



The journey of human life and the grandeur of nature: Art-based research on the creation of batik inspired by cultural visual icons of Cirebon and Japan

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to (1) develop a concept for pattern creation, (2) describe the process, (3) describe the results, and (4) reflect on the researcher's experience in creating batik patterns combining visual icons from Cirebon and Japan. The research method used is art-based research, including the stages of exploration, design, and realisation. Data was collected through literature studies and documentation to identify ideas, concepts, techniques, and styles. The research results show: (1) The pattern has the concept of the human life journey and the greatness of nature through the exploration of the characteristics of *Batik Mega Mendung*, Cirebon Masks, The Great Wave off Kanagawa painting, and Geisha. (2) The creation uses Indonesian batik techniques, starting from the preparation of tools and materials, application of sketches, canting, colouring, and removing the wax. (3) This research produced five patterns of painted batik titled "*The Beginning Page*," "*The Flower of Life in Bloom*," "*Meaning Amidst the Roaring Waves*," "*Nurturing What Has Wilted*," and "*The Line of Eternity*." (4) Through the process, the researcher realises that every aspect of art is a result of deep reflection; the researcher can express themselves and convey messages that have been interpreted through the batik painting patterns that combine cultural traditions and personal perspectives.

Keywords: *Pattern, Mega Mendung, Cirebon mask, The Great Wave off Kanagawa, Geisha*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk: (1) menyusun konsep penciptaan pattern; (2) mendeskripsikan proses penciptaan; (3) mendeskripsikan hasil, dan; (4) merefleksikan pengalaman peneliti dalam penciptaan pattern batik lukisan yang menggabungkan ikon visual budaya Cirebon dan Jepang. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah Art Based Research, mengacu pada metode penciptaan seni rupa oleh Gustami (2004), meliputi tahap eksplorasi, perancangan, dan perwujudan. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui studi literatur dan dokumen untuk mengidentifikasi sumber ide, konsep, teknik, dan gaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan: (1) Penciptaan pattern memiliki konsep perjalanan hidup manusia dan kebesaran alam, melalui eksplorasi karakteristik Batik Mega Mendung, Topeng Cirebon, Lukisan The Great Wave off Kanagawa, dan Geisha. (2) Penciptaan pattern menggunakan teknik batik Indonesia, dimulai dari persiapan alat dan bahan, pengaplikasian sketsa, pencantingan, pewarnaan, dan pelorodan. (3) Penelitian ini menghasilkan lima pattern batik lukisan yang berjudul "Lembaran awal", "Bunga Kehidupan yang Sedang Mekar", "Kemaknaan di Tengah Gemuruh Ombak", "Memupuk Kembali yang Sudah Layu", dan "Garis Keabadian". (4) Melalui proses penciptaan, peneliti menyadari bahwa setiap aspek seni merupakan hasil refleksi mendalam, peneliti dapat mengekspresikan diri dan menyampaikan pesan yang telah ditafsirkan melalui pattern batik lukisan yang menggabungkan tradisi budaya dan perspektif pribadi.

Kata Kunci: *Pattern, Mega Mendung, topeng Cirebon, The Great Wave off Kanagawa, Geisha*

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INTRODUCTION

Batik serves as a national identity and has been internationally recognised as an intangible cultural heritage of Indonesia by UNESCO in 2009. It is also a tool for diplomacy that influences the economy, including bilateral relations with Japan since 1958. This relationship, initiated by a peace treaty between the two countries in 1958, gave rise to the Hokokai batik pattern during the Japanese occupation in Pekalongan (1942–1945). Batik gained further recognition through a design competition organised by PPI Ishikawa in 2018, which introduced combined patterns as part of a non-state actor diplomacy strategy.

