Typography And Local Culture: How Local Values Influence Batik Label Design In Yogyakarta And Surakarta

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Abstract: Batik was incorporated into the Indonesian culture since the Majapahit era. At that time, the royal families of Majapahit Kingdom wore batik clothes for activities such as religious event or kingdom event. Since then, batik was seen as a symbol of nobility. The growth of batik industry, especially in Yogyakarta and Surakarta region, has produced a diverse motive and fabric quality of batik clothes. To help differentiate between these batik clothes, the owner of batik industries created batik labels with intricate design. This study focused on analysing the intricate design and typography found within three batik labels each from Yogyakarta and Surakarta Region to better understand the role of local culture and values in creating the batik label design using vernacular typography and cultural approach. The result shows that the local culture and values symbolically enforced by each keraton (kingdom-like body) and social system in Yogyakarta and Surakarta influenced the batik label design. The high cultured values of Yogyakarta keraton resulted in a more formal and rigid typefaces used in the batik label, giving off a classical feeling. Meanwhile, the more grass rooted values of Surakarta urban culture resulted in a fluid and flowing typefaces, giving off a trendy casual feeling.

Keywords: Batik, Typography, Local Culture, Vernacular Typography, Yogyakarta, Surakarta

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Roman Script brought by the European nations to Indonesia brought some changes to the usage of typeface since there weren’t that many options of typeface selection to be used in printed machine by that time [1]. The introduction of Roman Script also changes how typography was used in many industries in Indonesia, especially Batik industry. Batik was incorporated into the Indonesian culture since the Majapahit era. At that time, the royal families of Majapahit Kingdom wore batik clothes for activities such as religious event or kingdom event. Since then, batik was seen as a symbol of nobility. The growth of batik industry, especially in Yogyakarta and Surakarta region, has produced a diverse motive and fabric quality of batik clothes. To help differentiate between these batik clothes, the owner of batik industries created batik labels with intricate design. Batik labels serves not only as a representation of the Batik creators, but also as the brand identity. Bajraghosa [1] said that Batik label was first and foremost a means of brand identity as it was used to convey the nature and quality of the fabrics. Hence, Batik labels served its function in marketing, informing the consumers about the manufacturers and the fabric’s quality through their intricate design, often embroidered with a unique vernacular typography influenced by Roman Script. This vernacular typography incorporates ‘found’ items and borrowing low-culture forms of communication such as slang words [2]. Vernacular typography is shown as a representation of emotional and expression which is growing in the society, creating a uniqueness which become a local genius in Indonesia [3].

2. VERNACULAR TYPOGRAPHY ON BATIK LABEL YOGYAKARTA AND SURAKARTA

2.1. Batik Labels from Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta is a city in the middle of Java Island. The batik culture and its industry in Yogyakarta started when the batik, which can only be worn by the nobility from Yogyakartan Sultanate (Keraton), was brought to the society and gradually worn by ordinary people [1]. Batik then quickly becoming preferred clothing in Yogyakartans’ everyday life. This gave a way to the rising batik industry in Yogyakarta and the Batik culture was developed. The industry first started as a home industry in Prawirotaman and Tirtodipuran before spreading across the region. This makes a diverse owner of the home Batik industry, ranging from hibghorns, merchants, even to those of a Chinese descent. These growths see Batik label as an important item and started the Batik label requirements in the Batik industry.

