

Various Embroidery Motifs in Kudus Regency as Supporters of Local Cultural Identity and Strengtheners of Competitiveness in the International Market

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Abstract. Kudus Embroidery craft is one of the oldest crafts in Central Java because it is believed to have existed since the time of the Demak Sultanate. The variety of Kudus Embroidery motifs has also developed rapidly, namely there are motifs that interpret the local cultural identity of the Kudus community, including the Kretek Dancer, Kudus Tower, and from the natural products of the community's livelihood (cloves, tobacco, orchids, sunflowers, and so on). However, in addition to Kudus Embroidery which has a variety of motifs, there is a main problem, namely the variety of Kudus Embroidery motifs that should be able to show their existence as a local cultural identity and be able to compete in the international market in reality is not the case, because they have not been able to meet consumer tastes in the international market. The purpose of this study is to find the relationship between the variety of Kudus Embroidery motifs as a local cultural identity and the tastes of the international market. This study has relevance to historical studies that show the history of the variety of embroidery motifs. This study uses historical methods, namely Heuristics, Criticism, Interpretation, and Historiography. The findings in this article's research indicate that the diversity of Kudus Embroidery motifs is actually able to show its existence as a local cultural identity and face challenges in the international market in the form of competition for consumer tastes.

Keywords: Variety of Motifs, Kudus Embroidery, Local Culture, International Market

1 Introduction

In Kudus Regency, embroidery craft is better known as Kudus Embroidery. Kudus Embroidery has long existed in the lives of the Kudus community. According to the beliefs of the Kudus community and several local historical sources, Kudus Embroidery has existed since the time of the Demak Kingdom which was founded around 600 years ago, and Sunan Kudus became a figure who had influence in the development of Kudus Embroidery. Most of the Kudus Embroidery motifs depict the culture and characteristics of Kudus Regency. One of the famous Kudus Embroidery motifs is the Kudus tower embroidery motif which stands firmly next to the Kudus Mosque. The Kudus Tower is a form of acculturation between Hindu, Islamic, and Javanese cultures [1].

In the international market, products such as Kudus Embroidery craft art have their own competitiveness. Especially competitiveness in the field of traditional cloth craft art between countries. The countries in the Asian Continent that have high competitive potential for Kudus Embroidery products from Indonesia are China and Japan. Chinese Embroidery craft art has existed since the Tang Dynasty (around 618 AD), and spread to develop in Japan during the Nara Dynasty (around 645 AD). Embroidery craft art in China is usually known as Suzhou Embroidery (Su Xiu), while in Japan it is known as Nauru. Chinese Embroidery craft art motifs are dominated by local wisdom and culture motifs that represent the lives of people in China, for example lily, phoenix, dragon, kylin, and so on motifs that make these motifs have their own appeal in the eyes of consumers [2]. In addition, the motifs of Japanese Embroidery are no less interesting than those of China. Japanese Embroidery motifs are more representative of nature and culture, including pagoda and hira Embroidery motifs that are in harmony with cherry blossom motifs, hydrangeas, fish, and so on. Japanese people also believe that in life there is good and evil. This is usually shown through embroidery motifs [3].

Based on the explanation above, it can be formulated that the problem of Kudus Embroidery craft art is actually a unique craft art, because it represents and reflects the life of the Kudus community which is closely related to its cultural and natural aspects. This shows that indirectly the variety of Kudus Embroidery motifs plays a role as a supporter of local cultural identity and can be developed as a competitiveness enhancer in the international market. However, this cannot run well, because one of the main factors is the interest of consumer tastes in the global market. Many consumer tastes, especially in the international market, prefer Chinese and Japanese Embroidery motifs because they have elements of symbolic cultural and historical meaning that are stronger, and there is pride for the wearers compared to Kudus Embroidery motifs. [4] One of the causes is that in the field of history and culture, the Kudus community is less well known in the international market. Thus, it is difficult to attract consumer interest in liking Kudus Embroidery motifs. Therefore, efforts are needed from various parties to be able to introduce the variety of Kudus Embroidery motifs which actually also have high historical and cultural value in the international market in order to compete and show that the variety of Kudus Embroidery motifs are also part of the local cultural identity of the Kudus community.

2 Methods

The research method used in compiling this article uses the historical method. The historical method is a method used to research, reconstruct, and analyze events in the past. The historical method includes four steps, namely heuristics (collecting sources), criticism (testing sources), interpretation, and historiography (writing history) [5].

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 General Overview of Kudus Embroidery Crafts

Based on its historical aspect, Kudus Embroidery Craft is one of the oldest crafts in Central Java. The origin of this craft developed in the Kudus region is believed to have existed since the time of the Demak Kingdom which was established around the 15th century AD. At that time, one of the Walisongo figures in Islamic History in Java, namely Sunan Kudus, introduced cloth embroidery in the form of hand knitting to the Kudus community [6]. This is what then persisted to the Embroidery craftsmen in Kudus who for centuries later continued to preserve the Kudus Embroidery craft as a local cultural identity. The existence of Kudus Embroidery also cannot be separated from the history of the development of Embroidery craft in the world. According to several sources of world cultural history literature, it is recorded that embroidery craft has existed since ancient Greek times between the 6th-7th centuries BC. At that time, embroidery craft motifs were still very simple in the form of decorations for clothing. As time went on, the spread of embroidery became more massive [7]. In the Asian continent, the art of embroidery has developed rapidly, such as in China for example, since the Tang Dynasty 618-907 AD, the art of embroidery has developed and has become a craft that is in great demand by various levels of society, even silk cloth is one of the cloths used in embroidery in China.

