



Visual narrative of ethnic identity: preserving Chinese culture through traditional hand-drawn batik Lasem



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ABSTRACT

Lasem, a coastal town in Central Java, Indonesia, is well known for its unique batik that blends cultural influences from both Chinese and Javanese. The study explores how traditional hand-drawn batik Lasem functions as a visual narrative representing Chinese ethnic identity and helps preserve culture in Indonesia's diverse society. Through qualitative research, data were collected through purposive sampling of key informants, namely artisans and batik entrepreneurs at the 'Kidang Mas' batik center in Lasem. Data collection techniques include in-depth observation, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation of the batik-making process. The researchers used thematic analysis to examine repeated patterns, cultural symbols, and meaning in the batik-making process. The findings exhibit cultural preservation in practices such as using canting tools, applying nature-based designs, and incorporating symbols from Chinese mythology. These motifs are decorative and tell stories regarding belief, values, and cultural identity. This study adds to discussions on intangible cultural heritage by showing that traditional batik is more than simply 'an art' but a living expression of Chinese-Indonesian identity. The combination of symbolic and local elements reflects cultural strength and adaptation, highlighting hand-drawn batik Lasem in keeping minority identities in Indonesia visible in Indonesia's multicultural society.



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1. Introduction

Located in a small coastal town in northeastern Central Java, Indonesia, Lasem was a vital stop in the past, along the northern sea trade route, linking major ports like Semarang and Surabaya. Though no longer a central trading hub, Lasem still holds cultural importance due to its long-standing Chinese community, with their traditional Chinese-style buildings that remain part of the town's landscape in the present. The Chinese presence in Lasem could be traced back to the 15th century, when Admiral Zheng He's fleet arrived. This event began early Chinese migration and cultural exchange in Indonesia. Over time, this interaction led to acculturation, with one of its most visible outcomes being Lasem's hand-drawn batik, known as *batik tulis*. This traditional art combines Chinese symbols and colors with the aesthetics of Javanese batik. Despite combining two cultural aesthetics, Lasem batik is not just about making beautiful fabric. It tells a visual story of cultural blending and continuity. Motifs such as dragons, phoenixes, peonies, and vibrant red and deep blue colors show how Chinese traditions merge with local Indonesian artistry. This textile art plays a vital role in expressing and preserving Chinese-Indonesian identity in a diverse society. Historical records show that by the late 1800s, especially around the 1870s, Chinese-Indonesian families played a key role in developing and preserving batik in Lasem [1]. These artisans added new creative styles while keeping

traditional techniques like hand-drawing with the *canting* tool and using natural dyes. These practices are more than just methods; they reflect respect for ancestors and act as a form of cultural resilience. As such, Lasem batik is both an art form and a living archive of ethnic identity and heritage.

This article, such as those by Jaeni [2] and Utomo *et al* [3], highlights the important roles batik plays in economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and the formation of community identity. In the context of Lasem, batik motifs are not merely aesthetic expressions but carry symbolic meanings that reflect the community's social and religious values, such as togetherness, prosperity, patience, and compassion. For example, explores how Lasem batik patterns function as cultural symbols that represent the socio-religious life of the local community. Her research shows that certain motifs, such as the *burung hong* (phoenix), lotus flowers, and cloud formations, symbolize harmony, virtue, and hope, influenced by a blend of Javanese and Chinese philosophical values. These patterns serve as a medium for intergenerational transmission of cultural norms and identity, making batik a living archive of Lasem's multicultural heritage. Meanwhile, Utomo *et al* focus on how batik production contributes to community resilience by empowering women economically and fostering local pride [3]. His research underlines the role of batik as both an economic commodity and a vessel of cultural meaning, helping to sustain traditional knowledge in the face of modernization. Together, these studies contribute to a deeper understanding of Lasem batik not only as an artistic product but also as a tool for cultural continuity and social cohesion within a diverse community.

Chinese influence has dramatically shaped the patterns, designs, and style of Lasem batik [4]. Through bold visuals and bright colors, it reflects cultural exchange. As William noted, batik patterns are visual structures with meaning and beauty [5]. Lasem batik's uniqueness is further showcased in how it mixes elements from different cultures into a distinctive style. One example of this blending is *Tiga Negeri* batik ("Three Regions Batik"). This type of batik shows the mix of cultures through a three-part dyeing process: the maroon red from Lasem reflects Chinese aesthetics, the indigo blue from Pekalongan shows Dutch colonial influence, and the soja brown from Solo represents traditional Javanese values like humility and harmony. The hand-drawn *Batik Lasem* generally uses colors like red, indigo (*niru*), soja (brown), green, purple, black, beige, and white. Each color has cultural meaning: red and gold are tied to Chinese symbolism, indigo and green hint at Islamic and colonial influences, and soja is central to classic Javanese batik. Chinese motifs in *Batik Lasem* are more than decoration; they are symbols of identity and pride for the Chinese-Indonesian community. Patterns like dragons, phoenixes, and peonies represent a long cultural legacy and help shape Lasem's current cultural identity. Comprehending these motifs requires comprehension of representation and how meaning is communicated through signs, symbols, and images. Representation is how people express and understand meaning, whether real or imagined. It uses language and symbols to describe ideas, people, or objects. Thus, in the case of *Batik Lasem*, it uses visual symbols to express cultural identity, values, and history.

