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HEIRLOOM AND MALE ANCESTORS
The flowered Kain Kembangan of Kerek, East Java

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Introduction

A range of handspun cotton textile types, in earlier times possibly made throughout Java, continue to be manufactured by the village women of Kerek, a subdistrict 30 kilometers southwest of the ancient north coast port of Tuban.¹ Cloth made in the Tuban area was mentioned by the first Dutch travellers as early as the late 16th century. Soon after Tuban harbor lost its importance to international trade and its hinterland became a backwater. The weaving enclave, enclosed by the mountains of the Northern Limestone Ridge, which offer access through a single entrance road, generated little economic interest from the outside world and could thus continue in its old ways. One of the culture's most striking features is its intricate textile system, in which the many types of locally-made cloths are combined with a few imported textiles to function as clothing and ritual objects (see ao. Heringa 1994).

During the past two decades, however, this system has undergone numerous changes, as the outside world has finally encroached upon the area. Men and both sexes of the younger generation now mostly wear shopbought clothing. Young girls, in particular those belonging to the elite families, follow secondary schooling, and will no more acquire the complicated skills of weaving and *batiking* the cloths with the highest social and ceremonial value which used to be the prerogative of their social group. Still, a large number of older married women continues to express through the colors, motifs and technique of their home-made hipwrapper their village of residence, their age, and the social rank acquired through marriage.

The *Kain Kembangan* : Visual and Symbolic Aspects

The highly valued and technically most complex of the textiles woven by the village women of Kerek, the *kain kembangan* - literally "flowered cloth" - will be the subject of this paper.² The handspun cotton cloth shows a tabby base in a variety of stripes or checks in blue-black, red and some white, sometimes enlivened with accents of a brighter shade of blue. The cloth's special feature, as

indicated by its name, are the small floral motifs overlaid on this base. The textile is woven in two different sizes, the first intended for use as ankle-length hipwrapper for women and - originally - men. The second, a long narrow piece of material, is intended to be sewn into a men's jacket (*kelambi*).

First to be considered are the visual aspects of the *kain kembangan* as a symbolic expression of its relation to the main status group in the stratified social system of Kerek, the owners of inherited agricultural land. The production process of the cloth by the women of this elite group forms the second aspect of my paper, which will be concluded by the function of *kain kembangan* as heirloom property during the marriage ritual.

***Kain kembangan* and Land**

The main and most immediate symbolic link is that between the *kain kembangan* and the *tegal*, non-irrigated agricultural land, as indicated by the terminology used by the villagers for the separate design sections of the hipwrapper. The center field is called *pelemahan*, cultivated land, a derivation from *lemah* (soil, land) [FIG 1]. The term for the selvages is *galengan*, also used to denote the low earthen banks edging the field. The dense overlay of flowers covering the central field is related to the flowering crop growing on the land. Near each end, in the so-called *tumpal* sections, the pattern changes into wider spaced floral bands. The weavers view these floral bands as a metaphor for the trees planted at each end of the field.

Male and Female

The second - though by non-weavers easily overlooked - aspect of *kain kembangan* are its two technically separate but symbolically related forms: in the first the floral decorations are generated by warp floats [FIG 2], in the second by a continuous supplementary weft. The women themselves express the distinction as follows: each row of the single type of flowers following the warp is compared to an unbroken line (age) of male landholders. These cloths are therefore intended for male wear. The pattern of the base is adjusted to the gender distinction as well: *bakal kelambi*, fabric made into jackets for men show contrasting warp stripes only. On hipwrappers patterned in the warp, the clearly contrasting warp stripes predominate over barely visible weft stripes in alternating picks of black and red.

In the second type, the rows of flowers generated by the extra weft are interrupted by the selvages, seemingly starting anew at each pick [FIG 3]. The weavers describe the weft stripes as "coming from the side, like women who marry in", which designates the cloth as female dress. Generally, hipwrappers of this

type have a balanced checked base, with each check enclosing two alternating types of flowers. Is it too farfetched to suggest that the two flowers refer to the sons and daughters borne by the wearer of the cloth? The suggestion appears to be corroborated by the pattern names of the female cloths, as many of them are named for flowers or trees. Trees in general are conceptually related to men, while flowers are a metaphor for descendants. One example is *kembang jati*, flowers of the teak tree. It is one of the few forest trees which sheds its leaves in the dry season. With the first rains it blossoms on the bare branches, to the villagers a sign of abundant fertility. As the tree grows in most grave yards it is also linked to the ancestors. The pattern names for the male cloths all include the term *batur*, which means follower but also descendant, indicating another link to a direct line of descent from father to son.