Embroidery craft art has also been widely traded around the 15th-20th century in various regions with the number of traders dominated by Asian and European countries by combining gold and colored silk. Based on this explanation, it can be interpreted that with the large number of embroidery trades in the world, it is possible for cultural assimilation to occur, especially in the variety of embroidery motifs [8]. This condition then occurred in Kudus embroidery, resulting in a variety of embroidery motifs. According to the testimony of embroidery craftsman Almira, enthusiasts of Kudus embroidery come from the provinces of Aceh, East Java, Sulawesi (West, Central, Southeast), Kalimantan (East, Central, South), and West Papua, while international enthusiasts come from Malaysia, the Netherlands, and Italy [9].

3.2 Various Kudus Embroidery Motifs: Philosophical Meanings and Symbols of Local Cultural Identity

Kudus embroidery craft art contains various kinds of motifs, most of which are influenced by foreign cultures. This is based on historical stories in the past from around the 4th century AD, namely the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom era to the 16th century AD, the Islamic Kingdom era in the Archipelago (Indonesia). Many traders from outside Java came to the Kudus area, including traders from China, Arabia, and India to trade while assimilating cultures, one of which is in Kudus embroidery craft products. As previously known, many Kudus embroidery motifs are similar to foreign cultures [10]. However, there are characteristics of Kudus embroidery motifs that

distinguish other motifs, namely the philosophical meaning and symbols of local cultural identity. One example is the Kudus Tower motif which only in the Kudus region shows the philosophical meaning of the harmonious acculturation relationship between Indian, Arab and Javanese cultures which are typical with elements of Hinduism, Islam and dynamism, Kejawen animism, while also showing the symbol of the local cultural identity of the Kudus community which is tolerant of religious communities. Another difference lies in the embroidery technique using intricate, fine, and detailed kerancang (holes made from woven embroidery threads) and Kudus embroidery is better known as Icik Embroidery [11]. The following presents several explanations of Kudus embroidery motifs along with their philosophical meanings and symbols of local cultural identity.

First, the philosophical meaning of the kretek dancer embroidery motif symbolizes the symbol of the daily life of the Kudus community which is dominated by livelihoods related to tobacco plants in the processing of the cigarette industry. Although the cigarette industry is not classified as a form of culture, the community's livelihood activities interpreted into dance forms are symbolic forms of honor that reflect local wisdom, work spirit, and cultural values that must be maintained and preserved. Therefore, because it has been packaged in the form of dance, it is indirectly classified as a form of culture. This kretek dancer embroidery motif was created as a philosophical meaning that kretek is part of the life of the Kudus community which plays a role as a balance between morality, spirituality, and professionalism in entrepreneurship. This motif began to be introduced to consumers around the 1980s [12].

Second, the peacock embroidery motif has various philosophical meanings, it can depict beauty, glory, elegance and luxury. In some cultures such as Indian culture which is predominantly Hindu, the peacock is interpreted as a form of purity, wisdom, and eternity and is considered a form of protection and harmony. The peacock embroidery motif in Kudus represents the relationship between the Hindu religion and the life of society. As previously known, before the Kudus region accepted the teachings of Islam, its people adhered to the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism which originated from India as a form of spreading beliefs at that time, namely around the 4th century AD-13th century AD. Therefore, the form of tolerance of religious life also appears in the form of the peacock motif which has existed since around the 16th century AD, when embroidery began to be introduced in the archipelago [13].

Third, the tobacco embroidery motif has a deep philosophical meaning that tobacco plants are one of the livelihood plants of the Kudus community which are used in the cigarette industry and have been used as a livelihood for the Kudus community since the Dutch colonial period around the 18th century. It is also believed that this embroidery motif has existed since the 19th century. The tobacco embroidery motif in Kudus also symbolizes fertility and freshness [14]. Next is the moon orchid embroidery motif which has a philosophical meaning of perfection,

beauty and immortality. Through this motif, the Kudus community wants to show a symbol of harmony in cultural and social life. Furthermore, the sunflower and rose motifs symbolize the meaning of happiness and love, that in life these two aspects must always be present in every human being. Fourth, the parijoto embroidery motif symbolizes the gift from God Almighty which reminds humans to always be grateful for the gifts given by Him. Fifth, the grouse motif symbolizes intelligence and agility, while the spider motif symbolizes the philosophy of patience and perseverance. Sixth, the sea shell motif symbolizes the philosophy of protection and strength like a strong shell to protect oneself from threats [15]. The following shows images of several types of Kudus embroidery motifs.



