

# Ethnomathematics on the *Gringsing* batik motifs in Javanese culture

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#### Abstract

Mathematics cannot be separated from human life. However, mathematics is often taught directly through formulas and abstract mathematical forms at school and is less associated with students' daily lives. Hence, it makes it difficult for students to understand mathematics and often find it difficult to understand how mathematics can be useful in dealing with various problems in real life. Therefore, school mathematics needs to be reconnected with the reality of human life so that students can easily understand mathematics and use it to solve various daily life problems. This study explores ethnomathematics in Javanese culture, especially in the *Gringsing* batik motif. The ethnographic method was employed in this study, and the data was collected through literature review, observation, and interviews. The data was then analyzed before and according to the conditions in the field. The results showed that the *Gringsing* batik motif contains philosophical meanings, cultural values, and mathematical elements of plane shapes and geometric transformations. This research contributes to the context of learning mathematics. In addition, it also increases the knowledge of mathematics and culture and can be used as a reference in learning or similar research.

**Keywords:** 2D Shapes, Ethnography, Ethnomathematics, Geometric Transformation, *Gringsing* Batik

### Introduction

Mathematics is inherent in human life (Nurhasanah, Kusumah & Sabandar, 2017). Many human activities are unconsciously part of mathematics (Sembiring, 2010). So, it can be said that mathematics has been very close to culture in human behavior and habits since ancient times in responding to real-life phenomena and problems (Muhtadi et al., 2017). Mathematics is often taught directly through formulas and abstract mathematical forms at schools and is less



associated with students' daily lives (Alangui, 2010). In turn, students find it challenging to understand mathematics and its usefulness in dealing with real-life problems (Risdiyanti & Prahmana, 2020). Therefore, mathematics in schools needs to be reconnected with real-life to help students understand mathematics and use mathematics to solve various daily life problems.

D'Ambrosio, a mathematician from Brazil, initiated Ethnomathematics as a solution to bridge formal mathematics and the realities of daily human life (Rosa & Orey, 2016). Ethnomathematics reconstructs mathematics to be rooted in mathematical knowledge built by the ideas, ways, and techniques of a cultural group in dealing with daily life problems so that mathematics is close to students and easily understood (D'Ambrosio, 1985). Using Ethnomathematics as a context in learning mathematics can trigger the process of mathematization in students' minds so that there is no leap in students' thinking processes in understanding mathematics (Risdiyanti, 2022). This mathematical formulas and forms to students, resulting in students finding it difficult to understand the concepts and the benefit of mathematics to deal with real-life problems (Risdiyanti & Prahmana, 2021).

Mathematics educators see Ethnomathematics as a way to connect aspects of culture to the mathematics their students are learning (Meaney et al., 2021), and Ethnomathematics has been integrated into school mathematics and contributes to helping indigenous students improve their Math performance (Gerdes, 1986; Meaney et al., 2021). For example, teachers can help students build mathematical knowledge in artefacts and practices, contribute to valuing local cultures (Tereshkina et al., 2015), and assess problem-solving abilities on topics related to the local cultural context in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2019). Therefore, images of history and culture also need to be studied and installed in textbooks or teaching and learning materials for Mathematics (Nguyen et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020). At the same time, mathematics education, in addition to developing mathematical and general competencies, also has a goal of fostering traditional cultural values for students.

Indonesia has abundant cultures that can be used as contexts for learning mathematics (Risdiyanti & Prahmana, 2020). One of them is batik motifs in Javanese culture, including Yogyakarta. However, research on ethnomathematics exploration in batik is limited. Whereas in the daily life of the people of Yogyakarta, batik is a familiar and common clothing, such as for school uniforms, office services, celebrations or weddings, traditional events, or casual clothes (Didik, 2017; Dian, 2017). One of the famous batik motifs in Yogyakarta is the *Gringsing*, the oldest ancient batik motif native to the archipelago but is preserved and widely used today. In ancient times, the cloth with the *Gringsing* batik motif was believed to be a lucky cloth that could heal sick people (Kusrianto, 2021). The *Gringsing* batik motif is in the form of *isen-isen mata deruk* eyes (a circle with a diameter touching each other) (Sulistyobudi, 2017). This motif can be used as a context in learning mathematics because it is close and familiar to students, especially students on Java islands. However, there has been no research exploring Ethnomathematics in the *Gringsing* batik motif.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the Ethnomathematics of the *Gringsing* batik motif. The exploration results can be used as a context for learning mathematics and ease students to



