition and culture that is shown in Tuban nowadays. It is believed that from those tradition and cultures owned by people of Tuban, producing cloth is one of the oldest tradition maintained by the people. Those clothes, as one of traditional products, have unique identity that differ them to other regions. It is because the uniqueness of people’s knowledge about cosmology concept, and skill owned by the people that passes through generations. This research explains the condition of traditional cloth tradition of Tuban society with fundamental ground data and explains elements that intervenes the tradition, and forms resulted from it.

Keywords: traditional cloth, tradition, culture, identity, Tuban

I. Introduction

Tuban is one of areas that are located in East Java, Indonesia, that has a long historical story. For centuries, Tuban has already been one of ancient trading ports that are located between “western” and “eastern” area of the world. Possibility of study of Tuban started from Airlangga Dynasty around 11th century and still stood until now. It is explained Sedyawati, Manus, and Raharjo (1992) that in ancient encryptions left by Airlangga King, it is mentioned that foreigners who came to Tuban were traders from North India, South India, Sailan, Burma, Cambodia, and Campa. Having its role as an international port, Tuban has been involved in so many foreign culture receptions outside of its local culture. As a consequence of the international relations, there are influences of traditional and cultural forms that occur in Tuban up until now.

From a number of traditional and cultural forms born and developed in Tuban, based on historical sources in the form of Biluluk II inscription, one of traditional activities that has been known for long by Tuban people is making
cloth. It is estimated to start since 1319 AD. Cloth and coloring substance are known as one of important commodities and they are also important for daily routine of Tuban people. They also have special functions, such as: showing social status, community’s identity, ritual, and one of living philosophies that picture important cycle in their life, such as: birth, marriage and death (Achjadi & Natanegara, 2010).

In the development of traditional cloth identity of Tuban, especially value and aesthetic point of view, the cloth identity experiences a displacement that tends to popular style which is no longer follow traditional standard but more to be a free and dynamic creation. An object like this traditional product that is passed through generations shows superior quality in term of function and design. The Quality and traditional product superiority are even found in some products, even though, it cannot be denied that some of the product is slowly lost its traditional value since modern context is considered not relevant.

It is asserted by an explanation Koetjaraningrat (2005) that one of the causes of transformation in traditional and cultural body is made by some important process, such as: acculturation, assimilation and innovation. Acculturation has some meanings culture contact, that relates how social process can be happened in human culture if they face foreign culture, so, slowly, those foreign culture are accepted and treated into our own culture, and it causes the loss of the culture’s identity. The idea occurs as a result of five sense responses to the surrounding. In is corresponding to an explanation by Norman (2004) that every human, without exception, is a designer. There is nobody who does not do manipulation to the surrounding or things around him. Human, subjectively gives personal touch to the surrounding and things around him to get recognition, happiness and comfort, or it is a way to fulfill their daily needs.

This condition shows evidence that there are cracks of possibility for tradition to experience transformation as a result of acceptance and assimilation to foreign tradition/culture and environmental factor that is always change, to make the tradition dynamic and always moves to find new shapes. However, there is something that should be understood in the transformation of traditional body, which is fundamental ground or basic spirit of traditional formation that is owned by the tradition. It is traditional knowledge of values and cloth aesthetic that occurs as the shape of legacy through generations. In the context of traditional preservation, it is important to be preserved since it functions as a support so that the tradition would not experience identity crisis.

II. Literature Review

1. Review of Culture Based on Cultural Transformation Theory

In explaining tradition and modernity, the best way is by comparing both of the terms, but it does not aim to put them in a conflict and is disputed. Either tradition or modernity is actually owns positive and negative side. To explain tradition understanding, citing Nugraha (2012) that tradition has 2 main ideas. First, it refers to an established knowledge, method, practice, belief, custom, habit, legend, or story that is passed through generations, especially through oral or practical communication.

Tradition is a group of practical activity that is created in the past and maintained by a group of people/community in present. Second, the word tradition is used to express something “old” and expired. These things are related by past, pre-industry, local wisdom, primitive, vernacular, and the opposite of modernity. Also for the term of ‘traditional object’, it can be understood as object that represents the use of all old material, old ornamentation, old tools and equipment, that is usually owned by special, time, place, and cultural condition in the past.
While modernity is something related to historical period, starting middle age until now, that is meant as condition that becomes modern. The word modern refers to newness, contemporary or recent, something new, and is seen as an effort to create something fresh and traditional.