In Indonesia, batik is categorised into hand-drawn (*batik tulis*) and stamped (*batik cap*) batik, with *batik tulis* renowned for its manual crafting process and higher value. Modern batik features more expressive designs with innovative techniques and colour combinations, catering to younger generations seeking high-quality and comfortable batik. Cirebon is one of the national batik industry centres, famous for its *Mega Mendung* pattern, symbolising the strength and grandeur of nature. Additionally, Cirebon culture incorporates life symbolism, as exemplified by the Cirebon mask (*topeng Cirebon*).

In Japan, a similar technique called *roketsuzome* or *rozome* employs wax to create patterns on fabrics, primarily for kimonos. Japan is also renowned for *Ukiyo-e*, a genre of painting and woodblock printing that flourished during the Edo period in the 17th century. Two prominent artists from this era are Kitagawa Utamaro and Katsushika Hokusai. Hokusai's most famous work, *Kanagawa oki Nami-ura* ("The Great Wave off Kanagawa"), and Utamaro's mastery of portraying beautiful women, known as *Bijin-ga*, are iconic cultural symbols.

Ukiyo-e paintings depicting beautiful women often feature geishas, which are recognised as symbols of Japanese culture. Alongside geishas, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* is also a cultural icon. On the other hand, Cirebon's cultural visual icons include *Mega Mendung* and *Topeng Cirebon*. These four visual icons—geisha, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, *Mega Mendung*, and *Topeng Cirebon*—share harmonious meanings. This research integrates the visual icons of Cirebon and Japanese cultures to create innovative batik painting patterns through the Art-Based Research method.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method, specifically Art-Based Research (ABR), integrating artistic creation methods as outlined by Gustami (2004). According to Leavy Patricia, as cited in Sanjaya (2023), Art-Based Research is highly beneficial for studies aimed at describing, exploring, and discovering art.

The research involves the active role of the researcher in the creative process, following Gustami's (2004) creation method, which outlines three stages: exploration, design, and realisation. The exploration stage involves literature and documentation studies to identify concepts based on the harmony of meanings and visual icon elements between Cirebon and Japanese cultures, including *Mega Mendung*, the Cirebon mask (*Topeng Cirebon*), *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, and the geisha. The design stage translates these ideas into sketch drafts, considering several aspects such as materials, techniques, artistic elements, messages, and philosophical meanings. The realisation stage involves transferring the sketches onto fabric using Indonesian batik techniques, including *molani* (outlining), *pencantingan* (applying wax), dyeing, and *pelorodan* (wax removal).

The objects of this study are the concepts, visualisations, and resulting patterns of batik paintings inspired by the cultural visual icons of Cirebon and Japan. Data were collected through literature reviews to examine relevant theories and cultural elements, as well as documentation studies to gather historical and artistic data. The data were then analysed by selecting, categorising, and organising them to develop the concept. Data validity was ensured through theoretical triangulation, comparing the findings with relevant theories. The creation of the batik painting patterns was carried out over two months, from April to May 2024.

RESULT

A. The Concept of Creating Batik Painting Patterns of Cirebon and Japanese Cultural Visual Icons

This study explores the concept of creating batik painting patterns by integrating the visual icons of Cirebon and Japanese cultures. *Mega Mendung* represents the human journey from birth to death (Ilmi, 2012). She is paired with the Cirebon masks (*Topeng Cirebon*), which symbolise the five human desires as explained by Lasmiyati (2011) through the characters of Panji, Parmindo, Rummyang, Tumenggung, and Klana. Additionally, Katsushika Hokusai's painting *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* and the geisha figures inspired by renowned ukiyo-e artists of the Edo period were included to add visual and symbolic depth to the batik painting pattern.

The Great Wave off Kanagawa and the geisha are iconic symbols of Japanese culture. The painting depicts towering waves threatening fishermen's boats, symbolising the immense and unpredictable power of nature (mislanguageschool.co.id, accessed on 01/02/2024). Meanwhile, geisha reflect Japanese culture rooted in the Bushido ethical tradition, encompassing their attire, hairstyles, and mastery of arts (Suliyati, 2018).