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The three Batik labels shown in figure 1 are ‘Batik Tjap Betara Surya’, ‘Batik Serimpi’, and ‘Batik Tjap Prijaji’ from Yogyakarta region. Each of them contains a distinct design easy to recognize. Batik Tjap Betara Surya contains the image of Batara Surya illustration from the Javanese Wayang, the almighty Sun God from olden times surrounded by paddy leaves. The text ‘Tjap’ was placed at the top using manual script typeface accompanied by the text ‘Betara Surja’ using grotesque sans serif typeface written in a lineal outline. The text ‘Batik Tenun’ using transitional serif typeface was placed at the center, emboldened with shadow while the text ‘Jogjakarta’ was placed at the bottom using old style serif typeface. In Batik Serimpi, the illustration shows a traditional high culture Javanese dance called Serimpi. The text were placed at surrounding the illustration using sans serif typeface with a strong stroke at one side and thin stroke on the other side with outline style. This label only uses one typeface. Just like Batik Serimpi, Batik Tjap Prijaji also uses a similar layout where the text was placed in curve surrounding the illustration. This Batik label shows an illustration of a Javanese princely figure wearing nobility garb. The text on the top side of the curve was placed using serif typeface with strong stroke and hairline outline on the typeface while the text on the bottom side of the curve was placed using sans serif typeface with outline. The three Batik labels in figure 1 use various typefaces. Among the three, the serif and sans serif variation are dominantly found within. These typefaces variations ensure the quality of readability so the costumer can easily recognize their product through their Batik label. The local philoshophy and local values also play a role in determining the typeface used in these Batik labels. For example, in Batik Tjap Prijaji, the Yogyakartan people highly refer their nobility as great, powerful, and wise person. Thus, the typeface used was emphasized with strong stroke and outline variation to properly depict the royalty. Another example is the typeface used in Batik Serimpi. Serimpi is a sacred traditional dance performed only in the time of the ascension of a new king. It symbolizes the philosophy of Yogyakartan people in their war to fight the bad with goodness. The dance movement shows elegant yet bold and strong characteristics. Thus, the sans serif typeface was used to emphasize that while depicting the two warring side with the use of the typeface variations with strong stroke at one side and thin stroke at the other side.

2.2. Batik Labels from Surakarta
Surakarta is one of the cities located in the middle of Java. Just like Yogyakarta, Surakarta still has its own kingdom (keraton) highly regarded by the people in the region nowadays. Along with Yogyakarta, Surakarta was deemed as the city of Javanese Culture. The rich Javanese culture permeates in every aspect of everyday life in these two cities. But unlike Yogyakarta, Surakartan Batik culture started with the Surakartan people in mind. Ordinary citizens wear Batik depending on the occasion such as the birth of a new child or the death of the relatives. Thus, Surakartan Batik home industry prospered and Surakarta is known as the central of Batik in Java [5]. The Batik industry started in Laweyan dan Kauman region before they were spread across the region.

![Figure 1. Batik Labels from Yogyakarta region](image-url)
The three Batik labels shown in figure 2 are ‘Batik Putri Duyung’, ‘Batik Tiga Canting’, and ‘Batik Puspa Dewi’ from Surakarta region. Batik Putri Duyung shows a photograph of a young girl which was the daughter of the brand owner. Putri duyung means mermaid in Indonesian language. The text ‘Putri Duyung’ was placed on the ribbon at the top using old style serif while the text ‘Batik Solo’ was placed at the center using lineal sans serif. Batik Tiga Canting and Batik Puspa Dewi both shared a similarity in using a script typeface, but differ in variation. In Batik Tiga Canting, the text ‘Tiga Canting’ was written using script typeface with shadow, matching the style of a handwritten or lettering style. The illustration shows three cantings, a tool to paint the batik motifs on the cloth. The texts aside of ‘Tiga Canting’ are written using sans serif typeface with thin stroke and extended style. Meanwhile, Batik Puspa Dewi use script typeface with handwritten style emboldened with outline in the text ‘Puspa Dewi’. The text aside of ‘Puspa Dewi’ is written with sans serif typeface with the text ‘SOLO’ in particular using a sans serif with outline style variation. Immediately we can see the difference between the Batik labels from Surakarta and Yogyakarta. The script typeface in particular has been found dominantly in Batik labels from Surakarta aside of the serif and sans serif typefaces. The script typeface was mostly used, especially in contrast to the sans serif typeface with bold or thin extended stroke, to elevate the feeling of trendy and fluidity because of the quality in its clarity. The local philosophy and local values of Surakartan people also influence the variations used in the Batik label. For example in Batik Tiga Canting, the three cantings are tool used by the people, representing their daily life. Thus, it emphasizes the use of script typeface to give the sense of casual life. This creates a more grounded brand reflecting the urban culture in Surakarta.

