



## The Batik Latoh as the Result of Maritime Culture of Lasem Community

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### **Abstract**

The underlying notion of this research was to investigate the Batik *Latoh* as one of maritime cultures of the *Lasem* community involved in the study of maritime history. The study of Indonesian history many times examined the events occurred on the land, even though more than half of Indonesian area covers the ocean. As the alternative of historical study, there is historical investigation based on maritime culture. This is a crucial issue recently since the area of Indonesia is mostly covered by the ocean. One of maritime history studies is the existing maritime potency in Lasem area. The batik of Lasem has the unique color of light red. The infiltrate of outside influence affects the pattern and color of batik. Batik *latoh* (genus of seaweeds/green algae) was the result of cross cultural of coastal Lasem people on the north coast of Java.

**Keywords:** Batik Latoh; Maritime culture; Maritime history

### **Introduction**

Indonesia is a country consisting of land and sea. There are several large and small islands separated by the sea which lead Indonesia to be called as Nusantara (*sometimes called as the archipelago country*). Thus, water transportation is the tool to link among the islands. The existence of moorage becomes very crucial for those who visit a particular destination, and hence a port is built for various purposes. It has been known that the archipelago is the island area on one side and water territory on the other side in which the water territory covers 2/3 of the region. When the community in the archipelago still consisted of small kingdoms spread throughout the region, there were several kingdoms whose people belonged to marine nations and also they were the sailor more skilled than the fishermen (Anshoriy Ch. Nasruddin., 2008: 8).

Well-known as a maritime country, Indonesia has not only one “main sea” or heart of sea but there are also at least three major seas forming Indonesia as a sea system, namely the Java Sea, Flores Sea and Banda Sea. The Java Sea was the heartland of sea trade of the archipelago and had been integrated by shipping and trading networks before the arrival of the West. It is undeniably that history is valuable for people’s life of any nation. History is a collective memory, a storehouse of experiences that will be the source of the society in future (Zuhdi, Susanto., 2014: 537). Indonesia has fulfilled the elements of maritime state, the geographical position as an archipelagic country and has even been recognized

internationally. The widely shaped of the land and the beach provide the chances for Indonesia to establish many seaports. The ocean was considered as the way of life, because traditional wisdom and local knowledge of the ocean developed (Arif, Satria., 2014: 99).

The shipping and the trading in Indonesia' water territory had the strategic paths in which one of them is Java sea. Java Sea has relatively small waves compared with other seas in Indonesia and surrounding areas such as the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and so forth. In the context of the world trade traffic, the Java Sea served as a central trade along the coast that developed due to sailing and trading through the Java Sea. Maritime history is an important aspect since the relationship among communities made the communication through shipping and trading routes going well. In this case, Lasem is a coastal area in the north of Java having strategic location as a bridge of shipping and trading networks.

Batik Lasem is one of the cultural acculturation results from the cultures of Java with Tionghoa. Looking back at the history of batik in Lasem, it can be traced since the King of Lasem, *Lasem Bhre I* governed the small Lasem Kingdom (1350-1375). In that period, batik seemed become a noble outfit in Lasem region. It is assumed because Bhre Lasem personally might have own batik and hired skilled batik workers; this was seen from the artifacts of batik cloth that existed in the Majapahit Kingdom era.

### ***The History of Lasem***

In the heyday of Majapahit, *Lasem* was part of a territory led by *Bhre*. The position of Bhre Lasem was as representative of Majapahit to oversee the activities of local government. The position of Bhre Lasem was very important because of becoming the responsible of coastal area that involved in the Majapahit authority. In addition, the presence of Lasem as the main door of the Majapahit Kingdom placed Bhre Lasem in a strategic position (Aziz, Munawir., 2014: 59). In the history, Lasem was famous as the port city, the important one since the Majapahit period until the Japanese colonialism era. In Majapahit era, Lasem became the small empire under the rule of Bhre Lasem who also raised the *syahbandar*, the term of the chief of port, to become the powerful guard over the economic flow of seaports in the city (Aziz, Munawir., 2014: 39).