The process of creating these batik painting patterns involved an in-depth exploration of the visual characteristics and philosophies of each selected element. This exploration included combining image fragments into a digital mood board, which was then developed into alternative sketches using the Procreate application. The mood board facilitated the design stage. The colours used in the batik patterns reflect philosophical values, with blue and red serving as the primary colours, symbolising the grandeur of nature and the human life journey.

The blue and red colours were chosen to retain the original hues of *Mega Mendung*. Dark blue represents rainclouds bringing life-giving water, while the gradient to light blue signifies the brightening phases of life (Abdullah, 2021). Red symbolises vitality, masculinity, and strength (Rasjoyo, 2008). The colouring process employed the *colet* technique using reason and naphthol dyes applied to primetime cotton fabric.

This study aims to create a unique and innovative batik painting pattern by combining cultural elements from Cirebon and Japan. The design not only showcases the visual beauty of these cultural integrations but also narrates the human life journey harmonised with the grandeur of nature. The cohesive colour palette provides a consistent visual identity, reinforcing the research concept and achieving harmony across the entire batik pattern.

B. The Process of Creating Batik Painting Patterns of Cirebon and Japanese Cultural Visual Icons

The process of creating these batik painting patterns involved several stages: preparing tools and materials, transferring sketches, applying wax (*pencantingan*), colouring, colour fixation, and wax removal (*penglorodan*). The tools and materials included pencils, projectors, wax, canting tools, brushes, electric stoves, wax pans, cloths, primisima cotton fabric, plastic cups, naphthol dye, remasol dye, waterglass, soda ash, starch, clamps, buckets, and basins. The next stage involved transferring the sketch to the fabric using a 2B pencil and a projector to ensure accuracy in replicating the digital sketch.



Picture 1. Sketching process using projector and pencil

The *pencantingan* stage is critical for protecting the sketch patterns from unwanted colouring. The patterns were then coloured using the *colet* technique with brushes. Remasol dyes were applied to the *Mega Mendung*, Cirebon masks, geisha figures, and *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* elements, while naphthol dye was used for the geisha's skin tones. These colours were fixed using water glass, applied to the fabric, and left to dry for over four hours.



Picture 2. Fixing colour using water glass

Finally, the *penglorodan* stage involved boiling the fabric in a soda ash and starch solution to remove the wax covering the patterns. The fabric was then rinsed in water to eliminate any remaining wax residue.



Picture 3. Drying process

C. The Creation of Batik Painting Patterns of Cirebon and Japanese Cultural Visual Icons

No	Result and Pattern's Title	Description	Analysis
1		<p><i>“The first cry shattered the silence of that day. A newborn had arrived, bringing new hope to those feeling unfulfilled in this world, much like the melody of nature welcoming the dawn of a new life. A baby represents the beginning of a story on a blank canvas, ready to be written, drawn, and etched with love and determination. Each breath carries prayers from loving souls as a gesture of gratitude to the Almighty. Nature seems to smile with every small step, heralding a future filled with mysteries and wonders yet to unfold.”</i></p>	<p>This batik painting pattern symbolises the beginning of life, reflecting the values inherent in the <i>Mega Mendung</i> pattern, which signifies birth. The pattern centres on a baby geisha holding a <i>Topeng Panji</i> mask, a symbol of human purity, untouched and innocent, akin to a newborn.</p> <p>The depiction of the baby in a seated position, accompanied by a calm sea, mirrors the gentle movements of the <i>Topeng Panji</i> dance, where the dancer appears almost motionless. The dancer's bowed head is represented by splashing waves that encircle and protect the baby, emphasising a sense of care and tranquillity.</p>
2		<p><i>“Under the sunlight, the joyful laughter of children echoes, carried by the gentle sea breeze. Their cheerful smiles warm the heart, and their eyes, filled with boundless curiosity, resemble blooming flowers of life. The happiness of children is pure and needs no grand explanation. Through their laughter and tears, they remind humanity of the world's beauty, unconditional love, and the courage to dream. Humanity once possessed a fantastical world of boundless imagination in childhood, creating strokes that shape future manifestations of life. They remind us to be present, appreciate the small things in life, and see the world as a place full of promises and infinite beauty revolving in hope and wonder.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Under the sunlight, the joyful laughter of children echoes, carried by the gentle sea breeze. Their cheerful smiles warm the heart, and their eyes, filled with boundless curiosity, resemble blooming flowers of life. The happiness of children is pure and needs no grand explanation. Through their laughter and tears, they remind humanity of the world's beauty, unconditional love, and the courage to dream. Humanity once possessed a fantastical world of boundless imagination in childhood, creating strokes that shape future manifestations of life. They remind us to be present, appreciate the small things in life, and see the world as a</i></p>