Tradition and modernity cannot work in contradiction. The most appropriate term for tradition is ‘completing each other’ to the development and that is accomplished from the previous forms. In that process of development, traditional element that is still relevant and beneficial can be kept, while ones that are irrelevant can be left and changed by new elements. If tradition experiences this, so, it can be said that the tradition is discontinued from present, and it can be said as old tradition. Consideration of whether traditional element is relevant or not is based on effort to fulfill human basic needs and motivation.

In term of design phenomenon, culture transformational process can be observed through changes and aesthetic value displacement. This value displacement is, according to him, is triggered by the openness of culture. Related to the chart in figure 1, it is started by process of continuous ‘cultural dialog’ so there will cultural synthetic that create many forms of ‘mixed’ culture. This process lasts in long period of time so it creates established final cultural format (Sachari, 2004).

![Cultural transformation process chart](image)

Figure 1. Cultural transformation process chart (Sachari, 2004, p.84)

### 2. Study to Previous Relevant Researches

Research on study of traditional textile values for Tuban society is known to be conducted by a researcher from Netherlands, Rens Heringa in 1994 and book the research result entitled: “Spiegels Van Ruimte En Tijd”. And then, in 2010, using the same object, Heringa perfected the research, and booked it, entitled: “Ninik Towok’s Spinning Wheel: Cloth and the Cycle of Life in Tuban –East Java”.

In the research, Heringa explains the relations between Tuban traditional cloths that use special technique, which is hand drawn batik and gedog weaving. Hand drawn batik is a technique in decorating fabric that is estimated to enter Indonesia by Chinese traders. It is proven by the finding of wax as color to create motif in China. Another theory about batik in Indonesia is maybe taken from India which is famous for its traditional cloth since the 15th century (Gillow, 1992).
Explained by Elliot (2004) about the word ‘batik’ that is the closest meaning is the word batik coming from the word dots which means point, dot or drop. Even in linguistic such as Raffles rejects to translate it and only add the word “tukang batik”(batik maker) which means one who create cloth. Batik is derived from the word ‘hamba-tik’ which means making dots, and dots is the oldest motif that is ever found since it is emphasized to sheets of cloth made from cotton, silk, or organdy that has passed special process by the addition of batik wax on plain cloth as color border. And then it is dipped into color substance to color it. Tools that are used to border the cloth by using wax are special canting and brush to color it by using colet technique—swipe the brush with coloring substance on drawing area that are wanted to be colored.

Gedog weaving is a process of making cloth by using simple woven tool made of wood that is arranged so it can create braided cane work from two kinds of yarns; vertical dan horizontal yarn to create cloth. The name of gedog itself comes from the sound of “dhog” that is created during the process of waving, as a consequence from collision of woods on the weaving machine.

In addition to for traditional behavior of Tuban society is touch on cosmology concept that consists in every sheet of the cloth. In the study Heringa (2010) related to the figure 2, explained that hand drawn batik cloth and gedog woven own not only material values, but also influenced by non-material values considered as cosmology of Tuban’s society, it is called “Life Cycle”.

![Figure 2. Cosmology of “The Cycle of Life” for Tuban people (Heringa, 2010, p.42)](image)

The explanation of the life cycle by people of Tuban is related with location of where the villages are located, based on cardinal points; and also meanings which are represented. The explanation of meanings that is represented by the villages.

If we see Tuban clothes, especially from its characteristic, it is a cultural artifact that represent values and meaning to a culture that is represented by visual appearance of motif composition and color. Related to the figure 3, the visual appearance specifically owns a meaning that is strongly related to knowledge of people of Tuban about cosmology and aesthetic. Explained by Ciptandi (2018), batik putihan is dominated by white, that is according to people’s knowledge, it is a new beginning of born, that human is in the condition of pure and sacred. It is also what happened with batik irengan that is dominated with black. It is related to their understanding that death and the end of life is represented in dark and thick color. Then, between putihan and irengan, there is red / bangrod and blue / biron that are believed as colors that represent fertility and life.
Table 1. Village dissemination based on cosmology concept for Tuban people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Meanings Based on Cosmology Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>Represents the birth mark and childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Represents the process of sexual maturity and woman’s fertility, becoming a mother and giving birth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Represents infertility of woman and becoming old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Represents old time and the end of time/ death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>The most important place and has the highest authority for all Tuban Sub districts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Textile and cosmology of “The Cycle of Life” concept of Tuban people (Heringa, 2010, p.43)

III. Methodology

Methodology used is qualitative method by using the five sense evaluation at the first place, to see culture that tends to be dynamic and changeable along with the era more accurately. In this approach, researcher becomes the center of data, follows cultural assumption, and follows data. It can be said that cultural qualitative study is more flexible, and gives no fixed price, reflective, and imaginative. For data collection is done in the following ways:

1. Study literature from articles and reference books that discuss the traditions of Tuban's traditional cloths, personal notes, photographs, and sketches.
2. Observation in the location to observe the situation in batik and weaving center in Tuban, which consists of 4 hamlets: Kedungrejo, Margorejo, Gaji, and Karanglo.
3. Oral tradition, that is communicated orally, said verbally, from one generation to next generation. Oral testimony can be done by in depth interview that takes long time to a figure or traditional person and passes a period of time. This method is done to process data from tradition that the written evidence is not easy to find, but it is clearly developed in the community.