The narration script of the Lasem History on its translation tells that Lasem was beautiful, peaceful and prosperous area during the reign of Bhre Lasem Duhitendu Dewi. According to Edi Winarno in Randen Panji Karsono (1920: 9) Lasem city was beautiful, nice and cool, covered by the shade trees along the edge of the street. Keratin palace was majestically stood in Puri Kriyan. Taman Sari Balekambang Kemalaputri (the garden of palace where the Queen took resting) was located next to the south east of the Lasem palace which fulfilled of *kamal-tropong* trees (tamarind tree) that grew big and shady. Along the *delanggung* (sidestreet or alley) were planted the small sapodilla trees, and every corner of t-junction and crossroad was planted with the Banyan trees. Each yard of the resident's house was planted the gading and puyuh coconut trees (on both sides of the yard) that fruit bushes were dangling, and the various flowers were also planted.

The importance of Lasem as the foudation of Majapahit maritime power was reinforced after the arrival of the Admiral Cheng Ho troops, an Emperor Yung-Lo's representative from China, to King Wikrama Wardana in the early of 15<sup>th</sup> century (Unjiya, Akrom., 2014: 6). From the first visiting, Majapahit addressed the port cities such as Gresik-Surabaya, Tuban and Lasem as the special areas for the Admiral Cheng Ho's entourage and also the merchants from China. The impact of Cheng Ho's visiting in Lasem for several times led to the vast of people from China who later settled in Lasem. After the end of Bhre Lasem authority which served as the vassal kingdom of Majapahit (1466-1468 AD) which were the Hindu, the Majapahit kingdom suffered the deterioration caused by the battle of power by the leaders.

In the era of Majapahit kingdom collapse at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was one kingdom in Java that confidently established a new empire that is the Demak kingdom, the Islamic kingdom. This was also done in several vassal kingdoms in the coastal cities that declared having the freedom of the Majapahit kingdom and then became the independent country. The people in the rural area of Java as well as those in the conflict areas were moving to the port city. In the port cities such as Gresik, Surabaya, Tuban and Lasem, Islam began to grow rapidly. The Demak kingdom that was maritime-oriented kingdom established good relations with the districts that were earlier having the independent status such as Lasem, Tuban, Gresik, and some other kingdoms in Java.

The Lasem kingdom transformed into Lasem district at Bonang Binangun (1391 saka or 1469 AD) near the Regol bay after a year of the end of Bhre Lasem's power. The Bonang Binangun, Lasem district that had separated from the vassal kingdom of Majapahit were ultimately building their own country. The establishment of Lasem district near the port of Regol bay did not just happen without any factor. The shifting place that was originally in Lasem then led to the Regol bay was due to the swift currents of changes and the supports of the traders.

The Pajang kingdom was the first inland kingdom after the Majapahit kingdom collapse in 1545 AD. This agrarian kingdom gradually took control the coastal areas such as the northern coast of Lasem, Tuban, Gresik and Surabaya. With this in mind, the trade in the inland area still existed to market the natural products to the northern coastal areas. Trading the natural products of the inland areas was not as bustling and rushing as in the previous kingdom authority because of presence of monopoly trade. The subjection of these coastal cities under the Pajang kingdom authority was due to the weakening of the port area caused by the insistence of European economic politics by monopolizing it.

Under the order of Islamic Mataram kingdom in 1586 AD, Lasem district belonged to the territory of the kingdom. Lasem district was the coastal city with the characteristic of city of port under the recognition of the Islamic Mataram kingdom as an agricultural city. The Lasem port remained exist among the competition and trade monopolist since the arrival of the Europe ships. The arrival of the Europeans led the changes for Indonesia which gave rise to a war between Lasem people and the VOC called the Kuning War in 1751 AD in which the people defend was ended in defeat. In the colonial period of the Dutch East Indies, Lasem was used as the central trading and industrial in Rembang Regency that is as busy port city.