3



Picture 6. "Kemaknaan di tengah gemuruh ombak" (Meaning Amidst the Roaring Waves)

"The sea, with its towering waves, symbolises the desires and courage mingled with the anxieties burning within the soul of youth. Dancing amidst the roar of waves reflects the steps of adolescents searching for identity, freedom, and the hidden meanings of life in the depths of the ocean. The fear of losing oneself to the currents is real, yet the desire to chase dreams drives them to explore uncharted territories. Here, they begin to understand the essence of companionship among living beings in their quest for meaning. They learn to unite, let go, and leave traces as they transition to the next stage of life, carrying newfound wisdom amid the unpredictable tides of existence. Hearts brimming with courage are ready to face challenges, fueled by hope, forming a solid foundation for life. They grow, learn, and forge enduring bonds in the narrative of life."

place full of promises and infinite beauty revolving in hope and wonder."

This batik painting pattern illustrates the journey of an adolescent beginning to grasp the essence of life, symbolised by a Geisha performing an elegant dance while wearing the *Topeng Rumyang*, a representation of joy and grace. The loose kimono conveys a sense of freedom, while the Geisha's dance movements appear to control the flow of waves behind her, symbolising skill and resilience in facing life's challenges. The gradation of blue hues and sharp wave strokes reflect increasingly complex challenges, yet the intended message is to confront life with strength and joy, even when the current flows against them.

4



Picture 7. "Memupuk kembali yang sudah layu" (Nurturing What Has Wilted)

"The stillness of the night feels loud to adults reflecting on the journey of their lives. The flame of hope in their hearts burns brightly, illuminating the darkness of that night. Standing tall amidst the powerful waves, they navigate life's twists and turns with wise principles. Each step is accompanied by sweet and bitter memories that nurture long-buried dreams. Prayers become the melody in the symphony of life, bridging reality and aspirations. Challenges come and go, fortifying the foundation of their lives for themselves and future generations. Behind their smiles lies an enduring tale of strength, perseverance, and unconditional love."

This batik painting pattern represents the phase of adulthood, symbolised by a Geisha standing gracefully while holding the *Topeng Tumenggung*, embodying the attitude and demeanour of a mature individual. The elegant folds of her kimono enhance her charm, while the increasingly forceful and sharp waves reflect the growing complexities of life's challenges. The spray of waves forming the *Mega Mendung* pattern signifies the connection between the cosmos and worldly realities. This artwork conveys the importance of spiritual strength and practical skills in

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Picture 8. "Garis keabadian" (The Line of Eternity)

"The finish line of life is death. What you sow in this world will bear fruit for eternity, leaving behind the message that life is a beautiful yet fleeting gift. What moral lessons can be imparted to the world? It reminds us that every breath drawn should be filled with gratitude, every moment cherished, and love given without limits. A pure soul lightens the steps on the journey toward infinite light. Do not always raise your head high; lower it to the ground—the final resting place of life on earth. In prayers and hope, those left behind send love and yearn for a reunion in the eternal realm."

achieving inner peace and addressing life's challenges with mindfulness and wisdom.