Chinese patterns in *Batik Lasem* are one of the forms of identity and pride of the Chinese ethnic group that still survives today. This shows the efforts and representation of the Chinese ethnic group to maintain their identity. The context of cultural identity includes things that tell how culture, customs, and historical backgrounds influence an area to become an area that is identical to the Chinese ethnic group. Culture is significant to show the identity of a community or society [6], [7]. Representation can also mean an action that presents or represents something through something outside of itself, usually in the form of a sign or symbol [8], [9]. Returning to representation is not just about showing what's real. It is a way to create meaning using symbols, signs, and codes. Representation helps turn experiences, ideas, or identities into something we can see, read, or understand daily, like images, stories, or language. Representation can appear in many forms: words, pictures, events, or stories that express feelings, ideas, and facts [10]. Representation is about using language or other forms of communication to share meaning with others. It works through shared signs and symbols that people in the same culture understand. According to scholars, it includes using language and other tools to shape how something is shown or understood, allowing it to carry specific social

meanings or effects [11]. Representation is a tool in such a case, playing an essential role in how people give meaning to cultural products [12]. It is also profoundly connected to how identity is created and understood. Cultural identity is not something fixed. Instead, it is built through repeated use of signs, stories, and symbols that reflect a group's values, history, and traditions. Through this process, identity can be seen, understood, and shared in society. In the case of *Batik Lasem*, representation is used to express and celebrate Chinese-Indonesian identity. Batik is not just a traditional craft; it's a visual space where identity is preserved, communicated, and reshaped through art. Thus, this study explores Batik Lasem as a visual narrative that shows Chinese ethnic identity and acts as a way to protect cultural traditions in a diverse society. It aims to contribute to discussions on intangible cultural heritage by showing how traditional batik-making is more than just art; it is a way to keep identity alive across generations. It also helps us understand how visual symbols in the Batik Lasem are active in building and maintaining cultural identity over time.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with the phenomenological method. According to Kiymet Selvi, phenomenological research is used to understand the meaning behind people's real-life experiences with a specific concept or event [13]. From these approaches, the study aims to understand the personal experiences of Batik Lasem artisans in keeping their cultural traditions alive. The phenomenological approach is chosen to capture the real meaning of these experiences from the artisans' perspectives, without adding outside assumptions or theories. This study focuses on how cultural values and symbolic meanings are expressed through making traditional hand-drawn *Batik Lasem*. Through listening to artisans' personal stories, this method helps better understand how identity, tradition, and meaning are reflected in their daily batik-making practices. The phenomenological approach values individual, lived experiences as a way to understand cultural or social phenomena. Instead of finding a single truth, it looks at how people make sense of their experiences [14]. Since this method is subjective by nature, the researcher worked to reduce bias by involving various participants and using multiple ways to check the data. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling, meaning they were selected based on specific criteria. To take part in this study, participants had to be: (1) Traditional batik artisans or individuals who have inherited *Batik Lasem* knowledge and understand its symbolic meanings; (2) Community members who wear and use batik in everyday life or during traditional and cultural events. The informants included senior batik artisans, business owners, and batik workshop leaders from Kampung Batik Babagan, located in the Lasem Subdistrict of Rembang Regency, Central Java. This area is known as a key center for traditional *Batik Lasem*.

Participants were selected using the following criteria: (1) Someone who has been involved in making *Batik Lasem* for more than 30 years; (2) Someone who learned batik skills passed down through generations in their family; (3) Someone who still makes batik tulis using traditional tools and methods. In-depth interviews were conducted with Ibu Suwarti (age 50) and Ibu Keni (age 69), two senior artisans at Batik Kidang Mas. Additional insights were gathered from Ibu Jumiati (age 70), a respected elder known for her deep cultural knowledge. Data were collected using several qualitative methods: (1) In-depth interviews to understand personal stories and the symbolic meanings of batik motifs; (2) Participant observation of how batik is made, how it is used in daily life and rituals, and how designs are visually expressed; (3) Documentation, including photographs, batik samples, and motif records. To ensure the credibility and accuracy of the data, this study used several validation techniques, including source triangulation, member checking, and spending extended time in the field. Triangulation was done by comparing information from different participants and using various data collection methods. Member checking involved sharing the initial findings with the participants to confirm whether the interpretations were accurate and aligned with their experiences. Data analysis followed Moustakas' phenomenological method [16] which included these steps: (1) Identifying essential statements related to the meanings behind batik motifs; (2) Grouping these statements into meaningful themes; (3) Creating descriptions of what the participants experienced regarding the meaning of batik; (4) Describing how these experiences were lived,

for example, through daily routines or during ritual batik-making; (5) Combining everything into a complete description that reflects the shared essence of how hand-drawn batik Lasem carries symbolic meaning.