### ***The Latoh (Kinds of Seaweeds)***

The making of batik had its historical event when Admiral Cheng Ho dropped in the Lasem to Lasem repair the ship and brought the sick crew for medical treatment. The captain of Bi Nang Un, one of Admiral Cheng Ho's troops saw Lasem as a fertile and beautiful area with the friendly people, asked permission not to continue the journey because of the willingness to stay in Lasem. After getting permission from the prince of Wijayabadra, the Duke of Lasem's royal dynasty at that time, he returned to Campa to pick his son and his wife up and back to Lasem with other Campa residents who expertly made batik, gold jewelry, gamelan craftsmen and also brought the seeds of black glutinous rice and mango *blungko*, sugar cane, pomegranate, chicken *cempo*, blue peacock, and rice *klewer*. Bi Nang Un troops then landed in an area now well-known as Binangun Village, approximately 1 km east of Lasem city (Dekranasda., 2008: 1 in Sutrisno., 2012: 92).

With his wife named Na Li Ni, Bi Nang Un and Na Li Ni had two daughters named Bi Nang Ti and Bi Nang Na. When growing up, Bi Nang Ti showed her skills in batik, embroidery, weaving and making herbal medicine. The skills possessed by Bi Nang Ti made the Duke of Lasem, Badranala, was interested and wanted to marry Bi Nang Ti. Finally, Bi Nang Ti married the Duke Badranala. Bi Nang Ti taught the people batik skills. Although there were also people could make batik, but Bi Nang Ti taught

making batik with the proper technique and being creative. Bi Nang Ti taught people in making batik by combining Chinese styles with Javanese pattern (Nurhajarini., et al 2015: 79).

Batik Lasem is one type of coastal batik having its own characteristics. The characteristics can be seen on the patterns that are influenced by Chinese culture. The Batik of Chinese progeny arose because many of the Chinese people settled in Lasem in which the mostly Chinese people engaged in trade. One of their products was batik cloth that had developed in Lasem. At that time, they began making business of batik with Chinese characteristics combined with Javanese patterns. The privilege of Chinese community increasingly made the Chinese to show further their ethnicity through batik. The Chinese poured Chinese cultures that were still believed as the characteristics of various decorations on batik Lasem of the Chinese progeny. The Chinese progeny included all Chinese people born in Indonesia. The Chinese progeny generally could not use Chinese, either Mandarin or China dialects. Accordingly, the Chinese lived in Lasem were the Chinese progeny. They did not speak Mandarin. Languages used for their communication were Indonesian or Javanese (Nurhajarini., et al 2015: 80).

At that time, the business owner of batik was the Chinese, while the workers were the local people. The owner was from Chinese ethnic because they had the venture capital, trading network, material for production and marketing network, so that their business were easily developing (Rahayu., 2014). In Lasem, the dark brown and dark blue are still referred to Sogan Majapahit. The influence of Javanese and Hindu Buddhist culture in the Majapahit kingdom still exist on the pattern and color of batik Lasem on batik Baganan originated from Babagan village (Adi., 2014: 11-15).

Batik Lasem is no longer patterned on batik Mataraman, but the *Pesisiran* (coastal) pattern. It is similar with the color of batik Lasem, no longer colored in soga, but there is already the influence of coastal batik that is the light color. The influence of Chinese in Lasem had an effect on the using of pattern and color. Batik Lasem had a characteristic color that is the light red known as *getih pitik* (chicken blood) (Heck., 2006: 47-55). Written batik of Latoh pattern having green color of the seaweeds mixed with the basic color of red resulted in a unique combination possessed by Lasem people.

### ***The Batik Latoh as Maritime Culture***

One of the ways in strengthening maritime culture is by presenting historical perspectives about the various maritime life of the society. The maritime aspect of society is related to human and sea interaction. The interaction includes several aspects such as trading, sailing, shipping, maritime traditions, marine mythology, piracy, fisheries, marine law (Asnan., 2007: 4). The maritime life of Indonesia in historical perspective is a study that needs to be reviewed because the society's development has many times related to the sea. It can be seen that the Sea is responsible for various influences of great civilization in Indonesia that affect the life style of the society to nowadays. Thus, maritime is important in historical studies (AB Lopian., 1992: 2).

