

# BORNEO BATIK PATTERN PRODUCTION CONCEPT

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## ABSTRACT

Batik art is famous with unique designs and patterns, which display the beauty of textile art and reflect the values and cultural identity of the community. In Malaysia, there are four main motifs recognized: floral, fauna, geometric, and abstract patterns. Among the popular motifs are plants such as bamboo shoots, ylang-ylang flowers, champaca, and others. The batik art in Sabah also possesses its own unique characteristics and identity based on its designs and patterns. This paper discusses the concept of producing contemporary batik patterns in Sabah, focusing on aspects of creativity and beauty. Additionally, this study analyzes the techniques used in producing Sabah batik patterns, which serve as symbols of cultural identity and pride for the local community. The research employs a qualitative approach, with data collected through interviews with batik makers and cultural experts to analyze the creativity of Sabah batik. Furthermore, this study reveals the beauty in the creation of Sabah batik patterns that combine traditional elements with innovative motifs inspired by nature. In conclusion, Sabah batik is a beautiful artistic manifestation, representing an important iconic symbol of Sabah's cultural identity. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of traditional arts such as Sabah batik, ensuring its continued relevance and influence in the modern world through the production of contemporary batik patterns in Sabah.

**Keywords:** Borneo, Batik, concept, production, patterns, cultural identity

## INTRODUCTION

Batik is an important cultural heritage in Malaysia, particularly in Sabah, where batik art reflects the rich identity of the community's cultural artistry. According to Nurul Sakinah et al. (2018), the batik industry in Sabah has undergone significant changes, offering opportunities for artisans to combine traditional elements with contemporary aspects in batik production. This development has led to the advancement of batik in Sabah, evolving in line with modern times, even though it was originally passed down through generations. This progress reflects the creativity of batik artisans in producing textile-based handicrafts using traditional techniques. The technique of batik production involves the use of wax as a color-resistant agent on fabric, creatively patterned (Amin, 2006). However, the creative expression of batik art has since transformed within the industry, with production techniques now including variations such as block printing and machine printing.

The study of the origins of batik production in Sabah is closely related to cultural exchanges with neighboring regions such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brunei. According to Zamrudin & Mohammad (2019), the batik heritage in Sabah is also influenced by the ethnic diversity found in the state. Each ethnic group in Sabah has its own distinct patterns and motifs that represent their individual ethnic identity, thereby reflecting the cultural diversity and richness of their heritage. For instance, the Kadazandusun, Bajau, and Murut ethnic groups have traditional patterns and motifs that can be applied in batik production. Many of the traditional patterns used in Sabah batik are also influenced by the designs found in traditional clothing and woven crafts of each ethnic group.

The use of traditional patterns and motifs has become a hallmark of Sabahan identity in the production of Sabah batik, potentially distinguishing it from other batik patterns found in Malaysia. The traditional patterns of ethnic groups, when applied in batik designs, have become more practical as they can be used for daily wear or traditional attire among the local community. However, with the passage of time and the growing influence of various cultures, Sabah batik has evolved, becoming a symbol of national identity and a cultural emblem showcased in various local events and celebrations. The acceptance of traditional batik patterns by communities both locally and internationally has proven the creativity of Sabah batik artisans to be truly unique, as they incorporate the identity patterns of each ethnic group residing in the Land Below the Wind.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Batik design is an enduring symbol of Malay heritage, representing the interplay between tradition and innovation. While its precise origins remain debated, Langewis and Wagner (1964) proposed that batik techniques in Java may have been influenced by Indian craftsmanship, a notion supported by Alfred Steinmann's theory. Steinmann argued that batik was brought from southeast Deccan to East India and later to Java by the Sinhalese in the 11th or 12th century. Such perspectives underscore the cultural diffusion and adaptive nature of batik as a regional art form.

In Malaysia, the tradition of batik-making dates back to the 15th century, with unique methods and motifs emerging in different regions. Early Malay artisans used natural tools, such as potatoes, for stamping designs, highlighting their ingenuity in creating distinct styles. A particularly notable variation, "batik pelangi," appeared in the 1770s. Produced using a tie-dye method akin to that of limar fabric, this type of batik illustrates the creative synthesis of existing techniques. However, batik pelangi largely vanished after World War II, underscoring the impact of historical disruptions on traditional crafts (Azmi et al., 2009; Yunus, 2011).

