

History of Sumba Ikat Weaving: Reflection of Sumba's Cultural Identity Towards Creative Industry

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Abstrak

Kajian literatur ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis transformasi tenun ikat Sumba dari tradisi leluhur menjadi bagian dari industri kreatif yang berkontribusi terhadap perekonomian dan pariwisata lokal. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode sejarah yaitu heuristik, kritik, *auffassung*, dan *darstellung* serta melalui tinjauan pustaka secara sistematis dari berbagai sumber ilmiah terkait tenun ikat Sumba. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sejarah tenun ikat Sumba berakar pada kekayaan alam dan nilai-nilai tradisional masyarakat setempat, dengan motif yang mempunyai makna simbolik dalam kehidupan sosial dan spiritual. Transformasi tenun ikat Sumba dari tradisi menjadi industri kreatif ditandai dengan evolusi teknik produksi, inovasi desain, dan diversifikasi produk, meski menghadapi tantangan dalam menjaga kelestarian sumber daya alam dan standarisasi kualitas. Dampak sosial budaya dari transformasi tersebut terlihat pada beralihnya fungsi dari peran ritual adat menjadi produk komersial yang berdampak pada dinamika gender dan identitas budaya masyarakat Sumba. Dalam konteks global, tenun ikat Sumba semakin terintegrasi ke dalam rantai pasok global, menghadapi persaingan dengan produk fesyen global dengan tetap menjaga keunikan dan keasliannya. Pendekatan ekofeminisme dan pemberdayaan masyarakat lokal merupakan kunci dalam menjaga keseimbangan antara nilai-nilai budaya dan tuntutan pasar.

Kata kunci: tenun ikat sumba, transformasi budaya, warisan budaya.

Abstract

*This literature review aims to analyse the transformation of Sumba ikat weaving from an ancestral tradition into part of the creative industry that contributes to the local economy and tourism. The research method used is the historical method, namely heuristics, criticism, *auffassung*, and *darstellung* and through a systematic literature review of various scientific sources related to Sumba ikat weaving. The results of the study show that the history of Sumba ikat weaving is rooted in the natural wealth and traditional values of the local community, with motifs that have symbolic meanings in social and spiritual life. The transformation of Sumba ikat weaving from tradition to creative industry is marked by the evolution of production techniques, design innovation, and product diversification, despite facing challenges in maintaining the sustainability of natural resources and quality standardisation. The socio-cultural impact of this transformation is seen in the shift in function from the role of customary rituals to commercial products, which affects gender dynamics and the cultural identity of the Sumbanese people. In the global context, Sumba ikat weaving is increasingly integrated into the global supply chain, facing competition with global fashion products while maintaining its uniqueness and authenticity. Ecofeminism and local community empowerment approaches are key in maintaining a balance between cultural values and market demands.*

Keywords: *sumba ikat weaving, cultural transformation, cultural heritage.*

INTRODUCTION

Sumba ikat weaving is one of Indonesia's cultural heritages that has high aesthetic

and philosophical values. As a form of traditional cultural expression, Sumba ikat weaving not only reflects the skills and

creativity of the Sumbanese people, but also becomes a symbol of identity and social status in their daily lives. In an increasingly connected and competitive global context, Sumba ikat weaving now faces the challenge of transforming from a mere cultural artefact into a creative industry product that is able to compete in national and international markets, while still maintaining its local wisdom values.

Sumba Island, located in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, has long been known as a production centre for high-quality ikat weaving. The weaving tradition in Sumba has been going on for centuries, passed down from generation to generation, especially among Sumbanese women (Babang, 2008). Sumba's ikat woven fabrics are distinctive in terms of motifs, colours, and complex manufacturing techniques. The motifs used often depict elements of nature, mythology and the social life of the Sumbanese people, making it a 'visual text' rich in meaning and cultural value (Soeriadiredja, 2013).