According to Singgih Tri Sulistiyono et al. (2005: 2-3), it is noted that there are several prominent studies of maritime history. Firstly, it is supported by geographical conditions as an ethnic group that for centuries has used the sea as a communication vehicle. The history of maritime becomes a vehicle for awakening the consciousness of a nation. Secondly, the maritime aspect has been inherent in Indonesian people for thousands of years. Thus, there has been formed a set of values that can maintain the existence and continuity of society. Accordingly, the maritime history can play the significant role as a social media and enculturation of maritime cultural values for society. These values are responsible in fostering people's wisdom in marine management. Thirdly, the maritime community that developed in the Indonesian archipelago has been in a relationship for centuries. Here, maritime history is able to provide the real example of cross-cultural communication between one community and others as the basis for the

integration among people. This is an example of egalitarian and openness values as a prerequisite for integration.

In maritime culture, if the Indonesian generally wants to get more benefits of maritime-based, so the culture and mental attitude towards maritime must be changed. Maritime is an integral part of the identity and potential of prosperity for Indonesian people. Maritime characters that are dynamic, egalitarian, and persistent need to be maintained and developed. If this is done consistently and continuously, it is not impossible that the Indonesian will again find the identity as a maritime nation (Suropati., et al, 2016: 199-200). Culture can practically be understood as a manifestation of the cultural value system of a society that exhibits a visible character or identity so that easily recognized its presence. The relief of the boat on the Borobudur temple shows the sea life in which the Javanese had been sailing away for previous centuries (Zuhdi, Susanto., 2014: 224).

Maritime culture is a collection of the values, point of view and life attitude that is centered on water as a source of life because the mass of water on earth is mostly in the sea, so that the maritime culture is defined as marine dimensions, especially sea as living space. If learning is a process of interpreting as well as constructing experience that require space and time sensitivity, it can be concluded that maritime culture is a learning culture (Rosyid., 2017: 165). The understanding of the maritime culture can gradually be inherited from one generation to the next. The maritime doctrine and the paradigm shift from land to sea can run well without causing cultural disturbance in society. Maritime culture will automatically inspire every movement, mindset and attitude of next generations in the future (Hendrawan Didit., 2016: 180-181).