This batik painting pattern represents the final phase of life, death, with an ambience of sorrow and fearsome darkness. A Geisha holding the Topeng Klana symbolises desires and arrogance that must be avoided. The dark ocean surrounding the Geisha, along with towering waves, creates a dramatic impression, portraying death as a fierce and inevitable force for those ensnared in wrongful behaviour.

This artwork conveys a profound message about the dangers and consequences of moral failings. It is not merely a visual depiction of death. However, it serves as a warning for humanity to reflect on life, avoid destructive actions, and consider the moral legacy to leave behind when facing life's end.

D. Reflection of the Researcher Based on the Process of Creating the Batik Painting Pattern

This study created a batik painting pattern depicting a seascape and sky with life meanings behind them. Susanto and Murthadi, as cited in Iniyah (2012), stated that batik painting patterns are representations of objects, such as landscapes, filled with well-arranged details to produce beauty. This pattern displays lines embellishing the ocean as decorative details (isen-isen), creating beauty within the batik painting pattern.

Susanto, as cited in Iniyah (2012), further stated that painting patterns are part of modern batik, which provides freedom in selecting the objects to be applied. Although the batik patterns vary, the process of creation and colouring still uses the traditional Indonesian batik technique, which involves using wax as a resistance for colours and the canting tool in the "canting" process. Harmoko, as cited in Iniyah (2012), also argued that batik should not only be regarded as a craft but also as a technique for expressing creativity.

The researcher also gained reflections during the creation process of the pattern. In creating this batik painting pattern, the researcher employed the Indonesian batik technique. The use of batik techniques relies not only on skill but also on the feelings and intuition that develop during the canting process. Canting allows the researcher to explore and grasp the deeper meaning of every stroke made. This process also reminded the researcher of the values of patience, precision, perseverance, and flexibility—virtues often overlooked in today's fast-paced life.

Each drop and stroke of wax reflected the researcher's emotions and thoughts at the

moment. In this way, the researcher was able to experience the depth and beauty of every stage of creation, allowing them to appreciate both the process and the outcome. Creating the batik painting pattern in this study was the researcher's way of expressing themselves and communicating with the world, blending cultural heritage with their perspective. Thus, this study not only enriched the researcher's understanding of batik and art but also strengthened their identity as a researcher striving to connect tradition with innovation. It reinforced the researcher's belief that batik art is not only a cultural heritage that must be preserved but also a powerful medium for conveying essential messages about identity and human values.

CONCLUSION

This study created a batik painting pattern by combining two visual icons from the cultures of Cirebon and Japan with the concept of the human life journey and the grandeur of nature. The idea was explored through literature review and documentation studies on the characteristics of Mega Mendung, Cirebon masks, The Great Wave off Kanagawa, and the Geisha figure, which share a harmonious meaning within the religious and philosophical values of life. The human life journey, from birth to death, was represented through the Geisha figure and the characteristics of Cirebon masks, namely Panji, Samba, Rummyang, Tumenggung, and Kelana masks, with the assistance of a mood board for sketch design. The creation process employed the Indonesian batik technique, starting from the preparation of tools and materials, application of the sketch, canting using klowong and tembok canting, coloring with remasol for the main objects and naphthol for the Geisha's skin, and culminating in the removal process. Red and blue were chosen to maintain the identity of Cirebon's Mega Mendung batik, with the *colet* technique to create a colour gradient.

This research resulted in five batik painting patterns that depict the human life journey from birth to death, titled "The Beginning Page," "The Flower of Life in Bloom," "Meaning Amidst the Roaring Waves," "Nurturing What Has Wilted," and "The Line of Eternity." Using the Art-Based Research method, this study produced not only visual patterns but also insights from personal reflection and socio-cultural investigation. Art was used to convey concepts and issues relevant to human life, as well as to evaluate and interpret information critically and creatively. This study emphasises that culture is not only an identity of a nation but also a guide for life, as reflected in the exploration of Mega Mendung Batik, Cirebon Masks, The Great Wave off Kanagawa, and Geisha, linking cultural heritage with personal perspective to convey life values through batik painting patterns.

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