IV. Result and Discussion

Traditional product has a very important role in taking care of and conserving existence of a tradition. In this condition, as there are many people believe that the effort of taking care of and conserving tradition is needed to be done by using conservative approach, which means, all elements that are contained in the tradition should be preserved and they are not allowed to experience any change. Nowadays, people slowly open their mind to a more dynamic direction in facing traditional matter. To him, there are some who put moderate attitude and thinking that every change is considered as natural if there is a change inside the tradition. It is still good if fundamental ground that becomes spirit of building tradition is still preserved and nobody vanish it. Also, there are some people who chose to be radical and think that tradition can be transformed into any new forms as a result from both internal and external factors as long as the uniqueness of this tradition is preserved.

1. Dimension and Function Elements

Design in Tuban traditional cloth is made based on its function. The main functions for Tuban People are as Sayut and Jarit. The width of sayut is about 60 and length reaches 300 cm women wear it by twisting it on the shoulder and then circling to the waist. Function of this cloth is as a tool to carry things that are brought daily. About this Achjadi and Natanegara (2010) added that there is a kind of sayut with tufted end on both side and is used as corset. To use it, it is only by twisting the cloth on the waist to shape loins. And for Jarit is a square cloth, the width is around 100 cm to 110 cm and the length reaches 250 cm. Jarit is worn by woman by twisting it from right to left, on the waist to ankle. It usually has many drapes in the front part.

Until now, the designs of sayut and jarit never change in the matter of shape and size (illustration on figure 4). But there are differences where people of Tuban nowadays do not always produce sayut and jarit by gedog woven and hand drawn batik, there are many who change the cloth to printing cloth with some motifs that are not based on available motif philosophy. It is because nowadays, sayut and jarit that made by gedog weaving and hand drawn batik need time to finish and the production process is complicated, so the price of the cloth is expensive.

The habit of wearing sayut and jarit for women in Tuban is now still exist even though the number is only a few, people who wear them are mostly senior citizen who are accustomed to wear sayut and jarit since they were young. Most of middle-aged women still wear this cloth when they go farming or shopping at traditional market (illustration on figure 5). While for young women, only a few women who wear it. They said they prefer to wear casual because it is more practical and trendy.
Figure 4. Design of *Jarit* (Above) and *Sayut* (Below) a unique cloth of Tuban people (Heringa, 2010)

Figure 5. Appearance of Tuban women wearing *Sayut* and *Jarit* in Tuban. February 20, 2015

Legend:
A: Camisole
B: *Clurit* (traditional weapon of East Java People) that is slipped on waist to show that she is a farmer.
C: Printing cloth with batik motif that is worn like *jarit*.
D: *Jarit* from gedog woven which is made with hand drawn batik technique.
E: *Stagen* (long cloth that is slipped on the waist to shape stomach and waist).
F: *Sayut* from gedog woven made with hand drawn batik technique.
G: Basket / Seneuk to bring trading goods or shopping items when she goes to the market, and contains lunch box and tools for farming.
H: *Kebaya* (upper clothes as a characteristic of Javanese people)
2. Visual Element of Cloth

By the appearance it is known that Tuban cloth is made by using hand drawn batik that has unique characteristic by its rough lines and untidy. And the motif composition does not have special pattern. According to Djoemena (2000) the appearance of Tuban cloth has its own appeal because of the rough material that is used. Besides, the dreary color taken from natural coloring substance also gives the sense of vintage, so it becomes favorite of collectors and foreign tourists. Motifs of most of batik Tuban are patterned but not precise.

Batik motifs that are drawn by people on the cloth are created because of stimulation as object in their surrounding that are responded by the five senses, and then they are influenced by knowledge and perception about cosmology concept, behavior and habit, belief; and they are represented in visual appearance. What become inspiration from their decoration style are something around them in their daily life, and some others are influenced by foreign culture acculturation that enters Indonesia and gives influence to visual motif style.