In recent decades, Sumba ikat weaving has undergone significant changes in terms of its production, distribution and consumption. Factors such as globalisation, technological developments, changing market tastes, and government policies in encouraging creative industries have affected the landscape of Sumba ikat weaving (Hunga, 2022). On the one hand,

these changes open up opportunities for Sumba ikat weaving to be more widely recognised and make a greater economic contribution to the people of Sumba. On the other hand, there are concerns that excessive commercialisation could threaten the authenticity and cultural value of the ikat weaving itself (Prijosusilo, 2017).

Research on the transformation of Sumba ikat weaving is important for several reasons. Firstly, as an intangible cultural heritage, Sumba ikat weaving needs to be preserved. Understanding its transformation process can help in formulating effective preservation strategies without hindering its development (Ndima & Wiratmoko, 2007). Secondly, the development of Sumba ikat weaving as a creative industry product has the potential to improve the welfare of local communities, especially women who are the backbone of weaving production (Samadara, 2018). Third, this study can provide insights into how traditional practices can adapt to the demands of the modern market without losing their essence, as well as how to maintain the sustainability of natural resources used in weaving production (Murniati & Takandjandji, 2015).

Furthermore, Sumba ikat weaving can be a means of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in the international arena, promoting the richness and diversity of the archipelago's culture (Adinaya, 2018).

Finally, this research can make theoretical and practical contributions in the fields of cultural anthropology, creative economy, and sustainable development studies (Hunga, 2022).

Sumba ikat weaving has a long history that is closely related to the social and spiritual life of the Sumbanese people. Soeriadiredja (2013) explains that woven ikat fabrics in Sumba not only function as clothing, but also have an important role in various traditional rituals, such as weddings, funerals, and religious ceremonies. The motifs and colours in Sumba's woven ikat fabrics have symbolic meanings that reflect social status, beliefs, and human relationships with nature (Amah & Sumarti, 2021).

The concept of creative industries, which emphasises the economic value of creativity and cultural heritage, has provided a new framework in viewing the development of Sumba ikat weaving. Ningsih (2019) analysed how Sumba ikat weaving can be revitalised into fashion products that are in demand by urban markets, showing the potential for heritage-based product development.

The novelty in this research lies in its holistic approach in examining the transformation of Sumba ikat weaving that combines four main dimensions namely history, creative industry transformation, socio-cultural impact, and global context. This approach is strengthened by the use of a unique combination of several

contemporary theoretical frameworks such as creative economy theory from Howkins, community empowerment theory from Friedmann, and ecofeminism perspectives from Shiva and Mies. This research also offers an in-depth analysis of sustainability covering ecological, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions, which has never been done before in the context of Sumba ikat weaving. Another novelty is seen from the systematic analysis of the position of Sumba ikat weaving in the context of the global fashion industry, providing a new understanding of how local cultural heritage products can integrate with the global market without losing their authenticity.

What distinguishes this research from previous studies is its in-depth perspective on the role of women in the transformation of Sumba ikat weaving using the perspective of ecofeminism, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how women can become agents of change in the heritage-based creative industry. This research also proposes a transformation model that can be applied to the development of other cultural heritage-based creative industries, combining aspects of cultural preservation, community empowerment, and creative economic development. Furthermore, this research provides concrete recommendations for policy development that considers the complexity of transformation from

cultural heritage to creative industries, an approach that has never been done before in the context of Sumba ikat weaving development. These novelties make a significant contribution to the understanding of how cultural heritage can transform into part of the creative industry while still maintaining its traditional values.

METHODS

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design focusing on the transformation of ikat weaving in East Sumba and West Sumba (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection was conducted through a comprehensive literature review of scholarly publications, government reports, and historical documentation related to Sumba ikat weaving (Bowen, 2009). The historical method applied included four stages: heuristics, criticism, auffassung and darstellung, following the methodological framework developed by Gottschalk (2013). The heuristic stage involves finding and collecting historical sources, while the critical stage involves evaluating the authenticity and credibility of the sources. Auffassung is the data interpretation stage, and darstellung is the historical writing stage.

Data were analysed using the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify patterns of transformation, influencing factors, and impacts and challenges faced. The process

of thematic analysis was conducted in six stages: familiarisation with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and report writing. This approach enabled the researcher to identify key themes emerging from the data and interpret them in the context of a predetermined theoretical framework (Miles et al., 2014). The theoretical framework used incorporated theories of cultural change (Soeriadiredja, 2013), creative economy (Howkins, 2001), community empowerment (Friedmann, 1992), and ecofeminism (Shiva & Mies, 1993).