## **Conclusion**

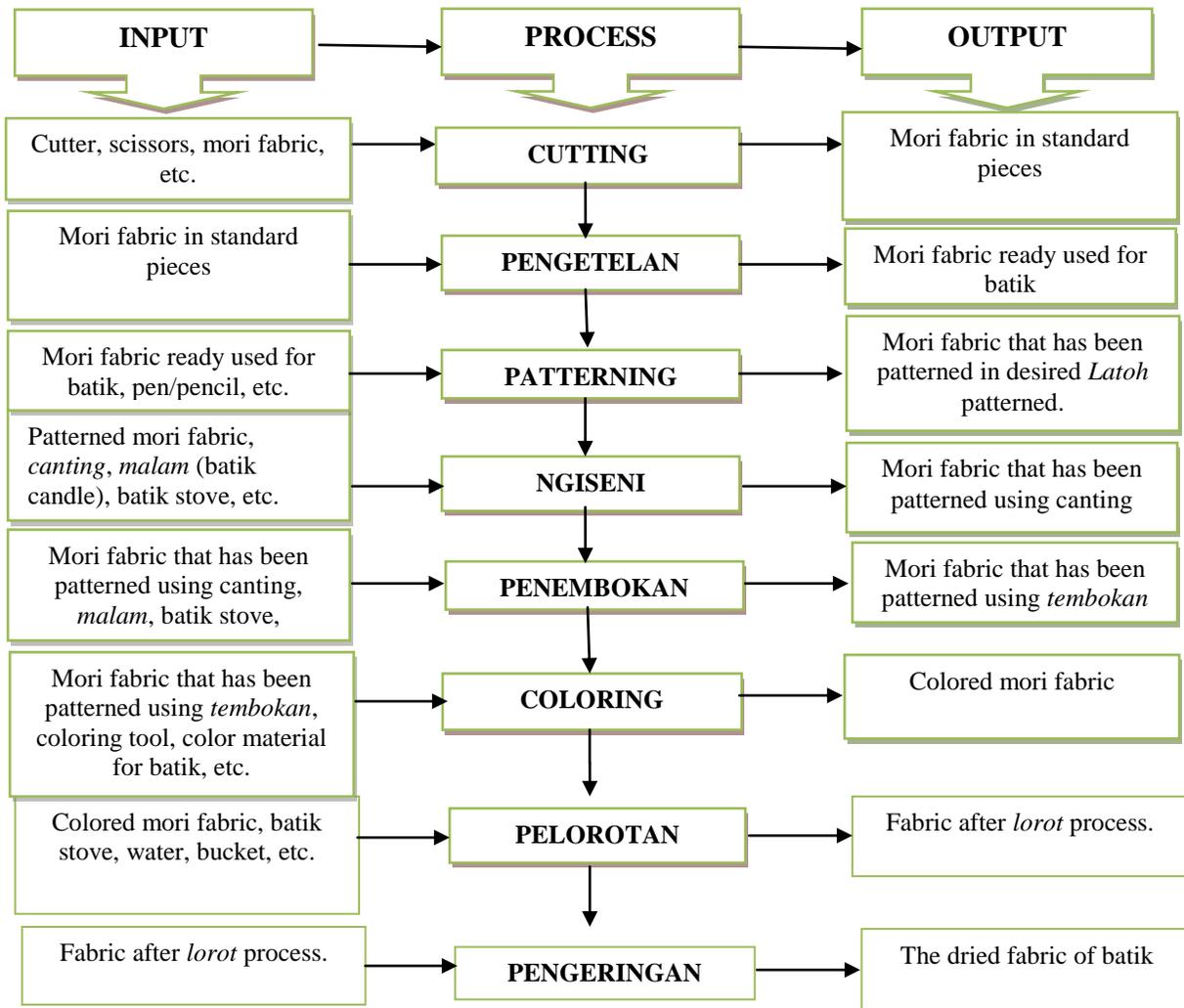
The comprehension of maritime history seems highly important in maintaining and managing the natural resources. The maritime history provides a broad investigation of cross-cultural communication among communities. As a port city in the north coastal of Java, Lasem has a long history and potential maritime well developed that can fulfill the industrial development demands and able to provide the prosperity for people. Each community has its own foundation system in which Lasem in its potential maritime has several aspects to support the history, one of the results of maritime culture of the Lasem community is Batik *Latoh*.

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**Appendices**



**FINISHING & FINISHED PRODUCT (WRITTEN BATIK OF LATOH)**

### 1. Cutting

This is the process of cutting mori fabric in accordance with desired size.

### 2. Pengetelan

The process begins by washing and soaking the mori fabric for approximately 1 x 24 hours. The goal is to eliminate the kanji. Then it is continued by *pengeloyoran* process, that is dipping the mori fabric into castor oil or peanut oil that has been mixed with soda ash. The mori fabric is dipped into the castor oil to make the fabric becomes limp, so that it has the high absorption of color.

### 3. Making pattern/ Nglengkrenng

This phase is imitating or making a pattern (*Latoh*) on the mori fabric by copying the existing pattern that is called as *ngeblat*. The pattern is usually made on the onionskin first, and then copied on the mori fabric. However, it can be directly done on the fabric or copying the pattern using the pencil or *canting*. To make the coloring process well completed, and the color will be full and perfect, the process of *nglengkrenng* must also be done on the back side of fabric. This part is called as *nerusi*.

### 4. Ngiseni

This stage means drawing the ornaments or stuff on the pattern.

### 5. Penembokan

*Nembok* is the process of covering the particular part of pattern/ fabric to avoid the base color. It is covered by thick layer of *malam* as if it is a retaining wall.

### 6. Coloring

This phase is coloring batik fabric that has passed *penembokan* process with particular desired color.

### 7. Pelorotan

This stage refers to erasing all *malam* (batik candle) layers by soaking the colored fabric into boiling water that has been mixed with soda. After finishing the soaking process, the fabric must be taken up and watered with the clean one.

### 8. Drying

In this step, the fabric is outspread and dried by avoiding to be directly exposed by the sun light to keep the quality of color.

**Note:**

The fabric can be colored more than once by repeating the process of *penembokan* and coloring in accordance with the number of desired color, and then continued by *pelorotan* process.

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