Sabah batik, introduced in 1989 by Rothman A Buntar, illustrates the localized adaptation of batik within the broader Malaysian context. Integrating motifs inspired by Sabah's 35 ethnic groups, Sabah batik embodies cultural signification, where designs are imbued with meanings unique to each community. For instance, "batik Linaudsilad," representing the Murut people, features plant-based motifs, while "batik Tinungkusan" reflects heritage themes. Such motifs not only preserve cultural identity but also serve as a narrative of Sabah's ethnic diversity.

Modern technological advancements have further transformed batik-making processes. Sabah batik now incorporates digital textile printing and Computer-Aided Design and Manufacturing (CAD-CAM), as seen in the operations of Chanteek Borneo Sdn. Bhd. These technologies enable precision and efficiency in pattern design, catering to contemporary aesthetic preferences while retaining traditional elements. The geometric and symmetrical patterns in Sabah batik, distinct from the floral motifs of Peninsular Malaysia, highlight regional artistic differences and reflect evolving consumer tastes.

Despite its adaptability, the batik industry in Sabah faces challenges such as sourcing natural dyes, which are integral to preserving authenticity but are increasingly scarce. This tension between traditional craftsmanship and industrial efficiency reflects broader theoretical discussions on sustainability and modernization in craft industries.

Batik is a traditional art form deeply rooted in cultural history, and its preservation is crucial in maintaining the identity and heritage of various communities, particularly in Southeast Asia. UNESCO recognized batik as part of the "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" in 2009, acknowledging its exceptional cultural value. Batik reflects not only aesthetic beauty but also profound philosophical and symbolic meanings, with each pattern carrying significant socio-cultural narratives. For instance, in Indonesia, the Sidomulyo motif symbolizes harmony and respect, and such designs are intricately linked to royal weddings and other significant life events.

However, the preservation of batik faces significant challenges, especially due to globalization and mass production. While machine-made batik offers accessibility and affordability, it risks diluting the craftsmanship and cultural meanings embedded in hand-dyed pieces. The rise of digital technology and contemporary fashion has created opportunities for batik to thrive in modern contexts, such as through collaborations with designers who blend traditional and modern elements, or by integrating sustainable fashion practices.

Efforts to preserve batik are ongoing and involve not only governmental support but also grassroots initiatives. Local communities, artisans, and organizations actively engage in workshops and educational programs to raise awareness of batik's importance. These efforts, along with UNESCO's recognition and the rising demand for authentic handmade items, offer hope for ensuring the continued relevance of batik in the future.

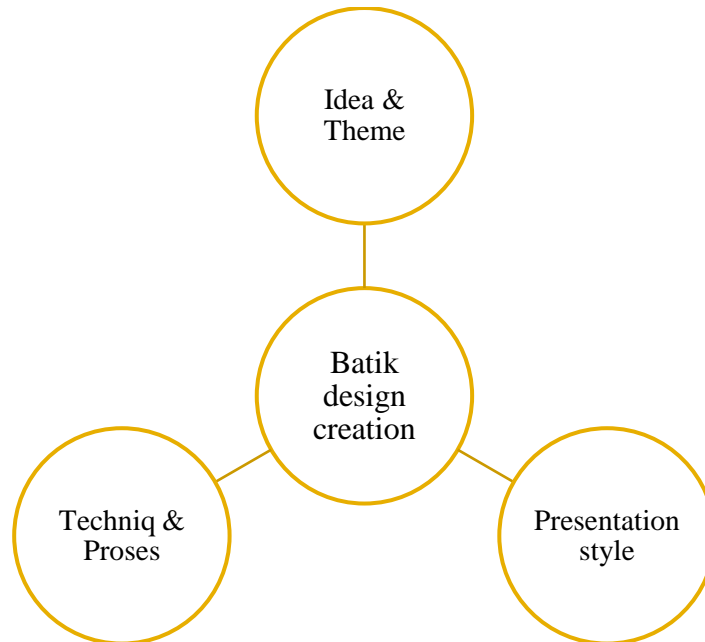
In conclusion, batik design in Sabah and Malaysia as a whole serves as a dynamic canvas for cultural expression, reflecting both historical traditions and contemporary innovations. The integration of theories on cultural diffusion, sustainability, and technological adaptation enriches our understanding of batik as a craft that transcends mere artistic value to become a vessel for cultural identity and historical continuity.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The data analysis in this paper is based on the theoretical perspective of creativity in design production to analyze contemporary batik patterns in Sabah. Mulyadi Mahmood (1993) stated that there are two main aspects of beauty, namely formalistic and iconographic, which are fundamental in the creation of an artwork. In appreciating a work of art, these two elements—formalistic and iconographic—are commonly known as form and meaning. These two elements unite to form a piece of art. An artist's understanding of using elements of art or artistic principles depends on how formal images are selected and arranged during the creation of a creative work in batik design.