understand the concepts and use mathematics to deal with real-life problems. In addition, the results of this study also contribute to enriching the knowledge of mathematics and culture so that it can be used as a reference in mathematics learning or similar research.

## Methods

The method used in this research is an ethnographic method. This method has the purpose to describes the culture of a community (Spardley & McCurdy, 1989). This method is chosen in this research because the method is in line with the aims of the ethnomathematics ideas (Shirley & Palhares, 2016). The ethnographic method involve study about cultures that found and developed by certain cultural community (Spardley & McCurdy, 1989). It means, the researcher does not only study the culture but also learns the mathematics ideas that which is found and developed by the cultural community. So, the ethnographic method was used in this research to explore ethnomathematics in the Gringsing batik motif.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection is done by observation, interviews, photo documentation, and a literature study about the Gringsing batik motif. The observation was done by looking at the Grising batik motif at Yogyakarta Barik Museum. Then, interviews were done with two key informants, they are Mr. Prayogo the curator of Yogyakarta Batik Museum, and Mr. Utut the staff of Yogyakarta Batik Crafts Center. The interviews were done to obtain information about the history and cultural value of the Gringsing batik motif.

### **Data Analysis**

Data in this research were analyzed using two techniques, that is pre-field analysis and field data analysis (Spardley & McCurdy, 1989). The pre-field analysis was done by analyzing the preliminary study results or secondary data to determine the research focus. Then, the field data analysis was done with three processes, such as data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The data reduction process was done by selecting important data. Furthermore, the data presentation process was done by presenting the data which is relevant to this research. Then the last process is the conclusion which is done by withdrawing the conclusion from the observation, interviews, and literature study. After that, all data that has been analyzed is then written in the field notes.

### **Results and Discussion**

The exploration results showed that the *Gringsing* batik motif contains philosophical meanings, cultural values, and mathematical elements. It is one of the well-known classic Javanese batik motifs in Indonesia. Before independence, Indonesia consisted of kingdoms, including the Majapahit kingdom (Prayogo, 2021). Rouffaer (1928), a researcher and librarian from the



Netherlands, in his writing entitled "De Batik-kunst in Nederlandsch Indie" explained that the *Gringsing* batik motif has been found since the era of the Majapahit kingdom in the XIII century. Paraton book mentions that Raden Wijaya, the first king of the Majapahit kingdom, distributed the cloth with the *Gringsing* motif to his soldiers before the war (Utut, 2021).

The *Gringsing* batik motif is dominated by isen-isen ornaments, dragon scales of small circles with a dot in the center (Prayogo, 2021). In Javanese culture, it is believed that the dragon is the guardian for balancing the earth and the universe. The dragon scales on the *Gringsing* motif are interpreted as a symbol of balance, prosperity, and fertility. The dragon symbol is an essential symbol of countries in the East Asian historical and cultural contexts, including China, Japan, and Vietnam (Nguyen, 2015). The symbol of the dragon is often used to denote mysterious strength (Pham & Lee, 2008). Of course, the symbol of the dragon can also be used in fashion and can also be printed on household items (Nguyen, 2015; Pham & Lee, 2008). In the Javanese culture, the dragon is often used as to symbol in the many Javanese artifacts including in the motif batik, the dragon is interpreted as a symbol of strength and fertility (Hidajat, 2004).

