

# Transformation of *Parang* Motifs in Contemporary Batik Fashion

Setyo Budi  
{setyobudi67@gmail.com}

Faculty of Fine Arts and Design Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia.

**Abstract.** In the past, classic batik with *parang* patterns was the clothing of nobles, two motif variants of which became the regalia of Javanese kings. This paper is the result of qualitative research based on the theory of Iconography and Elegant Design, with the aim of mapping the movement of *parang* batik. The basic characteristics of *parang* batik are 45 degree ornamental formations, *mlinjon* (melinjo fruit ornament), and additional ornaments as the basis for naming the motifs. In Javanese tradition, *parang* batik is a symbol of leadership and order. After Indonesia's independence, batik experienced openness in conception, creation and function. *Parang* batik has also experienced fundamental transformations, especially in: visual representation, pragmatic, social and aesthetic functions, as well as the symbol system and its meaning. In the contemporary era, *parang* batik is able to strengthen the articulation of a person's appearance to appear more dynamic, elegant and dashing.

**Keywords:** *Parang* Batik; Java; Contemporary

## 1 Introduction

For Indonesian people, especially Javanese, saying the word "batik" is not just clothing, but has long and complex psycho-cultural ties. Batik in the sense of 'batik motif' is a reflection of the cultural intelligence of clothing starting from technical, conception, to the ideology of the original beliefs of the people [1]. Understanding Javanese batik is not just a matter of coloring technique, but of expressional complexity in the visualization of motifs. Based on the book by Jasper and Pirngadie, as many as 220 batik motifs developed in Javanese society at the end of the 19th century [2]. You can imagine how many variants of batik motifs are currently developing, especially since UNESCO (2009) determined that batik is a *Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* [3].

Learning from the past, when the Islamic Mataram kingdom in Java was split into two, namely the *Keraton* Kasunanan Surakarta and the *Keraton* Kasultanan Yogyakarta based on the Giyanti agreement in 1755 [4], the position of batik was considered important because it was included in the contents of the agreement. Where the *Keraton* Kasunanan Surakarta gets the right to use the *parang* and *céplok* batik patterns, while the *Keraton* Kasultanan Yogyakarta gets the *parang* and *sêmèn* patterns [8]. This division further strengthened the two kingdoms to protect batik, subsequently these patterns and motifs were designated as "classic batik" [5].

During the reign of the *Keraton* Kasunanan Surakarta in Java (1746-1945) [6], Sunan Paku Buwono III (King III, 1749-1788) once made *batik larangan* (prohibited batik) regulations, namely *sawat*, *parang rusak*, *cumangkiri-modang*, *bangun tulak*, *lênga têtêng*, *darêgêm*, dan *tumpal* motifs [7], may only be worn by nobles and forbidden for commoners [8].

Moreover, within the span of power the two kingdoms also confirmed that the *parang* batik pattern, especially the *parang rusak* motif [Fig. 1] and *parang barong* motif [Fig. 2] as the royal clothing of kings [9]. After Indonesia became independent (1945), the two kingdoms merged into the territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Territorially, it is no longer in power, but it is still maintained as a protector of cultural heritage, especially maintaining the continuity of classic batik. Indeed, an amazing cultural work, just ornaments on *mori* cloth (white cloth), was able to survive for hundreds of years. Furthermore, the question and aim of this study is the existence of *parang* batik patterns which were once the regalia of kings, but are worn by just anyone now.

## 2 Method

The type of research used to examine the phenomenon of the shift from traditional to contemporary batik is qualitative research, based on the theory of iconographic analysis through three stages of analysis, namely iconographic description, iconographic analysis, and iconological interpretation [10]. To study contemporary *parang* batik, the theory of Elegant Design [11] is used. Data sources in this study include: 1) several large batik companies in the cities of Surakarta, Yogyakarta and Pekalongan, 2) batik markets and shopping centers, 3) several traditional ceremonial activities and community meetings, 4) daily events and behavior in society.

## 3 Discussion

### 3.1 Parang Batik

"Batik motif" is the smallest or simplest ornamental unit that is arranged repeatedly or combined with other ornaments into a regular or patterned arrangement, which is hereinafter called "batik pattern" [12]. The word "parang" in Javanese means a large knife or short sword, other names are machete or *gobang*. When this word has similarities with the name of a batik pattern/motif, it often gives rise to various interpretations, where ordinary people easily interpret *parang* batik as related to war or a symbol of war [13]. Based on the historical background of its emergence, when Sultan Agung (1586), the founder of the Islamic Mataram kingdom in Java, meditated on the coast of the southern sea of Java Island, he was inspired by the slopes of coral rocks to create batik patterns [14].