3. Results and Discussion

Fig. 1 shows the traditional process of hand-drawn batik clothmaking in Lasem, which takes place at the home of Mr. Rudi Iswanto, a local batik entrepreneur. Batik-making is completed in the backyard using traditional tools and techniques passed down for generations in Lasem and other batik-producing areas in Indonesia. The process still uses the *canting*, a classic tool for applying wax, and follows these steps:

- *Nyungging*: Designing the batik pattern on paper. This step requires creativity and artistic skill.
- *Njaplak*: Transferring the paper pattern to fabric by tracing it.
- *Nglowong*: Drawing the main outlines on fabric with hot wax using a *canting*.
- *Ngiseni*: Adding fine decorative details inside the motif using a fine-tipped *canting*.
- *Nyolek*: Coloring parts of the motif with a small brush.
- *Mopak*: Re-waxing the colored sections to protect them during later dyeing.
- *Nembok*: Covering all areas not meant to be dyed.
- *Ngelir*: Dyeing the fabric, usually starting with light colors and ending with darker ones.
- *Nglorod* (first): Boiling the cloth to remove wax after the first dyeing stage.
- *Ngrentesi*: Adding tiny filler patterns between the central motifs using a fine *canting*.
- *Nyumri*: Refining the motif with final details.
- *Nglorod* (second): Final boiling to remove any remaining wax, leaving the batik fully revealed.



Fig. 1. The traditional process of hand-drawn batik production

This detailed method reflects the high level of craftsmanship and cultural meaning embedded in every stage of *batik tulis*. All the steps of batik-making in Lasem, from *nyungging* to *nglorod*, are still done traditionally. The *ngelir* (dyeing) process often uses natural dyes like *mengkudu* (morinda), which produces a rich red color, although the plant is now harder to find. The primary informants from Batik Kidang Mas were Ibu Suwarti (50), Ibu Keni (69), and Ibu Jumiati (70). Each began learning batik shortly after elementary school, directly from their parents. They are examples of how batik knowledge is passed down from generation to generation. Ibu Suwarti said:

"For us, Batik Lasem is more than decorated cloth. It's a meaningful heritage. That's why it must be made traditionally using a canting."

Ibu Jumiati added:

"Batik Lasem has to be made by hand with a canting. That's the real way."

The *canting* is a small copper tool used to draw wax lines by hand. It takes patience and skill. Ibu Keni explained:

"Making batik takes time, but that's what gives it value. If it's printed or machine-made, it's not real Batik Lasem, it loses its soul."

Creating one piece of batik can take weeks to months, depending on the design and filler patterns (*isen-isen*). For these artisans, batik-making is more than a job; it's part of their lives and heritage.

"I started making batik at 10, learning from my mother. Back then, it wasn't a choice. It was to help the family. But over time, I saw it's more than a means to an end. It's like the lifeblood of Lasem. If we don't protect it, who will?"

"My parents always said batik is not just work, it's a legacy. Every wax line tells a story. I still use a canting because it's part of the pakem, our unwritten traditional rules."

"I've been doing batik since I finished primary school. I never sought higher education, but batik helped me raise my children. For me, batik is not just cloth; it's our identity. Lasem is known for its batik, and it survives because we keep it alive."

These stories show that batik in Lasem is not just a way to earn a living, but a deeply rooted cultural practice tied to family and community traditions. These women learned batik through hands-on experience as children, showing how cultural knowledge is passed on informally yet effectively. Their stories prove that *batik tulis* is a living heritage. Each design, each technique, and each *pakem* holds cultural meaning based on how the people of Lasem see the world. The idea of *pakem*, as explained by Ibu Keni, shows that tradition is not seen as something rigid, but as a meaningful guide. This fits with Michele Lamont's view that identity is built and maintained through cultural practices, not something we are born with [15]. The testimonies also reflect a shared identity among Lasem's batik makers. When Ibu Jumiaty says, "Batik is identity," it shows how Batik Lasem symbolizes who they are. It carries values like patience, beauty, and belonging. Batik-making is a personal expression and a collective cultural story, especially of Lasem's Chinese-Javanese heritage. From the perspective of cultural preservation, the interview dialogue from the batik-maker ladies shows how traditional knowledge is kept alive through cross-generational family practice. This section reflects Paul's Brass theory of cultural representation, which explains that identity is formed and expressed through symbolic actions [16]. In this case, the strong commitment to using *batik tulis* (hand-drawn batik) acts as symbolic resistance against mass-produced or machine-made batik. That way, not only does it help preserve the 'soul' of the batik, it also helps maintain the artistic quality and cultural identity of Lasem's batik tradition.