Kain Kembangan, Stratification and Age

The floral decoration which forms an extra layer on top of the tabby base inspires the link of the *kain kembangan* to the upper layer of the community, the landholding elite of the village. Originally only they, the affluent members of the community, could afford the shopbought yarn for the floral decoration. All other textile materials are products of the fields and easy available to any villager without financial expenditure. While the majority of *kain kembangan* combines handspun cotton yarn for the base cloth with finer quality shopbought cotton thread for the floral decorations, a few antique weft-patterned textiles were found to be adorned with silk. At present not used anymore, the precious material was only encountered on cloths carefully kept by the pinnacle of the village hierarchy, those who not only trace descent from the settlers of the village, making them owners of land reclaimed from the wilderness, but who also have served in the elected village leadership for many generations. These village leaders are landholders twice over as, apart from their family land, they are entitled the right to cultivate a field of communal land (*tanah bengkok*). The choice between cotton or silk to delineate social gradations among the elite is even further refined by that between two shades of silk, yellow (or its recent replacements, mercerized yellow cotton or gold metallic thread) and white (or silver). A village head's wife was entitled to wear the golden yellow, his helpers' wives used the silvery white.

A distinction between age groups is in Indonesian textiles generally effected by the use of bright shades of red and indigo for the younger generation, and gradually darkening colors for the aged. The *kain kembangan*, with its contrasting bright and dark faces, offers a special possibility. It is customary for young people to wear the bright face of the cloth on the outside, while elderly persons prefer to show the darker side.

Residential Patterns

In recapitulation, the non-verbal messages enclosed in the *kain kembangan* link it to male-owned land, and to the different status levels and generations among the landholding elite. The cloth thus discloses a certain patrilineal bias which is corroborated by its female type, which visualizes women as in-married outsiders who bear sons and daughters for the husband's group. This image indeed conforms to the residential model of the village elite. A landholder lives in a large single-family house with his wife and unmarried children, at most giving shelter to his widowed mother or unmarried female blood relatives. All children marry out, except one of the sons who is chosen to succeed his father as owner of the house and most of the land. This is in marked contrast with the pattern adhered to by the rest of the village population. As a general rule, they live in large family compounds belonging to the eldest woman, whose husband has married-in. Her daughters also bring their husbands to live in or close to the main house of the compound.

Newly-made *Kain Kembangan* as Alienable Goods

In Kerek, no cloth is ever made by a single person from start to finish. A newly-made textile is considered the result of a regenerative group process and denoted as child or grandchild of an earlier cloth belonging to the group. Evidently therefore, textiles do not belong to individuals. It is noteworthy that the group of owners only consists of the blood kin members of a house or compound, excluding those who have married in. This distinction can be clarified by the local concepts regarding these two types of kin. Blood relations are referred to as *awaké déwé* (one's own body); those related by marriage as *wong liya*, (others, strangers). The relationship among the former is defined as *momong* (giving each other loving care), the term also used for a mother's care for her baby. Under all circumstances, never expecting anything in return, one should provide one's *awaké* with *sandang*, *pangan* and *papan* (clothing, food and shelter). In practice this entails that textiles are automatically and - as the women insist - without any ritual practice, provided for the blood kin of the group. The association with the *wong liya*, however, is referred to as *mung dolan* (literally: no more than play). This game among people related by marriage is subject to strict rules of exchange. One of the aspects regulated in this manner is the exchange of textiles. Thus, in-married husbands offer part of the proceeds of their inherited family land in return for clothing for personal use. How do the *kain kembangan* function in this system?

The matrilocal compound, in which mature women abound, provides the ideal situation for the joint production of textiles. The patrilocal residential

pattern of the elite, however, has a scarcity of women, making it difficult to combine all textile tasks under one roof. Although raw cotton and plain handspun yarn can be obtained in the market, in exchange for products of the field or money, *kain kembangan* can only be woven by women of the elite. Only experienced weavers can master the complex and extremely labor intensive technique with its many variations. Traditionally, those wives of the elite who have gained expertise, spend much of their time filling the needs of their families. A live-in widowed or unmarried aunt often makes a welcome contribution. The *kain kembangan* needed as gifts from the husband's group may be ordered from less fortunate single women of elite backgrounds who make their living as professional weavers. Previously, the use of a house or part of the harvest was offered in return. Nowadays payment in cash has become the norm. While recently-made *kain kembangan*, that still accord with the traditional prescripts, have become rare and their money value has risen, all of these cloths can be used as gift or even sold for the benefit of the group. They can therefore be said to be alienable goods.