A batik pattern design typically consists of two main elements: motif and meaning. The motif or pattern design of batik art is the visual image, presented through formalistic elements. The formalistic characteristics include elements such as line, shape, tone, form, space, composition, perspective, and color. The combination of these formalistic elements as a design idea will create a motif or pattern. The ability to analyze or recognize formalistic characteristics will bring every designer closer to the question of iconography or the meaning of a pattern design. The meaning of a pattern is the interpretation based on what the designer perceives. For example, an interpretation may be associated with issues significant to customs, culture, beliefs, history, myths, legends, and so on. Both elements, the pattern design and the meaning behind its creation, are closely intertwined in conveying the message of the batik design. A work of art emerges from the expression or creative skill and imagination of a designer, usually in visual form.

Therefore, the creation of batik patterns involves composition or arrangement that incorporates the principles of art and design elements. Through formalistic elements and iconography, an individual who understands and grasps the principles of art and design elements can analyze a work of art. Formalistic analysis is an important method for explaining information about a visual art piece, such as a batik pattern design. Thus, the creation of batik patterns can be classified into three parts: idea and theme, technique and process, and presentation style.



**Figure 1:** Aspects Influencing the Creativity of Batik Patterns.

Figure 1 shows three important aspects in the creation of batik patterns. The first aspect is the selection of ideas and themes, while the second aspect is the choice of techniques in the process, and the third aspect is the style of presentation. These three aspects are referred to as the artistic process that a designer must go through to produce batik patterns on fabric.

## METODOLOGY

The data analysis in this paper is from the perspective of the concept of batik pattern creation in Sabah. The data collection procedures involved the methods of observation and interviews with key figures. The observation method used was participatory observation, where the researcher went into the field to conduct direct observations. This method was carried out through visits to renowned batik production factories in Malaysia to gather research data. The focus of the visits was to identify ideas and techniques in batik pattern creation. The second research method was through interviews with batik experts in Sabah. The interview method was conducted face-to-face and through a forum program titled '*Sabah Batik, dimana Sabahnya?*' held in conjunction with the Universiti Malaysia Sabah Research Award (APUMS 2023). This method was conducted to obtain more detailed and in-depth information about the field of batik. All information discussed by these experts constitutes crucial data to help the researcher gain insights into the concept of batik pattern creation in Sabah.

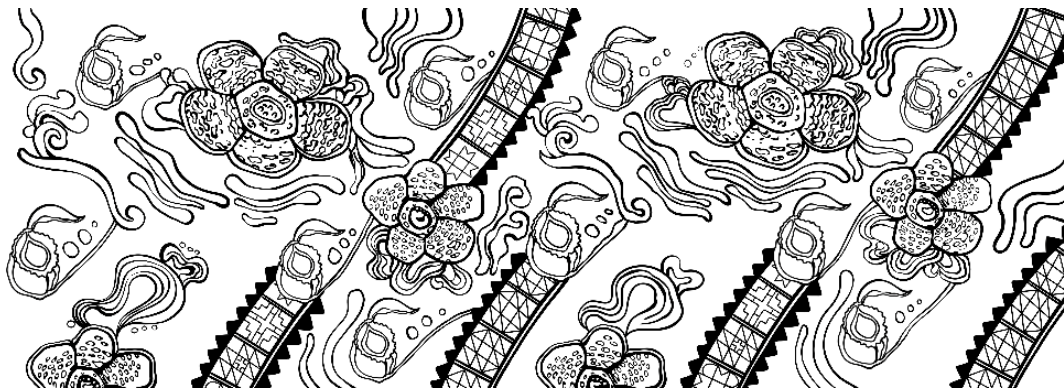
For the analysis method, the researcher applied Mulyadi Mahmood's (1993) theoretical approach, focusing on three essential aspects in the creation of batik patterns. The first aspect involves the selection of ideas and themes, the second pertains to the choice of techniques during the production process, and the third concerns the style of presentation. These three

aspects are regarded as the artistic process a designer must undergo to create batik patterns on fabric.

