Contextualizing Sundanese Aesthetics through Visual Adaptation and Batik Design Innovation: Formulating the Sundanese Batik Aesthetic System (SBAS) as an Indigenous Design Knowledge System

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Yan Yan Sunarya[1]*, Nadia Arfan[1], Aulia Fajrianingtyas[2], Bintan Titisari[3], Achmad Syarief[4], Yannes Martinus Pasaribu[5], Prima Roza[6]

[1]Craft and Tradition Research Group, Faculty of Art and Design, and Research Center for Cultural and Environmental Products (PPPBL), Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia
[2]Craft and Tradition Research Group, Faculty of Art and Design
[3]School of Design, University of Leeds, United Kingdom
[4]Human and Industrial Product Design Research Group, Faculty of Art and Design, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia
[5]Human and Industrial Product Design Research Group, Faculty of Art and Design, and Research Center for Cultural and Environmental Products (PPPBL), Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia
[6]Humanity Research Group, Faculty of Art and Design, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to formulate the Sundanese Batik Aesthetic System (SBAS) as a knowledge framework for understanding and guiding the visual adaptation of Sundanese batik in contemporary design. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, the study analyses batik motifs from four production centres in West Java, namely Sumedang, Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis, by examining the relationships between motifs, colours, forms, compositions, and naming practices and their environmental, linguistic, cultural, historical, and social contexts. The findings identify five interrelated domains of aesthetic knowledge: ecological visual knowledge, colour as cultural vocabulary, embodied aesthetic expressions, morphological thinking, and ethical principles of composition. These five domains are integrated into SBAS and operationalised through four principles of adaptation: *muka* (openness), *merenahkeun* (contextual fit), *hade hate* (a constructive disposition), and *binangkit* (creative ingenuity). SBAS provides a conceptual framework for developing and evaluating visual adaptations of Sundanese batik based on contextual relevance, cultural identity, and continuity of practice.

Keywords: Indigenous design knowledge, Sundanese aesthetics, Sundanese Batik Aesthetic System (SBAS), Sundanese batik, Visual adaptation

Introduction

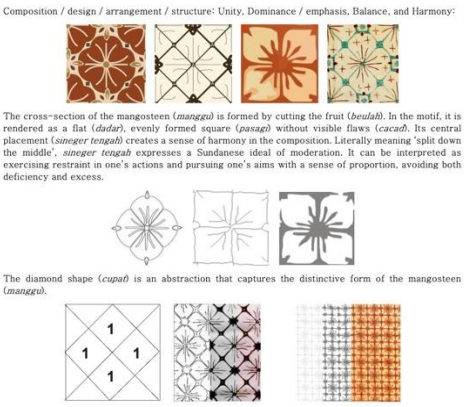
Design research increasingly recognises traditional crafts as sources of knowledge that connect the visual characteristics of artefacts with the skills, experiences, environments, languages, and cultural values of communities (Djelantik, 1999; Sachari, 2007). Sundanese batik, which developed in Sumedang, Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis, reflects the adaptation of external cultural influences through local knowledge and practices, resulting in distinctive motifs, colours, compositions, and naming conventions (Sunarya & Anas, 2014; Sunarya, 2018; Machdalena et al., 2022). However, the relationships between visual elements and cultural contexts as a system of aesthetic knowledge remain underexplored, particularly in relation to visual adaptation and design innovation. This study aims to identify the domains of Sundanese batik aesthetic knowledge, formulate the Sundanese Batik Aesthetic System (SBAS), and explain its application as a framework for guiding and evaluating visual adaptation in contemporary design. Based on an analysis of Sundanese batik from 2009 to 2011, this study proposes a conceptual framework that positions Sundanese batik as a culturally grounded design knowledge system to support innovation while maintaining connections to its cultural sources.

Method

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach to examine Sundanese batik from Sumedang, Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis. Data were collected through observation, visual documentation, and literature review, with motifs selected purposively. The analysis was conducted in three stages: descriptive, interpretive-inductive, and evaluative, to formulate the five domains of the Sundanese Batik Aesthetic System (SBAS) and four principles of visual adaptation: *muka, merenahkeun, hade hate,* and *binangkit*.