The number of *parang* motifs in the classic batik category is around 54 motif variants [15], among which are still circulating in society include: *parang rusak* (damaged) [Fig. 1], *parang barong* (Mythical beast) [Fig. 2], *parang curigo* (Javanese heirloom weapon) [Fig.3], *parang kêncono* (Gold), *parang klithik* (Dice box), *parang kusumo* (Flower), *parang pamor* (Prestige), *parang sobrah* (Root), and so on. Apart from the most important basic characteristic of the *parang* batik pattern, which is the ornamental groove slanted at 45 degrees, there are three ornaments as part of the symbol system, namely [Fig. 4]:

- 1) *Alis-alisan*, in the form of an abstraction of the eyebrow line [16] in the form of repeated and continuous curved lines forming a diagonal groove, a symbol of precision and intelligence.

- 2) *Parang*, an abstraction of a machete arranged in a row and in crossed directions. For other variations of the name of the *parang* motif, abstractions of other objects can be substituted. The symbolism contained is potential and strength that can be better organized.
- 3) *Mlinjon*, the ornament that is a requirement for *parang* batik patterns, without *mlinjon* it is called *lèrèng*. Abstractions of melinjo or “so” fruit (*Gnetum gnemon* Linn) are lined up between two rows of *alis-alisan*. It is not the shape of the fruit or the word melinjo that is the symbol, but the name “so”, from the Javanese idiom of *tumpang suh* which means chaos. Next, it is abstracted to be neatly arranged as a symbol of order.



Fig. 1: *Parang rusak* [17]



Fig. 2: *Parang barong* [18]

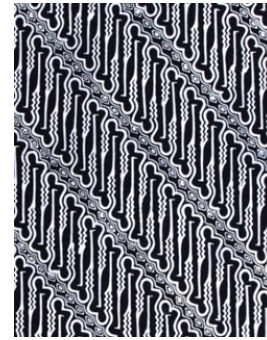


Fig. 3: *Parang curigo* [19]

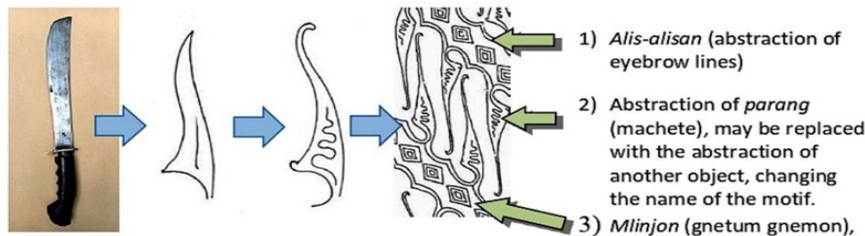


Fig. 4. Process of abstraction of a machete to become a *parang rusak* motif (Picture redesign: author)

Table 1. System of art symbols in the batik *parang rusak* motif [Fig. 1].

Abstraction	Index	Symbol	Meaning
Damage Machete	Weapon damage	Weakness	Unexercised power yet
<i>Alis-alisan</i>	Eyebrow line	Precision	(Leadership)
<i>Mélinjo</i> (so fruit)	Javanese idiom: <i>tumpang suh</i>	Chaos	Becomes organized
Symbolization of the <i>Parang rusak</i> batik motif: Leadership to create a better/stronger order			

The *parang rusak* motif is a symbol of leadership [Table 1], where someone wearing batik clothing with a *parang rusak* motif is a reflection of a leader who is able to organize damage or overcome chaotic conditions. Meanwhile, the *parang barong* (a mythological animal that is a combination of a tiger and a lion) is a symbol of a leader who is also able to control the supernatural dimension. The *parang kusumo* (flower) motif is a symbol of a leader who shows love to his people, or the *parang curigo* (kris, a Javanese heirloom weapon) is a leader who has magical powers, and so on. Iconographically, it all means “leadership”. This is reinforced by

the supporting ornamental formation that goes straight up and down, meaning a leader must be fair to the upper classes and the people.