The interviewed artisans emphasize that keeping the traditional method alive is essential to protect the authenticity and cultural meaning of Batik Lasem. They consistently said that 'true *Batik Lasem*' must be made by hand (*batik tulis*), not stamped (*batik cap*) or printed by machine. For them, batik is a living tradition passed down through generations. Their insistence on using the *canting* of a copper tool with a small spout to apply hot wax shows a technical preference and a deep respect for *pakem*. These unwritten traditional rules guide the design, motifs, colors, and techniques in Batik Lasem. These *pakem* are learned through practice and oral tradition and help maintain the symbolic meaning in every part of the batik. Hence, this interview can prove that the Batik Lasem tradition is a dynamic and living heritage, sustained by artisans who act as cultural guardians for their community. Also, *batik tulis* is not just a craft, but a way to express identity, pass on tradition, and resist cultural erosion. Furthermore, according to Bourdieu's theory [17], the idea is reflected in the life experiences of Batik Lasem artisans, especially in the way people absorb values, skills, and beliefs through repeated practices in their everyday social

environment. Making batik is more than a job or a way for these artisans to gain income. It is a cultural practice deeply tied to memory, identity, and the survival of their community. The concept of *pakem*, the traditional code of aesthetics and meaning, is not seen as something rigid, but as a flexible guide that is constantly interpreted and adapted. Thus, it represents the history, values, and pride of Lasem's Chinese-Javanese heritage.

Due to its representation of Chinese-Javanese heritage, informants had also stated that *batik tulis* is the most valid form of *Batik Lasem*. For them, replacing it with a *batik cap* (stamped batik) or printed techniques would reduce its authenticity and cultural depth. In their eyes, batik is more than an art. It is an essential heritage filled with meaning and identity passed through generations. Consequently, several artisans, including Ibu Keni and Ibu Suwanti, had expressed their concerns about younger generations losing interest in continuing the batik tradition. Many of their children prefer working in nearby factories, such as shoe companies, which offer more stable income. Despite coming from personal experiences of the artisans, their concerns reveal a broader shift happening in Lasem's artisan community. The younger generation increasingly chooses modern jobs over traditional crafts, a trend in many areas where heritage practices struggle to compete with industrial work. This poses a challenge in preserving cultural heritage because the risk of being forgotten increases when traditional knowledge is no longer viewed as 'practical' or 'rewarding'. While this study only involved a few participants, the findings reflect larger issues in cultural preservation. Lasem's situation shows the need for revitalization efforts such as cultural education, financial support, and youth engagement programs. These steps are vital to keeping *Batik Lasem* alive as a tradition, not just history.

Going back to the visuals of *Batik Lasem* for further discussion, *Batik Lasem* is known for its bold colors and multicultural character. As a coastal batik style, it reflects centuries of cultural blending between Chinese and Javanese traditions. This mix is evident in its visual design. Motifs create the basis of the fabric's artistic language. Chinese influence can be seen in animal symbols like the phoenix (*fenghuang*), kilin (a unicorn-like creature), dragon (*liong*), and *koi* fish; each representing values like strength, virtue, and persistence. These animals are often combined with flowers like chrysanthemum, pomegranate, magnolia, peony, and sakura, which symbolize beauty, good fortune, and renewal in Chinese culture. Combining these Chinese elements with traditional Javanese batik features makes *Batik Lasema* a visual symbol of cultural fusion. The patterns are not just aesthetically pleasing; they tell stories and hold meaning from both cultures. Table 1 categorizes the main visual motifs in Batik Lasem, distinguishing those from Chinese tradition and those from Javanese batik. The designs shown in Table 1 highlight the distinctive motifs that define *Batik Lasem*. Among them, floral patterns stand out for their rich variety and deep symbolic meaning. These motifs are not just decorative; they act as cultural texts that express the values, beliefs, and way of life of the Lasem community. The frequent use of floral themes reflects a strong connection between people and nature, showing how cultural and ecological ideas are blended through the long history of Javanese and Chinese influence in Lasem. During interviews, Pak Rudi explained:

"The inspiration for batik patterns often comes from everyday life. For example, if someone drinks coffee, they might include coffee beans in the design."

Vina added:

"Even horse footprints or coconuts can be part of the pattern, too."









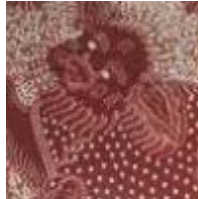






Pak Rudi continued:

"We include horseshoes here, coconut leaves there. Maybe someone was batik-ing under a coconut tree, and they just decided to add that. Even a comb, why not? It's all part of the artisan's imagination."

He emphasized:

"There's cultural mixing here, but also the artisan's identity. They translate what they see in their daily life onto the fabric."