## IDEA DAN THEME ANALYSIS

To create attractive designs, a designer needs to have ideas for developing patterns through theme establishment. Themes can be set based on market demand or suitability. In terms of batik pattern design ideas, they arise from the designer's own environment, which greatly influences their ideas. The ideas and themes of batik found in Borneo are more focused on designs that reflect the identity of its communities. The uniqueness of the patterns based on these ethnic characteristics makes Sabah batik unique and appealing

The ideas and themes used by designers in creating batik patterns can differentiate between authentic batik and imitation batik. For example, the elements present in authentic sarong batik clearly display the motifs painted on both sides of the fabric. The patterns and motifs depicted on the outer part are of the same quality as those depicted on the inner part. This is because the techniques and processes used in creating the patterns and motifs do not involve traditional batik techniques but instead involve direct printing techniques using technology. The ideas and themes in the creative development of batik patterns should also emphasize artistic elements and refinement in terms of quality, which depend on each designer's level of understanding in selecting and arranging formal images in creating a pattern. Batik designs typically consist of several main elements, namely embellishment, composition, motifs, and meaning.



**Figure 2** Creativity in Embellishment.

The styling of batik touches on the visible images, specifically the display of formalistic elements in the produced batik. Figure 2 illustrates the creativity in producing Sabah batik patterns that combine floral images and traditional ethnic designs. The motifs and patterns displayed incorporate formalistic elements such as lines, shapes, forms, space, tones, and colors. The combination of formalistic elements as an image of a subject will produce patterns designed by the creators.



**Figure 3** Creativity in Composition.

Composition in the production of batik design is an effort to arrange or organize the elements drawn until they become harmonious (congruent, balanced, and alignment). Composition is also one of the important formalistic elements in shaping designs to be more creative. To produce contemporary batik designs, the composition must be created harmoniously, and designers need to understand and master the elements and principles of design more deeply.



**Figure 4** Creativity of Motif.

A motif is the basic shape or form in a design that consists of floral, fauna, organic, and geometric motifs. The motifs used in batik making are decorative patterns applied during the painting or stamping process. Batik motifs are produced in two main forms: organic motifs and geometric motifs. Organic motifs are inspired by nature, such as swirling clouds, plants, flowers, and animals.



**Figure 5** Creativity in Meaning.

The meaning of a design pattern is the interpretation of significance based on what a designer observes. Such perception refers to the understanding of an idea and theme that has been chosen. For example, an idea or theme associated with significant issues related to culture, customs, beliefs, history, myths, legends, themes, and so on. The unity of the related elements and meanings is closely interconnected in conveying the message of the design pattern produced.

## **TECHNIQUES AND PROCESSES ANALYSIS**

In addition to ideas and themes in the creative process of batik design, the techniques and processes involved must also be carefully considered to achieve beautiful and high-quality results. This is because several steps must be followed to create and produce captivating batik art. The variation in process techniques for each type of batik in Sabah also reflects the uniqueness of the batik itself. With the advancements we have today, the tools and processes used have also evolved to be more advanced and efficient. However, dedicated batik makers continue to apply traditional techniques to preserve the authenticity of the batik art. Moreover, the selection of fabrics also varies, creating differences in the quality of batik. According to Nurul Sakinah et al. (2018), the choice of fabrics such as cotton, silk, voile, and organza already shows the distinctiveness of this batik. Batik fabrics are not only used for traditional clothing but have also influenced everyday items like bed covers, bed sheets, pajamas, and more.

The techniques used in producing Sabah batik include the canting technique, tie-dye technique, rainbow technique, and block and stamp technique. From the aspect of the production process, each technique uses specific materials to create different resist effects. For example, in the tie-dye process, the dyeing of the material or medium used will resist the dye from penetrating certain areas, which results in patterns or motifs. In the context of batik techniques, the process is a design method applied to fabric, where the main materials used are wax, modern dyes, and natural dyes. Wax is the primary material used to separate colors, either

drawn with a tool called "canting" or applied with a tool called a "block" onto the fabric surface. The batik coloring process is then carried out using brushing and dipping techniques.