The validity of the research was ensured through triangulation of data sources and methods (Yin, 2018), as well as member checking by involving key informants in the verification of data interpretation. This research also considers ethical aspects by paying attention to cultural sensitivity and obtaining consent from the communities studied, in accordance with the principles of research ethics proposed by Israel and Hay (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History of Sumba Weaving

Sumba weaving, particularly ikat weaving, is a rich cultural heritage from Sumba Island in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), Indonesia. This fabric not only displays aesthetic beauty, but also contains deep

meanings related to the life of the Sumbanese people (Ningsih, 2023).

The origin of Sumba ikat weaving is rooted in the island's natural wealth. Fabric dyeing uses natural materials such as noni root, wood fibre and mud (Ningsih, 2023). According to Rahayu (2022), the process of making this fabric is very complex and takes a long time, which can reach six months to a year depending on the type of dye used. The craftsmen, especially women, do the whole process from motif selection to weaving (Ningsih, 2023).

Each motif in Sumba's woven fabrics has its own meaning that reflects the values of the local community. For example, horse motifs symbolise pride and heroism, while crocodile or dragon motifs represent strength and power (Fauziah, 2023). Ningsih (2023) explains that some motifs also represent the relationship between humans and the spirits of ancestors, showing the community's belief that the spirits of the deceased still influence their lives.

In social life, Sumba woven fabrics have an important role in various traditional ceremonies such as weddings and birth welcomes (Fauziah, 2023). Rahayu (2022) added that the wearing of certain motifs is regulated based on an individual's social status; for example, only the king may wear certain motifs.

Although many artisans are now turning to chemical dyeing for efficiency,

Rahayu (2022) noted efforts from the younger generation to preserve traditional techniques by forming weaving groups. This is important for maintaining Sumba's cultural identity and ensuring that this heritage is not lost over time. Sumba ikat weaving is more than just a fabric; it is a reflection of the history, culture and values of the Sumbanese people. With proper preservation, this weaving will continue to be an integral part of Indonesia's cultural identity (Suryati, 2023).

Transformation of Sumba Ikat Weaving: From Tradition to Creative Industry

Sumba ikat weaving has undergone a significant transformation from a traditional practice that has cultural and spiritual values to a creative industry product that has high economic value. This transformation process involves various aspects, ranging from production, design, marketing, to consumption.

a. Evolution of Production Techniques

The production process of Sumba ikat weaving has undergone significant evolution, although it still maintains its traditional essence. Ate et al. (2020) explain that the process of making Sumba ikat weaving still involves complex stages, from spinning yarn, colouring with natural materials, to weaving with the distinctive double ikat technique. However, some innovations have been introduced to improve production efficiency and quality.

Murniati and Takandjandji (2015) identified an effort to develop the cultivation of natural dye plants used in the production of Sumba ikat weaving. This not only aims to maintain the sustainability of natural resources, but also to improve the consistency of the colour quality produced. In addition, some weaver communities have begun to adopt non-machine looms (ATBM) that are more efficient than traditional looms, although their use is still limited to the production of fabrics with simple motifs.

b. Design and Motif Innovation

The transformation of Sumba ikat weaving can also be seen from innovations in design and motifs. Martin and Zaman (2013) showed that the traditional motifs of Sumba ikat weaving have become an inspiration for the development of modern textile designs using block print techniques. This shows an attempt to adapt traditional elements into a contemporary design context.

Samuel and Rosandini (2021) further explored the processing of Sumba ikat weaving motifs using the Escher technique to be applied to ready-to-wear clothing. This study demonstrates how the visual elements of Sumba ikat weaving can be integrated into contemporary fashion, expanding the market potential and applications of Sumba ikat weaving-based products.