Table 1. Batik Lasem Pattern

Floral Patterns Batik Tulis Lasem	Example of Patterns	Javanese Patterns	Example of Patterns	Chinese Patterns	Example of Patterns
Tulip		Watu Kecak		Burung Hong	
Mawar		Beras Utah		Naga	
Anggrek		Latohan		Kilin	
Sepatu		Kupu-kupu		Pring-Pringan	
Krisan		Gunung Ringgit		Buketan Seruni	

These comments show that cultural blending in *Batik Lasem* is closely tied to the artisan's life and surroundings. For example, the Lokcan motif includes flowers and animals with symbolic meanings from Chinese tradition. Meanwhile, Javanese influences appear in visual elements like coffee beans, coconut trees, and combs, all inspired by everyday objects and local customs in Lasem. These details are often added during the *isen-isen* stage, filling in empty spaces in the pattern, reflecting the artisan's spontaneous creativity based on what they experience in daily life. The key points from interviews about floral and symbolic motifs in *Batik Lasem* are summarized in Table 2. Floral patterns in *Batik Lasem* show a wide range of shapes and meanings. These designs are not just for decoration; they also reflect the local wisdom, daily life, and the deep connection between nature and culture in Lasem. Over the centuries, a blending of Javanese and Chinese traditions has shaped these motifs, making them powerful symbols of the community's values and identity. One of the most well-known floral designs is the *Sekar Jagad* motif. In Javanese, *sekar* means "flower" and *jagad* means "world," so it means "flowers of the world." In Lasem, this motif is more than decoration; it represents harmony, unity, and happiness. It reflects how people in Lasem accept cultural diversity and live peacefully together. One of the most well-known floral designs is the *Sekar Jagad* motif. In Javanese, *sekar* means "flower" and *jagad* means "world," so the name translates to "flowers of the world." Culturally, this motif stands for harmony and diversity, symbolizing the ideal of unity

in Lasem's multicultural society. Regarding representation theory [18], *Sekar Jagad* is not just a picture of flowers; it tells a story about cultural diversity, beauty in difference, and peaceful coexistence.

Table 2. Lasem Flower Batik Patterns

Flora Patterns	Description	Meaning and Symbolism
<i>Angkub Kembang</i>	Angkub Kembang or flower buds.	The meaning to be conveyed is an optimistic hope for progress.
Blarakan	<i>Blarakan</i> or coconut leaves	A motif inspired by wild grass (<i>blarak</i>) or dry coconut leaves. It represents things that may be overlooked but are still valuable in sustaining daily life.
<i>Cabe</i>	Chili pepper	<i>Cabe</i> is a type of vegetable that is well-known in the Lasem community. In some interpretations, it can also represent emotional intensity or protection.
<i>Bledak Cabe</i>	<i>Bledak</i> is dominated by white, plus the shape of a chili.	Literally means "exploding chili". A stylized version of the <i>cabe</i> motif. This might be a more expressive or "bursting" representation of power or emotion.
<i>Brayo</i>	<i>Brayo</i> is a mangrove-like plant that bears small, bitter-tasting fruit that grows on the coast of Lasem. This plant thrives in Lasem.	Seaweed, native to coastal areas like Lasem. It also reflects Lasem's strong connection to the sea and maritime culture.
<i>Jae Jaenan</i>	<i>Jae Jaenan</i> is a type of ginger crop.	Ginger and its stylized form. The shape of the ginger depicts the warmth and friendliness of the Lasem community.
<i>Latoan</i>	<i>Latoan</i> plant is a plant that grows on the seabed and is a typical Rembang food.	A type of small creeping plant or vine, related to <i>lato</i> or seaweed. Often seen as a gentle but persistent force.
<i>Padi</i>	The shape of the rice plant symbolizes prosperity in life.	Rice plant. One of the most sacred and revered plants in Javanese culture.
<i>Pring-pringan</i>	Bamboo motif. The shape of bamboo is beautiful.	The shape of a bamboo tree means the meaning of long life, so people who make batik and have batik with bamboo trees are always healthy and have a long life.
<i>Sekar Jagad</i>	This pattern features various floral patterns arranged beautifully and colorfully.	This pattern symbolizes the beauty and diversity of the world. It's often interpreted as a symbol of global harmony and cultural richness.
<i>Teratai</i>	The lotus flower symbolizes purity, innocence, and rebirth.	In many traditions (including Javanese-Buddhist), the lotus grows in muddy water but blooms beautifully, signifying purity rising above adversity.
<i>Blarakan</i>	<i>Blarakan</i> or coconut leaves	Often used to represent rural life, endurance, and modesty.
<i>Cabe</i>	<i>Cabe</i> is a type of vegetable that is well-known in the Lasem community.	Sometimes associated with feminine strength and boldness.
<i>Bledak Cabe</i>	<i>Bledak</i> is dominated by white, plus the shape of a chili.	A more dynamic or dramatic version of the basic chili motif.
<i>Bledak Kembang</i>	Flowers with a white base color	Suggests joy that bursts outward, like blooming or festivity.
<i>Bledak Kipas</i>	Fan shape with a white base color	The fan motif also hints at sociability and refinement.
<i>Brayo</i>	<i>Brayo</i> is a mangrove-like plant that bears small, bitter-tasting fruit that grows on the coast of Lasem. This plant thrives in Lasem.	A motif that reflects Lasem's coastal heritage and harmony with nature.
<i>Jae Jaenan</i>	<i>Jae Jaenan</i> is a type of ginger crop. The shape of the ginger depicts the warmth and friendliness of the Lasem community.	Ginger is a common medicinal root in Javanese tradition, representing protective and restorative qualities.