Fig. 1. Kretek Dancer and Peacock Embroidery Motif

3.3 Challenges of Kudus Embroidery Competitiveness in the International Market: Variety of Chinese and Japanese Embroidery Motifs

In facing competition in the international market. Kudus Embroidery has various challenges, both challenges in marketing and in terms of attracting consumer tastes. One of the challenges of Kudus embroidery's competitiveness in the international market is facing competitors with a variety of motifs that are experienced in terms of history, quality, shape, and uniqueness and are in great demand by consumer tastes. These competitors include those from China and Japan. China and Japan have long been known for the quality of their handicrafts, including embroidery crafts, so that many types of embroidery motifs are produced and attract a lot of consumer tastes. The various motifs include, for China, lotus flower motifs, chrysanthemums, tigers, dragons, cranes, phoenixes, peonies, and so on. For Japanese motifs, among others, cherry blossoms, lilies, and so on [16]. The philosophical meaning of several Chinese and Japanese motifs is as follows.

The philosophical meaning of the lotus flower embroidery motif according to Chinese society symbolizes the symbol of enlightenment, purity, and freedom from misery. The lotus flower embroidery motif is also identical to the nuances of

Buddhism, so that many cultures in China related to Buddhism use lotus flower motifs in their lives, including in the use of embroidered cloth clothing. In addition, there is a Feng Shui meaning that creates a harmonious atmosphere for the wearer. Next is the chrysanthemum flower embroidery motif. This flower has a philosophical meaning that is believed that anyone who wears the motif will live long and have good luck. In addition, it also symbolizes eternity and glory. Especially white chrysanthemums symbolize sadness and sorrow because they are usually used during funeral ritual processions. Furthermore, the tiger embroidery motif in Chinese culture symbolizes the philosophical meaning of strength, protection, power and dominance. The dragon motif tends to be similar to the philosophical meaning of the tiger motif and is more widely used in Chinese imperial cloth embroidery, but is more dominant in terms of masculine nature and Yan energy. The phoenix (Fenghuang) motif dominates the philosophical meaning of fertility (wealth), and luck and has feminine properties and Yin energy [17]. From various explanations of the philosophical meaning of the motif, the lotus and chrysanthemum embroidery motifs are more widely used by women because they symbolize beauty and purity, while men tend to use motifs that symbolize strength such as tigers, dragons, and phoenixes. Embroidery techniques in China also vary, some use the Su Embroidery, Shu Embroidery, and Xiang Embroidery techniques [18].

Furthermore, the philosophical meaning of Japanese embroidery motifs includes the cherry blossom motif which symbolizes a deep philosophical meaning, namely about the journey of life, namely birth, life, death and reincarnation (renewal). According to the cultural beliefs of the Japanese people, cherry blossoms symbolize a reminder of the ephemeral life of the world where there is no such thing as eternal life, except for the ruler. The cherry blossom embroidery motif is also widely used by traditional Japanese clothing such as Kimono, yukata, Jinbei and so on in traditional ceremonies such as the chanoyu ceremony (tea drinking), matsuri festival, hanami, and so on. The lily embroidery motif is not much different in philosophical meaning from the cherry blossom, namely about the journey of life. But the difference is, the white lily embroidery motif is used for celebrations and festivals of joy, while the red lily is used for death [19]. Based on the explanation above, it is clear that China and Japan have their own embroidery motifs which also have their own philosophical meaning. This certainly attracts the interest of consumers, especially those who like decorative arts and crafts in the form of embroidered cloth. But this can also be interpreted as a form of challenge for the art of Kudus embroidery crafts in the international market that must face competitors from Chinese and Japan, and extra hard work so that consumers are interested in liking embroidery craft products from Kudus. Below are two images of Chinese and Japanese embroidery motifs.



Fig. 2. Phoenix (China) and Cherry Blossom (Japan) Embroidery Motif

4 Conclusion

The variety of Kudus embroidery craft art motifs actually contain many philosophical meanings and strong local cultural identities. The resulting motifs also have high historical and cultural elements for the Kudus community. The variety of Kudus embroidery motifs can also be said to be unique because they have influences from various cultures from outside. One example is the aspect of Indian Hinduism culture in the peacock motif which reflects the philosophy of glory, purity, and eternity that is closely related to the nuances of Hinduism. Although the Kudus community currently embraces Islam, it does not leave behind the history of civilization in the past where the majority embraced Hinduism. Thus, through the peacock motif, the Kudus community wants to show a high attitude of tolerance between religious communities.

In the international market, the art of Kudus embroidery craft is quite well known by the wider community. Neighboring countries of Indonesia such as Singapore, Malaysia, and even countries in Europe such as the Netherlands and Italy recognize the uniqueness of the art of Kudus embroidery craft. This can indicate that the taste of international consumers for Kudus embroidery products is good. However, Kudus embroidery faces quite a tough challenge, namely the taste of consumers who prefer other products from China and Japan that utilize silk fabrics using motifs that are their characteristics, including motifs that are often sought after and preferred are phoenix, dragon, lotus, chrysanthemum (China), Lily, Sakura (Japan). Therefore, in fact, Kudus embroidery is good in terms of motifs, but the solution needed is extra hard work from Kudus embroidery craftsmen so that they can show their existence in the international market, so that they can attract consumer interest.

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