Meaning contained in Batik Tuban motifs are usually talk about flora or fauna available in their surrounding and it is the actualization of cosmology concept understanding of “life cycle”, that is now still lasting because of continuous verbal information. So motif in batik is not only talk about visual, but also contains some meanings and messages. Based on a study through oral tradition that is already added by some private perception and understanding from resource person, it is explained that one of traditional motifs that is considered as genuine motif is lokchan (illustration on figure 6). If it is traced how this motif is taken by Tuban people whereas no such bird have ever been seen by people of Tuban, so, the strongest answer would be it is introduced by someone else that in the history is mentioned as Chinese through trading. People of Tuban imitate genuine form of lokchan motif so it can enter Indonesia through the process of adaptation.

![Figure 6](image.png)

Figure 6. Chinese porcelain found in Tuban (a), detailed picture of Lokchan bird motif at chinese porcelain (b), Lokchan bird motif as a characteristic of people of Tuban (c), Tuban Kambang Putih Museum. December 15, 2016

3. Material Element in Producing Traditional Cloth

Fiber material that is used by people of Tuban in making traditional cloth is cotton fiber. Cotton fiber is the only material that is used by Tuban people to make cloth. Simanjuntak and Santosa (2014) on Raffles (1817) mentioned that cotton in Java or it is usually called Javanese cotton is a variety of Gossypium herbaceum, that is lower type than Indian cotton (muri cotton). During harvest time, Javanese cotton will produce less fiber and the fiber is rougher. It is estimated that this low quality is caused by soil condition that is not supported for cotton growth. However, this kind of cotton is still used by local people as main material of textile, especially for clothes. Based on the explanation of
Gillow (1992) that until 19th century, Indonesia is still able to fulfill the need of cotton. Nonetheless, since Netherlands applied forced cultivation punishment for local people, cotton cultivation for production and consumption needs is forbidden. As a result, Indonesia needs to import great scale of cotton cloth from India and United states. After Indonesia gained its independence, cotton farmers started to glow, especially in Sumatera, Lombok, Flores, and Sumbawa.

The availability of cotton fiber for the traditional continuity of traditional cloth in Tuban is important because they can push the continuity of twinning and weaving. Even though clothing industry condition is increasing since 2013, but that increase is not the only matter to become basic measurement to see the success of the government in increasing that industry. It is because the traditional cloth industry is not only temporary industry that the development is done by copying other tradition. Traditional cloth from Tuban has a strong culture, and it is built since historical era. So, the conservation of this traditional cloth should be in line with the conservation of culture of the cloth itself.

4. Production Technique Element of Traditional Cloth

The making of traditional cloth of Tuban needs a complicated process by using gedog weaving technique to produce sheets of cloth, and using hand drawn batik technique to decorate the cloth with motifs and colors. Weaving for Tuban people is not only an activity of making cloth, but it has philosophical meaning about life. In weaving, generally there are two kinds of yarns that intertwined each other, they are: vertical yarn or known as lungsì and horizontal yarn or known as pakan. The principle of weaving is by entering pakan from east to west. The direction of yarn from east to west has a philosophy of where the sun rises from east to west. It is the beginning of life. lungsì is like ‘man’s destiny’ and pakan is like ‘woman’s destiny’. So it is emphasized by Achjadi that a sheet of cloth from Tuban is not a common clot, moreover, it means a man and woman in marital bond. (Achjadi & Natanegara, 2010; Heringa, 1994).

Figure 7. Activity of weaving Gedog by a woman in Tuban. November 26, 2015

The activity of weaving done by people of Tuban is degraded slowly. There are only few people who still want to do it, and mostly is women senior citizen. The main reason is because they do not find it interesting to weave since the process is complicated and it needs long time to finish every sheet of cloth. Besides, the payment they got from
doing batik is bigger and faster than weaving. It becomes a matter since a tradition can last if there is regeneration to continue a specific activity, gradually. If there is a change, at least, tradition can be treated through some developmental values of newness. Tradition of gedog weaving that lives among Tuban society has no negative values that contrast their rule and philosophy. However, the problem lies on the difficulties, and it becomes a strong reason why people left their tradition and is replaced by new tradition that can produce similar product without any difficulties of complicated production process.

Next, the last process is decorating plain woven cloth using special ornament with hand drawn batik technique. Based on observation of batik making that is done by Tuban people shows that the process is not different with other area, outside Tuban. The difference lies on terms and process.