This motif can also be seen as a metaphor for human life, where each flower represents a different person, experience, or identity. Like the flowers in a batik pattern, the people of Lasem, mostly of Javanese and Chinese descent, live together and enrich each other's culture. *Sekar Jagad* and other floral motifs serve as cultural signs that reflect collective memory, a philosophy of nature, and the meeting of cultures. Pak Rudi explained:

"The most important ornament in Lasem is Sekar Jagad. Almost all batik makers can make it. It includes all kinds of flowers. Later, Chinese animals like dragons and phoenixes are added."

This idea of unity and diversity is seen in the batik and how people in Lasem live. Javanese and Chinese families live side by side, helping each other during batik work or community events, practices that mirror the spirit of *Sekar Jagad*.

"Besides Sekar Jagad, which is very common here, we often use many other motifs. For example, the lotus, which stands for purity."

Another common motif is the lotus, influenced by Chinese and Buddhist traditions. It often appears with water or koi fish and represents purity, peace, and spiritual meaning, especially for the Buddhist community in Lasem. Another important flower motif is the jasmine, known for its small and delicate shape. Vina shared:

"Jasmine represents respect, peace, and sincerity. We use it in weddings to show true and honest love."

Jasmine is often used in traditional ceremonies, symbolizing moral and spiritual values like humility and devotion. The *pring-pringan* motif, which shows bamboo, is also very popular. An artisan explained:

"Bamboo is strong but flexible. It teaches us to be adaptable but stay strong inside."

The bamboo motif speaks to the value of resilience, being able to bend but not break. Another floral pattern, the *Peacock Flower*, combines plant and animal elements to show natural beauty and artistic creativity. Other common floral motifs include: (1) *Angkub Kembang* symbolizes hope and positive wishes; (2) *Pucuk Bung*, representing youth and fresh energy; (3) *Kawung*, one of the oldest patterns, stands for balance and harmony. These motifs reflect the values and hopes of the Lasem community. Some plant-based patterns go beyond art; they show deep local knowledge of nature. Examples include: (1) *Meniran*: A tiny wild plant that stands for simplicity and strength. *"It grows anywhere, and that's its meaning: resilient and humble."* (2) *Jahe* (ginger): A symbol of health and warmth. *"It brings healing, so it stands for well-being."* (3) *Padi* (rice): A sign of prosperity and gratitude. *"We use it in rituals to show thankfulness for blessings."* (4) *Brayo*: A type of seaweed special to coastal Lasem. *"The shape flows gently in batik. It represents calm but also strength."* (5) Motifs like *Cabe* (chili) and *Latohan* (another sea plant) also carry rich meanings: *"Chili may be small, but it means fire, passion, and strength."* *"Latohan comes from the sea. It shows growth, close relationships, and flexibility."*

Together, these floral and plant patterns show how the people of Lasem live closely with nature and express their beliefs and environment through batik. These motifs are more than just art; they are stories, values, and memories passed down through generations. In this way, Batik Lasem becomes a visual ethnography, telling us about the local culture, ecology, and identity. Animal motifs in Batik Lasem are not just for decoration; they carry deep meanings rooted in Javanese philosophy and Chinese beliefs about the universe, [Table 3](#). These designs help express the close relationship between people, nature, and spiritual values. Some motifs are inspired by marine life, like *Slisikan* (a local fish) and *Udang Berantai* (linked shrimp). These patterns reflect Lasem's location by the sea and its long-standing connection to fishing and coastal life. The local environment and people's daily livelihoods are captured and passed on as part of the cultural heritage through batik.

Table 3. Animal and Symbolic Motifs

Patterns Name	Description	Meaning & Symbolism
<i>Slisikan</i>	Inspired by the shape of fish scales found on the seabed around Lasem's coast.	Symbolizes adaptability, the flow of life, and the close relationship between nature and daily livelihood.
<i>Telapak Jaran</i>	Literally means "horse's hoof."	Represents strength, determination, and persistence values held by Batik Lasem artisans.
<i>Udang berantai</i>	Based on shrimp, a common sea animal in Lasem. The "berantai" (chained) part refers to a linked pattern.	Stands for sustainability, interconnection, and the importance of the sea in local life.
<i>Burung Hong</i>	Inspired by the shape of the mythical Hong bird or Fenghuang from Chinese legends.	Symbolizes grace, prosperity, feminine strength, and virtue.
<i>Naga</i>	Taken from the image of the dragon in Chinese mythology.	Represents power, protection, courage, and spiritual energy.
<i>Kilin</i>	A mythical creature from Chinese culture with features of different animals.	Symbolizes loyalty, peace, and divine protection.

