The cultural values of the landscape of Batik Giriloyo, a traditional industry of Yogyakarta

Batik is an art and craftsmanship which is a paragon of Indonesian cultural heritage. It is a traditional technique to decorate cloth which has been passed down from one generation to another for hundreds of years. On the island of Java Batik could formerly only be worn by Royal Families. Batik patterns were exquisitely designed and symbolized philosophical meanings which represented social status.

Due to its significance batik has been assigned the status of Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO on October 2, 2009. Afterwards the Indonesian government has designated 2 October as National Batik Day and has encouraged Indonesians to wear batik. The UNESCO recognition and government endorsement have given considerable influence to the Indonesian people on wearing batik garments and on having household items and handicrafts with batik design. This enthusiasm certainly have boosted the batik industry which today has become an important sector in the Indonesian economy. Furthermore, it has stimulated the re-emergence of traditional batik production centres in the country.

An example of Batik Giriloyo using natural coloring material (picture credit: Tendy Satrio)
in Wukirsari Village in Imogiri sub-district, which produce Batik, namely Giriloyo. Three main hamlets (dusun-s) are main producers in this village: Karangkulon, Giriloyo, and Cengkehan. Batik Giriloyo is manufactured by hand-drawn and stamped so the quality is different to Batik textile produced by machine. Recently the hamlets engage in tourism services alongside the batik production with batik and landscape as attractions. It seems that batik culture has been embedded in the landscape in a special way which causes Batik Giriloyo and its production area to be distinctive among batik production centres. This phenomenon will be explored by interpreting the various cultural values of the landscape of the hamlets.

History

The history of batik in the area was influenced by the establishment of the Imogiri graveyard - a cemetery of the Mataram kingdom’s Royal Families - in a hill near the hamlets in 1632. Sometime after the construction, the Mataram Yogyakarta King ordered the communities surrounding the graveyard to produce Batik for the Royal Families and the servants who guarded the cemetery. At that time the people assigned were only taught how to draw the pattern on the cloth. Although the palace later terminated the order they kept drawing and sold the pattern to the merchants in the city. They started to produce their own batik after several groups of batik drawers were trained in colouring batik through a disaster relief program. This program was undertaken after a 6.2 SR earth-quake hit Yogyakarta in 2006 which caused severe damage in the hamlets. The manufacture of Batik Giriloyo is a traditional industry which is currently performed by twelve groups of artisans in the three hamlets united in an organization which not only manages batik production but also tourism.

[caption id="attachment_109" align="aligncenter" width="367"]
Cultural values of landscape. An approach to understanding the potential range of values that might be present in landscape, namely Cultural Values Model, has been developed by Janet Stephenson. This concept perceives in a landscape three fundamental components: (1) forms which are related to tangible elements, (2) practices/processes and (3) relationships which include intangible elements. Natural and artificial forms in the landscape of the area are hills, river, rice fields, woodlands and forests, settlements connected by roads, workshops and showroom buildings, the kings’ cemetery, religious buildings, and tourism facilities. The main practices and processes in the landscape include the knowledge and practice of manufacturing Batik, governance of organization, agricultural activities, religious festivals, tourism, earthquakes and landslides. The relationships component consists of the King’s cemetery’s history along with stories and myths, the history of Batik and sense and scenery of the rural landscape.
Human-landscape interaction
These three components which basically influence each other can be applied to interpret the interaction of landscape and inhabitants. The hilly topography composed mainly of rocky soils is certainly not suitable for agriculture. Although there are farmers in the hamlets, only a few number who have rice fields while the rest preferring to hire themselves out as labourers. Making batik is therefore a good alternative for livelihood. Instead of rice fields the landscape of the three hamlets predominantly comprised of forest and woodland which form a buffer around the king’s cemetery. This land use is suitable for the landscape because vegetation minimizes run-off reducing the risk of landslides. Unlike heavy industry which involves special structures and buildings for production which occupy a large site, the manufacture of Batik Giriloyo is a domestic industry which can be executed in a small space by engaging in un-intensive activities. Thus, space limitation and fragile landscape pose no problems for the industry.

Conclusion

Although Batik making commenced at the King’s order instead of beginning as a response by inhabitants to the landscape conditions, this intangible element has to some extent affected the landscape. The Batik Giriloyo industry has indeed shaped the identity of the area. The land use of this activity is suitable for a low carrying-capacity landscape; therefore it supports the sustainability of the landscape and subsequently the conservation of the historical landscape of the King’s cemetery. Finally, this traditional industry has contributed to the preservation of Indonesian cultural heritage by putting the knowledge into practise.

Note: This article has been published in the Bulletin of The International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage, No. 70, 4th quarter, 2015 (Download the article). Many thanks to Ibu Hasti Tarekat for the opportunity to write down an article of industrial heritage, and Catherine Lee and Bernadette Lee for the proof reading and comments.