The giving of *Gringsing* motif cloth by Raden Wijaya to his soldiers is a symbol of Raden Wijaya's hope that his soldiers can always live in prosperity (Utut, 2021). The Majapahit kingdom applied very strict cultures with philosophical, moral, ethical, and other values believed to be passed from generation to generation. Thus, the people tried to pass on their culture through various media, one of which was the *Gringsing* Batik motif (Prayogo, 2021). *Gringsing* batik motifs are usually equipped with various ornaments, such as *cemplokan* (circles), stars, flowers, and others. Besides, the *Gringsing* batik motif contains mathematical elements of plane shapes and geometric transformations.

The philosophy behind one sheet of *Gringsing* batik cloth is that it symbolizes a prayer to avoid danger or pain. *Gringsing* comes from the word "*gering*", which means pain, and "*sumingkir*", which means lost, so it is a prayer for the pain to disappear (Prayogo, 2021). Ancient people wore or gave *Gringsing* batik cloth to others as a symbol of worship to avoid calamities and illnesses, such as physical illness, mental illness, economic illness, and others (Utut, 2021). Besides, the *Gringsing* batik motif contains mathematical elements of plane shapes and geometric transformations.

In its development, *Gringsing* batik motif is not only used by people in the kingdom but was already popularly used by the general public (Sulistyobudi, 2017). Besides that, *Gringsing* batik motif is currently often used in performances (Prayogo, 2021). In Javanese culture, *Gringsing* batik motif is still preserved and widely used by the community, especially Javanese society (Utut, 2021).

# Philosophical Meaning, Cultural Values, and Elements of Plane Shapes in *Isen-Isen* Ornaments of *Gringsing* Batik Motifs

*Isen-isen* is one of the basic ornaments of the *Gringsing* batik motif. It is an image of dragon scales with a black dot in the middle, like an eye. In ancient times, people in the Singosari kingdom interpreted it as a symbol of prosperity (Prayogo, 2021). Thus, anyone using



*Gringsing* batik is expected to have a prosperous life. Dragon scales symbolize prosperity and wealth both in tangible and intangible terms, such as the wealth of the soul, the wealth of brothers and sisters, and others. Illustrated as dragon scales, it is because there are so many dragon scales, but they cannot be counted. Therefore, the prayer of this motif is that someone wearing the batik with this *Gringsing* motif can live prosperously so that the wealth, both material and non-material owned, is priceless or cannot be counted anymore. In addition, *isenisen* ornaments also contain mathematical elements of plane shapes square and rectangle, as shown in Figure 1.

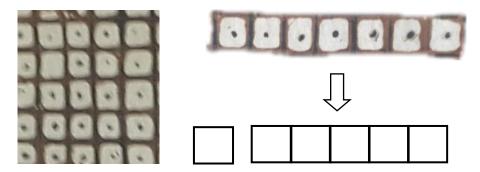


Figure 1. Square Elements in Isen-Isen Ornaments of Gringsing Batik Motifs

Figure 1 shows that the *isen-isen* ornaments of the *Gringsing* batik motif are a square making a rectangle when arranged in a row. In batik, the shape of the *isen-isen* is sometimes not a perfect square because it is often handmade, not printed, making it difficult to create a perfect square.

## Philosophical Meanings, Cultural Values, and Elements of Plane Shapes and Rhombus on the *Ceplokan* (circle) Ornaments of *Gringsing* Batik Motifs

There are two colors in the *Ceplokan* ornament, blue and brown. Blue is a symbol of eternity, meaning that every human being will return to their God, an eternal place (Prayogo, 2021). At the same time, brown is a symbol of the land. In addition, the *Ceplokan* ornament also consists of dots symbolizing the *Sedulur Papat Limo Pancer*. *Sedulur Papat* was a symbol of the four cardinal directions, with East as the source of life, North as the abode of God, West as a source of luck, and South as the center of everything (Prayogo, 2021). The center of *Sedulur Papat* is the center of life, defined as the human surrounded by the four cardinal directions.