Result and Discussion

The findings from the analysis of Sundanese batik from Sumedang, Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis identify five domains of aesthetic knowledge: (1) ecological visual knowledge derived from the natural environment and everyday life, as exemplified by the *cupat manggu* motif (see Picture 1); (2) colour as cultural vocabulary, connecting colour perception with local language, as illustrated by *gumading*; (3) embodied aesthetic expressions, such as *gumebyar*, which conveys the impression of radiating light; (4) morphological thinking through the simplification and stylisation of forms, as demonstrated by the *merak ngibing* motif; and (5) ethical principles of composition, emphasising balance, harmony, and appropriateness (*pantes*). Comparisons across the four production centres reveal shared visual sources but variations in colour, form, composition, and naming that reflect the distinctive cultural characteristics of each region.



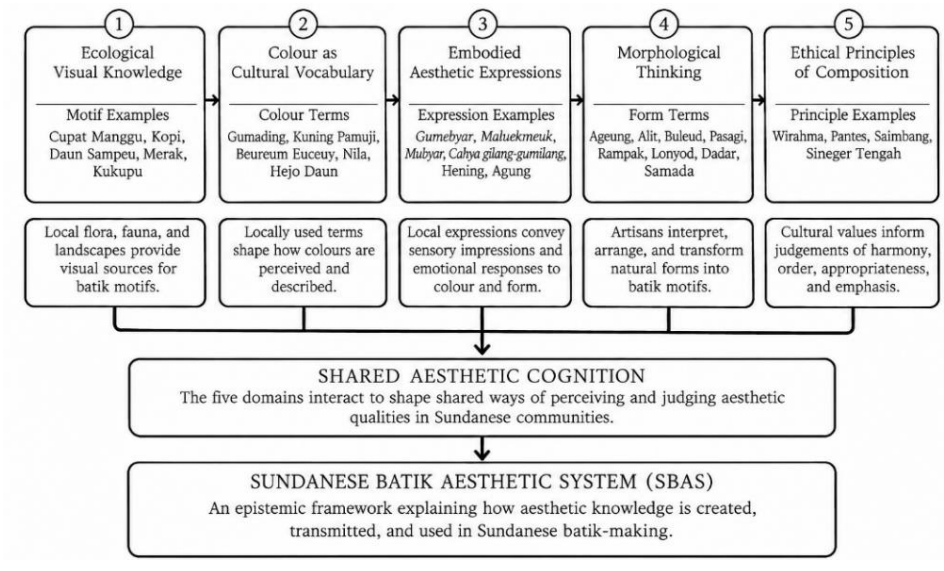
Picture 1. Analysis of aesthetic elements in the cupat manggu (mangosteen cross-section) motif

These five interrelated domains form the basis for developing the Sundanese Batik Aesthetic System (SBAS) as a culturally grounded framework of aesthetic knowledge.

The Sundanese Batik Aesthetic System (SBAS) demonstrates that design knowledge is formed through the interrelationships among ecological experience, language, artisans' skills, and cultural values that influence visual decisions in batik-making (see Picture 2). In the context of contemporary design, SBAS proposes four principles of visual adaptation: *muka* (openness to innovation), *merenahkeun* (contextual adjustment), *hade hate* (respect for cultural sources), and *binangkit* (creativity in generating innovation). These four principles provide a foundation for developing and evaluating new designs by considering functional appropriateness, artisans' contributions, cultural identity, and the traceability of relationships between adapted designs and their visual sources. Thus, SBAS positions Sundanese batik as a culturally grounded design knowledge system that supports contextual and sustainable innovation.

Conclusion

This study formulates the Sundanese Batik Aesthetic System (SBAS), comprising five domains of aesthetic knowledge: ecological visual knowledge, colour as cultural vocabulary, embodied aesthetic expressions, morphological thinking, and ethical principles of composition. SBAS explains the relationships between visual elements, local knowledge, and cultural values, and proposes four principles of adaptation—*muka, merenahkeun, hade hate,* and *binangkit*—as a foundation for contemporary design development. This framework contributes to understanding Sundanese batik as a culturally grounded design knowledge system that supports innovation while preserving cultural identity and connections to its cultural sources. Its application requires further examination through collaborative design practices with artisans.



Picture 2. Construction of Sundanese Aesthetic Knowledge