3. YOGYAKARTA AND SURAKARTA: SHARED IDENTITY WITH DIFFERENT LOCAL VALUES

Yogyakarta and Surakarta both stemmed from one great kingdom called Kerajaan Mataram. In February 13th, 1755, a treaty called Giyanti Treaty was established by The Netherlands’ Oost Indische Campagnie to divide the once great kingdom into two, Kasunanan Surakarta and Kasultanan Yogyakarta [6]. Since then, the difference of local values between the once great kingdoms became apparent. The nobility in Surakarta was greatly influenced by the presence of The Netherlands’ intervention which force the local intellectuals (comprised of the youth movements) to press this feudalism practice and brings the control over into the hand of the citizen, thus reducing the role of the Keraton into a mere symbol [7]. The people in Yogyakarta, on the other hand, refer to their nobility in a high regard. Sabdacarakatama wrote that the firm role of the nobility from Kasultanan Yogyakarta makes the Netherlands to back away from greatly intervene the region [6]. The two regions of Yogyakarta and Surakarta thus shape their own distinct local values from their social structure and condition although they once shared a common Javanese identity dated back to the great Mataram Kingdom, Surakartan urban culture flourish and their daily life and occurrences such as family, birth, and death became the regarded values of their social system [7] while Yogyakartan high culture preserved themselves and becoming the pride of the region, influencing the values of Yogyakartan social system where Keraton is seen as an enforcer of culture which then further recognized by the Indonesian government by acknowledging its status and giving the Keraton a Declaration of Special Authority, enabling Yogyakarta as a special administrative region (Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta) in 1950.

4. CONCLUSION

Batik labels from Yogyakarta and Surakarta show typeface diversity applied on the labels. These typefaces can be used as an addition to the already existing variations of typeface, particularly on the typefaces used for old style, traditional look or vintage theme. Vernacular variations on the typeface found in batik label in Indonesia were influenced by the Victorian style, Art Noveau style, Art Deco style, and Plakatstijl brought by the European nations, particularly the Netherlands and assimilated into the local culture influenced by the local values to generate a distinct style of vernacular typography. Batik labels from Yogyakarta and Surakarta have a contrasting difference between the two. Batik labels from Yogyakarta use a formal and rigid variation of Serif and Sans Serif typeface giving a classical feeling while batik labels from Surakarta use a fluid and flowing variation of Script typeface giving a more trendy and casual feeling. The typeface used also shows the contrasting local values and philosophy found in Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Surakartan people are more grass rooted and more fluid in contrast to the Yogyakartan people. Yogyakarta pride themselves with their aristocratic high keraton culture in contrast to the Surakartan which is more grounded where urban culture flourished and which the keraton is not as influential as those in Yogyakarta.
These values influenced the use of typeface in batik label and the design shown within the illustration on the label. Batik labels from Yogyakarta for example refer to the symbol of high culture circulating around the keraton as an influential body like the Sun God (Betara Surya), the sacred dance (Serimpi dance), and their nobility (the prijaji). Meanwhile, Batik labels from Surakarta refer to the symbol of everyday daily life of ordinary people and their life's occurrences such as the family daughter and the canting. These Batik labels are not showing just one particular known style but a mix of different styles assimilated with local values and philosophy. Although a product of a home industry, Indonesian batik labels are distinct enough to be a great visual identity, not just showing the brand itself but also representing the local culture which is easily recognizable by the people from the said culture. This paper can shed lights on how local values influence batik label design, especially the usage of vernacular typography as an addition to the diverse variations of the typeface based on the local culture. Further research is also needed to deepen the understanding of vernacular typography, especially those influenced by local values and ideas, as a contribution to the typeface diversity that can be used to represent values and ideas that is hard to express using a more known variation of typefaces.

REFERENCES