Then, in the *Ceplokan* ornament, there is also a tiny crab shape, meaning there will be many obstacles in life, so we must be agile like small crabs surrounded by five *Pancers* or four pillars of life (Prayogo, 2021). The *Ceplokan* image has an eternal philosophy of life and will be saved if it is filled with *Sedulur Papat Limo Pancer* dots (Utut, 2021). In life, everyone will face the dark blue, or transverse obstacles; therefore, you must be agile in seeking fortune and living life but have limits, *Sedulur Papat Limo Pancer*, so that it can run smoothly and



according to the manners of life (Utut, 2021). In addition, this batik contains mathematical elements of plane shapes of a circle, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The Circle Elements in Ceplokan Ornaments of Gringsing Batik Motifs

Figure 2 depicts the *Ceplokan* ornament with mathematical elements of a circle. It has a radius (OA), a chord (ED), diameter (FC), central angle (FOA), arc (DE), and segment (R). In batik, the *Ceplokan* is often not a perfect circle due to its making. *Gringsing* batik is mostly handmade, not printed, making it hard to create a perfect circle. In addition to mathematical elements of circles, this *Ceplokan* ornament also contains the mathematical element of rhombus, as seen in Figure 3.

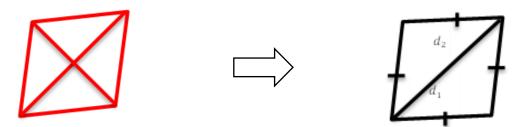


Figure 3. The Rhombus Element in the Ceplokan Ornament of Gringsing Batik Motifs

Figure 3 shows the mathematical element of a rhombus when several *Ceplokan* ornaments are connected. When connected, the distance between the ornaments is equal and forms a diagonal intersecting perpendicularly.

# The Elements of Geometry Transformation in Various *Gringsing* Batik Motif Ornaments

Some ornaments of *Gringsing* batik motifs consist of the elements of geometric transformation, such as dilation, reflection, translation, and rotation. The details are as follows.

- a. Dilation on Ceplokan Ornaments
  - The *Ceplokan* ornaments of the *Gringsing* batik motif are made using the concept of dilation, as seen in Figure 4.



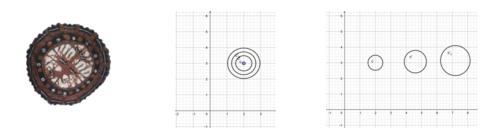


Figure 4. Dilation Concept in Ceplokan Ornaments of the Gringsing Batik Motif

b. Reflection on Flower Ornaments

The floral ornament on the *Gringsing* batik motif is created using the concept of reflection, as seen in Figure 5.

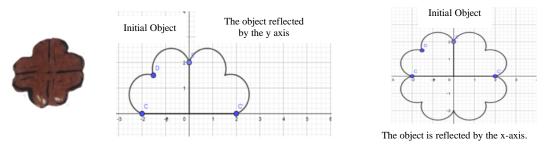


Figure 5. Reflection Concept in Ceplokan Ornaments of the Gringsing Batik Motif

c. The Translation of Star Ornaments and Ceplokan

The *Gringsing* batik motif has a star ornament created using the concept of translation, as seen in Figure 6.

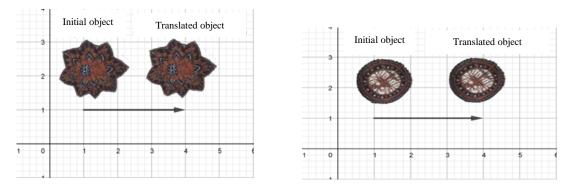


Figure 6. Translation Concept in Ceplokan Ornaments of the Gringsing Batik Motif

d. Rotation on the Ceplokan Ornament

Besides the concept of translation, the *Ceplokan* ornament can also be made using the concept of rotation, as seen in Figure 7.