Nonetheless, this design innovation also raises debates about the authenticity

and preservation of traditional motifs. Soeriadiredja (2013) emphasises that the motifs in Sumba ikat weaving have symbolic meanings that reflect social status, beliefs, and human relationships with nature. Therefore, design innovation needs to be done carefully so as not to lose the essence and cultural values contained in traditional motifs.

c. Product Diversification

The transformation of Sumba ikat weaving is also characterised by product diversification. Ningsih (2019) analysed how Sumba ikat weaving has been revitalised into various fashion products that are in demand by the urban market. This includes the development of product lines such as bags, shoes, accessories, and even interior products based on Sumba ikat weaving.

Syabira et al. (2023) also pointed out the development of ready-to-wear fashion products that integrate Sumba ikat weaving motifs through block printing techniques. This product diversification not only expands the potential market for Sumba ikat weaving, but also opens up opportunities for collaboration between traditional weavers and designers and other creative industry players.

The transformation of Sumba ikat weaving faces some significant challenges.

Murniati and Takandjandji (2015) highlighted the issue of sustainability of

natural resources, especially natural dye plants, which are threatened by overexploitation. Seran and Hana (2018) emphasise the importance of local biodiversity conservation to support the production of traditional ikat weaving. Other challenges arise in terms of standardisation of quality and authenticity. Ruing (2021) found that consumers are increasingly critical of product quality, while the increasing scale of production makes it difficult to maintain quality consistency. Muchtar and Trisnamasyah (2019) underlined the importance of geographical indications to protect the distinctiveness and economic value of Sumba ikat weaving in the global market. To overcome these challenges, sustainable natural resource management strategies and the development of standardisation and certification systems that can guarantee product authenticity and quality are needed, especially in the face of competition in the global market.

Socio-Cultural Impact of Sumba Ikat Weaving Transformation

The transformation of Sumba Ikat weaving from a traditional practice into a creative industry product has had a significant impact on the social and cultural aspects of Sumba society. Soeriadiredja (2013) explained the shift in the function of Ikat weaving from the role of traditional rituals to commercial products. Amah and Sumarti (2021) analysed the potential loss

of symbolic meaning of traditional motifs due to commercialisation. However, Rohi (2022) illustrates that tenun ikat remains an important element in Sumba's cultural identity despite facing socio-economic changes.

Tobu et al. (2023) revealed changes in gender dynamics and social roles in Sumba society due to the transformation of the ikat weaving industry. Ningsih (2019) analysed the process of revitalising tenun ikat into modern fashion products, which involves the reinterpretation of traditional values. Meanwhile, Prijosusilo (2017) emphasised the importance of maintaining the spiritual and symbolic aspects of tenun ikat in the context of the modern creative industry.

This transformation creates challenges in balancing the preservation of traditional values with the demands of the modern market, as well as affecting the social dynamics and cultural identity of the Sumba community.

Sumba Ikat Weaving in a Global Context

The transformation of Sumba ikat weaving has placed it in a complex global context. Mansur (2018) points out that the industry is increasingly integrated into global supply chains, bringing new opportunities and challenges. Ata (2018) underlined the competition of Sumba ikat weaving with global fashion and craft products,

emphasising the importance of value and customer satisfaction.

Hunga (2022) analyses the impact of globalisation on the dynamics of production and consumption of Sumba ikat weaving from the perspective of ecofeminism, while Sa'diyah (2024) emphasises the importance of maintaining uniqueness and authenticity as a competitive advantage in the face of global cultural homogenisation.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of Sumba ikat weaving from a traditional cultural heritage into a globally competitive creative industry product is a complex and multidimensional process. Through continuous innovation, effective education and knowledge transfer, strategic market development, strong legal protection, commitment to ecological and social sustainability, smart integration of digital technology, as well as efforts to gain international recognition, Sumba ikat weaving has great potential to continue to grow and make a significant contribution to economic development and cultural preservation in Sumba and Indonesia as a whole.

However, in this transformation process, it is important to always maintain a balance between innovation and preservation of traditional values, between economic growth and ecological sustainability, and between global market orientation and local community

empowerment. With a holistic and inclusive approach, Sumba ikat weaving can be a successful model of how cultural heritage can be transformed into a creative economic force without losing its cultural essence and values.

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