Other motifs feature mythical animals from Chinese culture, such as the phoenix (*Burung Hong*), dragon (*Naga*), and Kilin (*Qilin*). These figures make the fabric beautiful and carry powerful messages about cultural identity and beliefs, especially for the Chinese-Indonesian community in Lasem. The phoenix represents rebirth, harmony, and feminine power. It's a symbol of peace and prosperity. The dragon stands for strength, protection, and good luck. It represents spiritual energy and cultural pride. The Kilin, a rare and gentle creature, symbolizes kindness, moral values, and cosmic balance. These animal motifs show how *Batik Lasem* combines local nature, ancient stories, and shared beliefs. Batik becomes a meaningful way for the community to express who they are, their beliefs, and how they relate to their environment. In this way, *Batik Lasem* is more than just clothing or art; it's a kind of visual storytelling, where myths, values, and everyday life are recorded in fabric and passed from one generation to the next, [Table 4](#).

Table 4. Other Patterns

Patterns names	Description	Cultural Meaning
<i>Watu Kricak</i>	Inspired by the story of forced labor breaking rocks (<i>kricak</i>) for the Anyer–Pasarukin road project, which passed through Rembang-Lasem.	Symbolizes hardship, resilience, and the memory of historical suffering.
<i>Beras Utah</i>	Depicts rice grains, the staple food in Lasem.	It represents abundance, prosperity, and well-being, core values in Javanese culture.
<i>Biji Timun</i>	Based on the small seeds of a cucumber.	Simple but meaningful, it represents growth, renewal, and life's natural cycles.
<i>Biji Jeruk</i>	Shows orange seeds arranged like a pinwheel.	Symbolizes energy, movement, and the ongoing rhythm of life and community.
<i>Kawung Baganan</i>	A version of the kawung motif is used only in Babagan Village.	Carries meanings of tradition, identity, and local exclusivity.
<i>Geblok Kasur</i>	Inspired by a traditional rattan tool used to clean mattresses.	Reflects domestic life, cleanliness, and the cultural value of preserving everyday traditions.
<i>Anggur</i>	Based on the grapefruit, popular in Lasem for its clustered shape.	Symbolizes the source of life, fertility, and social ties.
<i>Semongko</i>	A creative motif inspired by watermelon seeds is often drawn with flowing lines.	Represents freedom, artistic expression, and individuality.
<i>Biji Kopi</i>	Features coffee beans scattered in random patterns.	It symbolizes alertness, hospitality, and daily life since coffee is part of local social and economic culture.

The "other motifs" in *Batik Lasem* show how daily life, spiritual beliefs, nature, and history are all part of the batik tradition. Motifs like *Beras Utah* (scattered rice) and *Geblok Kasur* (mattress pattern) reflect how farming and home life are central to the community's identity.

Patterns like cucumber seeds and grapes symbolize growth, fertility, and the close relationship between people and nature. Chinese symbols often blend with classic Javanese batik patterns like parang, kawung, and lereng. These Javanese patterns traditionally stand for strength, balance, and endurance. The mix of these styles is not random; it reflects intentional cultural blending. For example, a phoenix might be placed within a parang pattern to express feminine power and strength, or a peony might be matched with kawung to show harmony between beauty and inner virtue. These combinations turn batik into more than art; they become a form of cultural storytelling about how Chinese and Javanese traditions live side by side.

4. Discussion

Lasem batik has a long history, reflecting the interaction of different cultures over centuries. Despite planting its roots in Javanese tradition, Chinese influences and Dutch colonial history have shaped Lasem batik. These cultural interactions are visible in the fabric's motifs, methods, and meanings. From a cultural studies point of view, Lasem batik is a "hybrid space" [19], where cultural expressions emerge from the meeting and mixing of different traditions. Chinese culture influenced motifs like dragons, phoenixes, and peonies, while the Dutch introduced new dye materials and trade routes. These elements merged with Javanese philosophies of balance (*rukun*) and became part of what artisans call pakem (traditional batik rules). *Pakem* isn't a strict formula. It's a set of flexible cultural guidelines with deep meaning, often linked to cosmology, values, and local wisdom. According to Rebekah *et al*, such symbols help people understand the world and shape their identity [20]. For batik artisans, following the pakem will keep Lasem's cultural identity alive and pass it down to future generations. In the face of change, Lasem batik exhibits cultural strength. Unlike factory-made textiles, hand-drawn Lasem batik still holds high value because of its craftsmanship and artistic depth. Studies by Arswinda *et al* [21] and Nugroho *et al* [22] found that batik with potent symbolism and storytelling performs well in heritage and ethnic markets. Based on Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, traditional art like batik can become economically valuable and culturally meaningful in today's global world. Lasem batik, in this sense, is the product of many cultural influences: Javanese, Chinese, and Dutch.