### 3.2 Transformation of *Parang* Motifs in Contemporary Batik

One of the impacts of colonization in the archipelago (now Indonesia) was the increase in trade between countries, especially around the island of Java in the 19th century [20]. Batik, which was originally concentrated in aristocratic circles, began to spread as an economic commodity. The phenomenon of batik creation only became more massive when the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace and the Yogyakarta Sultanate entered the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (1950). Batik, which was originally under royal control, began to be open to the general public [13].

The definition of contemporary batik is the visualization of new creative batik motifs inspired by classic batik. The most crucial shift is that in the past it was used as a *jarit* (long cloth for lower clothing) or *dodot* cloth (clothing for the middle part of the body) [21], whereas in the contemporary era it is more widely used as clothing for the upper body. Some basic characteristics of *parang* patterns are still present [Table 2], especially the 45 degree slanted ornamental grooves, there are still *mlinjon* ornaments, but additional ornaments are re-abstracted more freely. In the contemporary batik era, all batik with *parang* patterns is called "*parang* motifs," no longer a symbol system, but an articulation of appearance.

**Table 2.** Transformation of classic batik *parang* patterns/motifs into contemporary batik

Subject	Classic Batik <i>Parang</i> pattern/motif	Contemporary <i>Parang</i> Batik
Status	<i>Parang</i> pattern (various parang motifs)	<i>Parang</i> motif
Ornamental patterns	Slanted 45 degrees	Most are slanted 45 degrees
Main motif	<i>Mlinjon</i> (main requirement)	<i>Mlinjon</i> (not the main requirement)
Supporting motives	Repetitive with consistency of direction	Repetitive and expressive
Motif visualization	Following <i>pakêm</i> (traditional rules)	Expressional (consumer taste)
Form	<i>Jarit</i> and <i>dhodhot</i> (bottom and middle)	Tops (shirts and blouses)
Pragmatic function	Clothing of kings and nobles	Everyday clothes
Social function	Social status	Social and economic relations
Aesthetic function	Symbol system	Articulation of personal appearance
Value	Leadership symbol	Dynamic, elegant and dashing.

People choose *parang* patterns/motifs no longer based on their symbolism, but rather the "impression" that will emerge when wearing clothes with that motif. This shows that *parang* batik can be a medium for inter-personal dialectics between perception and orientation [22]. In the world of fashion, clothing style can be a re-marking of the articulation of appearance [23], several personal characteristics can be emerged based on *parang* ornamental styles, including:

**Dynamic impression.** The type of *parang* batik that can strengthen the articulation of the appearance to make it look more dynamic is the formation of motifs such as the punctuation mark "\" (back slash) or "/" (forward slash), namely a crossing groove from the right shoulder to the left waist or vice versa [Fig. 5]. This formation contrasts with the vertical flow of the human body. This contrasting impression creates a dynamic feel, looking more enthusiastic and optimistic.



**Fig. 5.** Contemporary *parang* pattern/motif with an analogue slash pattern for a dynamic impression [24], [25]



**Fig. 6.** Contemporary *parang* pattern/motif with an analog Y pattern for a dashing and elegant impression [26], [27]

**Elegant and dashing impression.** In general, the body shape and height of Javanese people is short to medium, so the character of traditional Javanese clothing tends to respond to these limitations. Several contemporary *parang* batik ornamental styles are also designed to address this, namely by creating an elegant and dashing impression. The ornamental flow focuses on the chest, then branches to the right and left shoulders. The composition resembles the letter “Y” [Fig. 6] which can strengthen your appearance to make you look more authoritative, exclusive and dominant.

## 4 Conclusion

*Parang* batik is the most popular and respected classic Javanese batik pattern/motif. Apart from having historical ties to Javanese kings in the past, it also contains messages of local wisdom. The public's interest in *parang* motifs has made designers or craftsmen enthusiastic about creating new *parang* batik motifs. As a result, contemporary representations of *parang* motifs are not tied to standards, but still have a special and exclusive 'charm'. Whatever the style and expressional form, when a batik clothing has an ornamental machete style, it will create a special impression, especially dynamic, elegant and more dashing.