Heirloom *Kain Kembangan* as *Simpenan*

A special source of textiles are the heirlooms kept in the wooden treasure chest in the rice barn. These sacred textiles, related to the ancestors, are part of the *simpenan*, the "secret property" of the house. It consists of locally-made cloths, in particular *kain kembangan*, an occasional antique silk cloth imported from India, Chinese porcelains, and sacred weapons, all inherited from previous generations of the husband's family. These cloths can at most temporarily be given away which denotes them as inalienable property. Only important ritual occasions, a son's wedding or circumcision, merit the appearance of the precious heirlooms. Often too fragile to be worn, the textiles are present as a sign of the social status and the unbroken lineage of the group who owns them.

One particular ritual function specifically links the *kain kembangan* to Islam. During the Muslim fasting month, a silk-flowered version from the heirloom hoard is prescribed as covering for the huge ceremonial signal drum in the house of the village head. Thus the drum, symbol of the ancestors of the pre-Islamic period, is temporarily silenced, giving precedence to the foreign creed.

Kain Kembangan and the Marriage Ritual

The *kain kembangan*'s ultimate, and at present extremely rare role occurs about one week before the actual wedding of the son who will inherit the house, when the cloth forms an indispensable part of the *sasrahan*, the goods carried in procession to the bride's home to *ngrayuk* (entice) her into being taken away from

her compound to take up the lonely and unstable position of the in-married daughter-in-law. The offering consists of kitchen utensils, furniture, gold jewelry and the *koper*, a large basket plaited from palm leaves, containing a maximum of 60 textiles. Some have been newly made by the groom's female blood kin, many have been ordered, but the most valued contribution has been taken from the heirloom hoard. Absolutely indispensable are the two types of *kain kembangan*, representing the groom's male and female ancestors.

In descriptions of Javanese wedding rituals, the *sasrahan* is generally referred to as a gift to the bride's parents, in return for their daughter and her descendants (ao. Mayer 1897 II:360; Bratawidjaja 1985:13). While the public procession to the bride's house may be suggestive of this conclusion, the villagers of Kerek denote the ritual as a show of force. In this case, a more appropriate translation of *sasrahan* appears "surrender [of the bride]", as the girl will soon be taken away to the groom's house. The wedding is moreover not organized by her parents, the usual procedure, but by his. Clearly in Tuban, the goods were never intended as a gift, as, in practice, only a few newly-made textiles are chosen for personal use by the bride or by her close female blood kin. The bulk will eventually be returned to its hiding place in the rice barn. Especially the *kain kembangan*, whether old or new, are the inalienable possessions to be inherited by the younger generation in the male line, like the land the cloths represent. Moreover, in case of a divorce, the wife shall lose her rights to any part of the *sasrahan*. Muslim law also denies her the right to take her children.

On the wedding day, until a few decades ago, the bride first appeared in a *songket*, a red gold-flowered cloth from Bali. This "foreign" textile, though similar in technique to the female *kain kembangan*, is said to have marked her as a stranger or *wong liya*. After the actual wedding, a change of clothing presented the new pair in a coupled set of heirloom *kain kembangan*. The groom wore a jacket with the pattern running along the warp, while the bride was provided with a hip wrapper adorned with the same floral pattern in the weft, thus marking her incorporation into the house of her husband.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the visual aspects of the *kain kembangan*, and its function as inalienable heirloom during rituals, epitomize the cloth as the metaphor for the landholding elite of Kerek. Although the cloth is encountered in a male and a female form, the latter appears subordinate to the first. The patterns on the male

cloth have predominant male properties, whereas its female aspects have been toned down to the extent of being almost invisible. On the female cloth, however, next to female weft stripes, male warp stripes are consistently prominent. Moreover, the men wear *kain kembangan*, made into a jacket, on the conceptually higher upper part of the body and - formerly - as a hipwrapper, while women only use the hipwrapper.

All *kain kembangan* worn during rituals by the wives, are temporarily provided from the heirloom treasure owned by her husband's family. For personal use newly-made *kain kembangan* are made available to her from the husband's family store. This is at variance with the custom in most other areas in Indonesia, where textile gifts are provided by the side of the bride. The flowered cloths remain at the woman's disposal as long as she is available to her husband, in return for the flowers she brings forth, the children. The case of the *kain kembangan* eloquently expresses the Javanese bilinear social pattern, in a form modified by the elite group's male-biased views, which have been intensified by Muslim influences.

Notes

1. Fieldwork in Kerek (1978-1991) was supported in 1989-1990 by PRIS, Leyden University, and conducted under the auspices of the Indonesian Academy of Sciences).
2. See Heringa 1993 for the relation between the *kain kembangan* and batik cloth, and the agricultural cycle.

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