In *The Location of Culture* [23], explains cultural hybridity as a process where different cultures mix and create something new. Lasem batik is a clear example of this. Its patterns blend Javanese and Chinese styles into a unique and meaningful design. Take the dragon motif as an example. It's part of Chinese mythology, but in Lasem batik, it's adapted to match the coastal batik aesthetic and Javanese philosophy. The pakem reflects ideas about harmony, prosperity, and respect for nature. For Lasem's artisans, following these traditional rules is not just about technique; it's about protecting the deeper values behind the art. As Purnomo notes, representation is how meaning is created through language and symbols in culture [24]. In Lasem batik, symbols like dragons, phoenixes, flowers, and the signature "chicken blood red" color are not just decorations but signs of identity and history, especially for the Chinese-Javanese community. Purnomo describes batik as a multicultural craft with many layers of meaning [24]. The patterns in Lasem batik tell stories about identity, beauty, and cultural history. Setyoningrum *et al* show how Chinese motifs like the phoenix are combined with Javanese structure and color to create a hybrid visual style [25]. Mahesti *et al* explain how symbols like *latoan* (seaweed), *brayo* (another sea plant), dragons, and chrysanthemums stand for prosperity, heroism, nature's wealth, and well-being [26]. Meanwhile, [24] emphasizes how Lasem batik's designs reflect a deep blend of Chinese and Javanese culture and thought [27].

Because of its artistic and cultural importance, Lasem batik is still made by hand using batik tulis. Many artisans believe it is their moral duty to protect the tradition. The entire process, from drawing with wax to using natural dyes, reflects values like patience, humility, and care for the environment. Rahmah *et al* define local wisdom as values and knowledge passed down to help people live in harmony with nature [28]. In Lasem batik, using natural materials like mengkudu (for brown) and indigo (for blue) is part of this wisdom. Koentjaraningrat traced how Chinese motifs like dragons, phoenixes, and the bold "chicken blood red" color became part of Lasem batik between the 18th and 20th centuries [29]. These patterns show a long history of cultural blending that continues today. This study indicates that *Batik Lasem* is an artistic

product and a visual story that helps express and preserve Chinese ethnic identity in Indonesia. Motifs like the dragon, phoenix, and chrysanthemum carry deep cultural meanings. They pass on values, beliefs, and history through images that can be recognized and remembered across generations. By continuing to use traditional techniques like batik tulis, artisans in Lasem are keeping the batik-making craft alive and maintaining the presence of Chinese culture in a multicultural society. Through visual analysis and interviews, this research finds that Batik Lasem often includes Chinese symbols, such as dragons, phoenixes, flowers, clouds, and waves, visually expressing cultural identity. *Batik Lasem* also acts as a form of symbolic resistance. Instead of protesting directly, the artisans preserve and celebrate their minority identity peacefully and creatively. It is a living tradition, not something frozen in time. *Batik Lasem* brings Javanese values and Chinese heritage together, forming a unique artistic style that supports cultural diversity and harmony in Indonesia. The way identity is expressed in *Batik Lasem* is also supported by intergenerational transmission. Families and communities teach younger generations how to make batik and understand its meaning. This ensures the tradition stays alive and connects people to their roots while adapting to the present. In short, preserving *Batik Lasem* is essential as an intangible cultural heritage and a symbolic tool for sustaining the identity and cultural presence of Chinese-Indonesians within Indonesia's diverse society.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that *Batik Lasem* is not just a cultural product, but also a visual storytelling medium that helps represent and preserve the identity of the ethnic Chinese community in Indonesia. Well-known motifs like the dragon, phoenix, and chrysanthemum carry deep meanings and help pass down cultural values, history, and spiritual beliefs from one generation to the next. By using traditional methods like batik tulis, artisans in Lasem keep the technique of making batik alive and the presence of Chinese culture in a diverse and multicultural society. Through visual analysis, this study finds that *Batik Lasem* consistently includes symbols from Chinese culture, such as dragons, phoenixes, flowers, clouds, and waves, that are carefully blended into the designs. *Batik Lasem* also acts as a peaceful and creative form of cultural resistance, helping minority communities maintain their identity. It is not a fixed or outdated tradition, but a living art form that combines Javanese and Chinese elements to support Indonesia's cultural diversity. The expression of identity in *Batik Lasem* is also kept alive through family traditions. Skills and knowledge about batik are passed down from older to younger generations, helping preserve the technique and meaning. This ongoing practice makes *Batik Lasem* a dynamic part of cultural life that connects the past and present. For these reasons, preserving *Batik Lasem* is essential not only as a piece of intangible heritage but also as a way to support the cultural survival of the Chinese-Indonesian community in Indonesia's diverse society.

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