**Table 1** Batik Canting Techniques and Processes

<b>Techniques and Processes</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1. Pattern sketch	The fabric is stretched, and the contemporary motif design is sketched as desired using a pencil.
2. The fabric is stretched	After the sketching session is completed, the fabric is stretched using a metal frame.
3. Cooking candles	The wax mixture is heated until it melts.
4. Canting process	The canting process begins by scooping the melted wax with the canting tool, then tracing the patterns that were previously sketched with a pencil. This process is repeated until the entire fabric is covered.
5. Coloring process	The color is applied to the fabric based on the desired pattern using an appropriate brush.
6. Soaking process	After the canting and coloring processes are complete, the fabric is soaked for six hours in a solution known as sodium silicate. The purpose of this material is to fix the colors and ensure that the batik product does not fade.
7. Boil process	Next, the fabric will be cleaned, and soda ash powder is used to remove the wax. The powder is mixed into hot water, which serves to eliminate all the wax present on the fabric that is being boiled.
8. Dry process	Finally, the fabric is cleaned and hung out to dry, and a fragrance is also applied to scent the fabric.

The technique and process of producing batik fabric (batik canting) involves several steps using equipment such as canting and frame along with the application of specific techniques. The white fabric is first cleaned (starch removed) by boiling it with a mixture of alum or soaking it for several hours before being hung out to dry. This technique and process are similar to those applied in the traditional batik production method.

## **PRESENTATION STYLE IN CONTEMPORARY BATIK DESIGN ANALYSIS**

From the perspective of presentation style or the use of batik, contemporary batik is found to be more productive and quicker to produce compared to block or stamped batik, as the patterns or motifs created do not cover the entire surface of the fabric. Additionally, traditional batik is typically made for use as sarong clothing or loose batik, while contemporary or exclusive batik is produced for modern *baju kurung*, blouses, skirts, and shirts.

More clearly, contemporary batik is usually designed for women's clothing in various fashion styles, while men's clothing is made in both formal and casual styles. The motifs or designs of contemporary batik tend to be more freeform and showcase the creative talents of the designers or batik artists who produce them.

Although the production of contemporary batik allows for greater freedom and expression for each designer compared to traditional batik production, the quality of traditional



batik also possesses unique features and sustainability that are highly valued by society today. The assessment of whether the quality of contemporary batik is superior or otherwise is a subjective evaluation. Both types of batik, as previously mentioned, are artistic creations that have their own uniqueness and high quality.

The advancement and development of technology in batik production are becoming increasingly remarkable. Therefore, it is indeed appropriate for traditional batik to make a paradigm shift by taking steps to find a new breath in terms of design patterns, techniques, materials, colors, and the functions of batik itself.

Although technological advancements occur rather rapidly, their presence should not distract us from preserving the cultural heritage of our traditions. As we know, batik is one of the heritage crafts of the Malay textiles. The uniqueness and beauty of batik, when preserved and developed in line with current tastes, will undoubtedly ensure that Malay batik aligns with the demands of the market and the textile industry in particular.

To ensure that the heritage craft of batik has consistent continuity and aligns with contemporary tastes and lifestyles, an evolution of ideas or design patterns must be implemented, and a comprehensive transformation in the production of high-quality batik products must successfully dominate the international market.

The transformation of traditional motifs does not mean that we abandon the beauty of decorative patterns from the past; rather, this effort aims to empower and enhance the aesthetic value of batik itself. The role of designers is crucial in elevating batik design to a more global platform. Designers must be more astute in planning and reinforcing the principles and elements of design while being creative in the styling of batik motifs themselves.

The transformation of new ideas and combinations of techniques and creative motifs must align with current market demands. Contemporary batik art emphasizes elements such as creativity, design patterns, concepts, and productivity according to current trends. These characteristics serve as the primary foundation for measuring the aesthetic value of batik designs. The concept of contemporary design produced is more free-spirited, simplistic, and creative.

## **CONCLUSION**

The batik art of Sabah possesses its own uniqueness and charm, stemming from its contemporary batik designs. Creativity in batik design can be observed through the combination of ideas, techniques, and meanings. Sabah's batik has applied traditional ethnic patterns and motifs alongside elements of flora and fauna, resulting in aesthetic values. The creative process, based on ethnic traditional motifs and patterns that are more contemporary, indirectly produces batik designs that convey the meanings and cultural values of the people of Sabah, reflecting their increasing openness in line with global progress today.

Therefore, the findings from this research clearly indicate that creativity in the production of Sabah's batik is based on traditional ethnic motifs combined with floral and fauna motifs. Hence, the promotion of Sabah batik must be intensified to ensure that contemporary batik remains at the forefront of the craft industry in Malaysia.

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