5. Element of Social Condition of Local Tuban People

Tuban people usually make cloth not only be used for dress, but also having relations with social values in society. For people of Tuban, cloth is not only considered as primary goods, but also able to show one’s status. So, some material, such as cotton fiber, yarn, plain woven cloth can be grouped into primary goods. While other cloth that has already through the process of hand drawn batik has special meaning and can be grouped as symbolical goods, and special meaning to show society’s social status. As stated by Achjadi and Natangega (2010), that Tuban traditional cloth in the middle of 1980s is considered to have role as identity indication and certain society’s social status (illustration on figure 9). Sayut that is wore by Tuban women shows age group that differentiates from unmarried young woman, married woman, to old woman. While jarit cloth that is used by Tuban Woman shows her origin of village; is it from east, south, west or north part of traditional market.

The picture above shows Tuban women (a) are wearing original jarit hand drawn batik from Tuban society. That one who use that cloth is coming from high level social status. Besides, the woman is wearing dark blue camisole while she is carrying her child at the back and she is also wearing batik printing motif. Other woman (b) comes from low level social status, she wears gedog woven to cover body and only use a piece of cloth that is twisted through her body. And then young woman (c) who is wearing printing camisole with flowery motif shows her status as a member of farmer family who does not own land. Other cloth, which is white cloth, that is twisted on the belly shows that she is experiencing her first menstruation (Heringa, 2010).
The scenery of Tuban women who wear sayut and jarit follows the rule as explained above is rarely found, nowadays. Though there are some women who wear it, they usually not framed by social function of the cloth. Tuban women who are still wearing sayut cloth are usually farmer who go to the rice field and carrying bakul that contains food or farming tools. Besides, some of Tuban women also wear sayut to the market to carry goods for trading, or goods that she bought from the market. Sayut that they wear is not only traditional cloth, some wear printing cloth.

While now, there are fewer women who wear jarit. Most of the women now tend to appear without jarit because it is more practical. And they hesitate to wear it because it looks oldies, especially for young women. It shows that cloth has value displacement, it is where wearing sayut and jarit that once is considered appropriate and representation of Tuban, now is left for reasons related to modernity context.

**Figure 9.** Cloth for Tuban woman functioning to show identity and social status (Heringa, 2010, p.45)
V. Conclusion

The face of traditional cloth for Tuban people shows the symptoms of transformation by leaving some traditional form and adapt to the development of trend and modernity. As the matter of fact, nowadays, there is degradation of cloth role in society condition. Cloth is considered very important because the understanding of Tuban people about values is degraded. Only few people of Tuban who understand the philosophy behind the tradition. Even though there are still people of Tuban who use cloth for cultural ceremony, it is only because they continue habit that is passed from generations, but they don’t really understand to philosophy meanings.

It is based on transformational concept of tradition that might be happened because of custom is considered not relevant and in line with their need and living motivation, so that, they do not think to preserve it.

An example that can be said as displacement of cloth function as sayut and jarit can be happened because the use of cloth does not have philosophy that is considered sacred. Although this cloth has specific function and it is believed to have power in repelling bad luck or part of cultural need—like custom in someone’s birth, death, or wedding ceremony; but as dress, this cloth does not bonding and forcing regulation about the way to wear it. It is not mentioned that if there is someone punished. For some people, the use of this cloth is only about clothes that come with some rules about how to wear it, it is an inheritance from generation to generation. Based on mentioned character, thus, the transformation of using cloth for Tuban women is probably happened easily, because there are no regulations that rule it. It is proved that nowadays, women of Tuban prefer to choose their own outfit and slowly but sure leave sayut and jarit.
Next, in term of the existence of creational hand drawn batik for some group of society in Tuban, it is perceived as a treat of local tradition preservation. However, if it is seen from the existence doing hand drawn batik point of view, it can be a positive matter. If people of Tuban keep on only doing traditional habit, where weaving and hand drawn batik need a long time and high level of complication, there will be not enough to fulfill the economic need of local community. So, sooner or later, it will be a threat. That makes the tradition extinct. For that reason, the existences of craftsmen who live in that segment are actually help to preserve hand drawn batik and woven material to be “fruitful” in Tuban. Meanwhile, some other part still focuses on the attempt of the conservation, so, the traditional value will not be forgotten.

So far, there is no threat of conflict between traditional and newness / modernity. Both complete each other and shape a new face in the tradition of cloth, compared to the beginning of this tradition appeared in their community. It shows that there are good attitude in entering and accepting Tuban culture and foreign culture so the process of acculturation and inculturation can work. People of Tuban who own “open” character is one of very important factor that makes this process works well. The character of open society is part of tradition that is owned by people of Tuban since it is part of Hindu-Budha government. At that time, through the trading paths, Tuban society has become a group of people that are open to the acceptance of the coming foreign influence. They are able to do process of perfect adaptation, so the process of acculturation and inculturation can happened without conflict.

References