## References

- [1] CY. Wang, "Building a Network for Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage through Education: A Study of Indonesian Batik," *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 2018, vol. 38, pp. 398-415, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12200>
- [2] J.E. Jasper and M. Pirngadie, *De Inlandsche Kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indië - III*. Mouton, Netherlands: Door de Boek & Kunstdrukkerij, 1916, pp. 155-163.
- [3] R. Smend, *Batik: Traditional Textile of Indonesia*, Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2015, p. 9.
- [4] V. J.H. Houben, "Keraton and Kompeni – Surakarta dan Yogyakarta 1830-1870," 1994 (Transl. *Keraton dan Kompeni*, by E.S. Alkhatab, Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Bentang Budaya 2002, p. 17).
- [5] T. Lee, "Defining the Aesthetics of the Nyonyas' Batik Sarongs in the Straits Settlements, Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century," *Asian Studies Review*, 2016. Vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 173-191, DOI: 10.1080/10357823.2016.1162137
- [6] D. Lombard, "Le Carrefour Javanais," 1990 (Transl: *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya: Batas-batas Pembaratan Vol.1*, by PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Indonesia, Jakarta: Gramedia, 1996, p. 63).
- [7] S. Margana, *Keraton Surakarta dan Yogyakarta 1769-1874*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010, p. 293.
- [8] Guntur, "Inovasi pada Morfologi Motif Parang Batik Tradisional Jawa," *Panggung*, 2019, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 374-390, DOI: 10.26742/panggung.v29i4.1051
- [9] H.S. Doellah, *Batik: The Impact of Time and Environment*, Surakarta, Indonesia: Danar Hadi, 2002.
- [10] E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Art*, Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 7-14.
- [11] L. Landoli and G. Zollo, *Elegant Design: A Designer's Guide to Harnessing Aesthetics*, London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2022.
- [12] Rustopo, *Otobiografi Go Tik Swan Hardjonagoro*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Ombak, 2008, pp. 83-84.
- [13] R. Kurniawan, "Batik Motif Parang dari Court Art Menuju Global Trend," *Jurnal Rupa*, 2016, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 25-39, DOI: 10.25124/rupa.v1i1.734
- [14] A. Prasetyo, *Batik: Karya Agung warisan Dunia*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Pura Pustaka, 2010, p. 54.
- [15] Hamzuri, *Batik Klasik*, Jakarta Indonesia: Djambatan, 1981, pp. 37-41.
- [16] U. Septiana and R. Kurniawan, "Perubahan Visual Ragam Hias Parang Rusak," *Dimensi*, 2016, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 63-76, DOI: 10.25105/dim.v1i1.1779
- [17] A. Rifda, "Asal-Usul dan Filosofi Batik Parang Beserta 8 Jenis Motifnya." Accessed: August 04, 2023. [Online] Available: <https://www.gramedia.com/best-seller/batik-parang/>
- [18] C. L. Ticoalu, "Textile Patterns. Accessed." Accessed: August 21, 2022. [Online] Available: <https://id.pinterest.com/pin/683984262126879774/>
- [19] R. Aprilia, Resty. "15+ Motif Batik Parang: Gambar, Makna, Jenis, dan Sejarahnya." Accessed: April 14, 2022. [Online] Available: <https://bergaya.id/batik-parang/>
- [20] T. S. Raffles, "The History of Java," 1817 (Transl. *The History of Java*, by E. Prasetyaningrum, Indonesia, Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2014, p. 121).
- [21] S. Fraser-Lu, *Indonesian Batik: Processes, Pattern, and Place*, Oxford, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 23.
- [22] D. Crane dan L. Bovone, "Approaches to material culture: The sociology of fashion and clothing," *Poetics*, 2006, vol. 34, no. 6, pp. 319–333, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2006.10.002>
- [23] B. Berry, "Social Identity and Context in Men's Hybrid Masculinities through Dress," *Gender & Society*, 2018, vol. 20, no. 10, pp. 1–25, DOI: 10.1177/0891243218774495
- [24] <https://www.facebook.com/danarhadistore/photos/a.520552052030743/930017511084193/?type=3>. (accessed: November 12, 2023).
- [25] [https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=697655045692867&set=a.631235215668184&locale=id\\_ID](https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=697655045692867&set=a.631235215668184&locale=id_ID) (accessed: November 12, 2023).
- [26] <https://www.bukalapak.com/p/fashion-pria/kemeja/4hodcp1-jual-kemeja-batik-pria-lengan-panjang-katun-printing-motif-parang-janoko-baju-batik-sragam-kantor?from=list-product&pos=10> Accessed: November 12, 2023.
- [27] <https://www.blibli.com/p/diskon-arjuna-weda-blouse-batik-parang-seling-manuk-biru-tua/ps--FAG-70102-03821> (accessed: November 12, 2023).