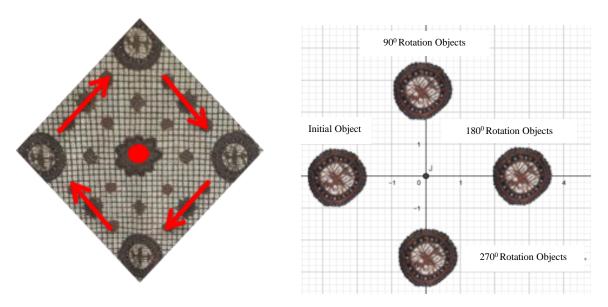


Figure 7. Rotation Concept in Ceplokan Ornaments of the Gringsing Batik Motif

The exploration results of the Ethnomathematics of the *Gringsing* batik motif show that in making *Gringsing* Batik Motif used mathematics concepts that are found and developed by people in Javanese culture since the Majapahit Kingdom era. Furthermore, Javanese people have used the concept of plane shapes and geometric transformations by self-taught, and these creative ideas emerged from their experience in drawing the Gringsing batik motif (Prayogo, 2021). In addition, the *Gringsing* batik motif also contains philosophical and cultural values that are passed down from generation to generation. The ethnomathematics findings on Gringsing batik complement some previous findings regarding the exploration of Ethnomathematics in Indonesian culture (Utut, 2021). The previous findings include research on Ethnomathematics in traditional Balinese houses (Suharta, Sudiarta, & Astawa, 2017), Ethnomathematics on rat repellent devices in Baduy culture (Arisetyawan, Suryadi, Herman, & Rahmat, 2014), mathematical calculations on the pranatamangsa system and predictions of the anniversary of death and birth in Javanese culture (Prahmana, Yunianto, Rosa, & Orey, 2021), Ethnomathematics on the architecture of the mosque of the Sasak people in Lombok (Supiyati & Hanum, 2019), Ethnomathematics on the Fort Rotterdam building in Makasar (Sulasteri, Nur, & Kusumayati, 2020), Ethnomathematics on typical Yogyakarta batik patterns (Prahmana & D' Ambrosio, 2020) and others.

To date, many students have difficulty understanding mathematical concepts and understanding their application to solve everyday problems because mathematics learning is less related to the student life and culture (Hendriana, Prahmana, & Hidayat, 2019). This research bridges mathematics with the reality and perceptions of students' mathematics. This study will allow students to see that mathematics is very close to their culture and daily life, so they will easily grasp the meaning of the mathematical concepts and apply them in their daily lives (Risdiyanti & Prahmana, 2020).

Previous studies have shown the changes in students' perceptions regarding the relationship of mathematics to culture and daily lives through learning mathematics in the



context of Ethnomathematics. Among the studies is the use of the Minangkabau Gadang house in learning the Pythagorean theorem (Rahmawati, 2020), the use of the Soko Tunggal mosque in learning two-dimensional geometry (Putra, Wijayanto, & Widodo, 2020), the use of traditional cookie maker namely "*Kue Putu*" in learning surface area and volume of cylinder (Nursyahidah & Albab, 2021), and the use of woven bamboo in translational learning (Maryati & Prahmana, 2020).

Not only do Indonesian researchers' study Ethnomathematics research but also researchers from other countries, such as ethnomathematics exploration of Malay-Islamic culture in Malaysia (Ismail & Ismail, 2010), ethnomathematics exploration of Hausa puzzles in Northern Nigeria (Waziri, Saidu, & Musa, 2010), ethnomathematics exploration on carnival in Brazil (de Freitas Madruga & Biembengut, 2015), and ethnomathematics exploration on braid craft in Argentina (Albanese, 2015). Various ethnomathematics studies in Indonesia and other countries indicate that worldwide, researchers have realized the importance of reconstructing mathematics so that it is re-rooted in the culture of each country. Thus, this research contributes to restoring mathematics to be rooted in Indonesian culture.

### Conclusion

Javanese people have used the concept of plane shapes and geometric transformations such as dilation, reflection, translation, and rotation as the results on Ethnomathematics exploration of the *Gringsing* batik motif. In addition, the *Gringsing* batik motif also contains a philosophy, such as prayers so that those using *Gringsing* batik are protected from harm and always given prosperity in life. The Ethnomathematics on the *Gringsing* batik motif can be used as a context in learning mathematics. However, it requires further research on implementing the context of the *Gringsing* batik motif to help students understand the concepts of plane shapes and geometric transformations. This research contributes to increasing the knowledge of mathematics and culture and enriches the reference for learning or similar research.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been covered completely by the authors.

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