

## Incung Script Serves as the Identity of Kerinci Batik

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Received on June 1, 2023	Accepted on June 7, 2023	Published on June 30, 2023
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### Abstract

Incung script of Kerinci is evidence of the intellectual civilization of the Kerinci tribe in its time. This script served as a means of communication for the Kerinci tribe since the 13th century. The fusion of the script created valuable cultural manuscripts with profound local wisdom. As a cultural subsystem, the Incung script has become an inspiration for local artists, particularly batik artists, in designing batik patterns, both through the cap (stamp) and tulis (hand-drawn) techniques. The Incung script is a writing system used by the Kerinci community and serves as a distinctive feature of Kerinci batik, aimed at identifying the identity of Kerinci batik. This research adopts a qualitative method with narrative data, discussing the information found in the field, focusing on aesthetic aspects. Data collection was conducted through literature review, observation, interviews, and data collection matrices. Kerinci batik consists of two types: Kerinci decorative batik and Incung batik, created using both hand-drawn and cap techniques. The primary motif of Kerinci batik combines the Incung script with Kerinci decorative elements, plant motifs, fauna, and sacred objects, which are all representative of Kerinci's identity.

**Keywords:** Incung script, batik, Kerinci tribe

### Introduction

Aksara refers to a writing system, and several regions in Sumatra have their own scripts. The main regions with their respective scripts are Batak, Rejang, Lampung, and Kerinci. Kerinci has the Incung script, which is used as a literary medium for writing customary rules, myths, and proverbs. Literary works, legal procedures, myths, and proverbs are written on various mediums such as horn, paper, palm leaf, bone, bamboo, and fabric. The Incung script manuscripts contain two components, namely "tembo" and "karang mindu." Tembo contains genealogical information of ancestors, while karang mindu contains lamentations and is commonly written on bamboo and paper.

The Incung script shares similarities with other scripts used in Sumatra, but it also has its own unique characteristics. The similarity in scripts across Sumatra is due to their common origin. The Incung script consists of 28 alphabets, with each character having 2 to 3 different forms. These forms include rigid, slanted, broken, and pointed shapes. The Incung script does not have

the letters 'e' and 'o'; their usage is substituted with punctuation marks. In recent times, there has been a revival of the Incung script. It can be found in street names, names of government institutions, through Incung schools, and it is also used as a distinctive feature in Kerinci batik motifs, thus preserving its cultural significance.

The Incung script used as a motif in batik represents its original form and is created to reflect the name and characteristics that specifically identify the socio-cultural identity of Kerinci. Culture, as a national identity, demonstrates the significance of culture as a crucial aspect for a nation, as it is evident that culture also defines the essence of that nation (Nuraeni & Alfian, 2013: 26).

The Kerinci region is widely known for its natural richness and boasts some of the most beautiful landscapes in the province of Jambi. It is often referred to as "Sakti Alam Kerinci" or "A Slice of Heaven" (Yuda, 2020). However, Kerinci is also culturally rich and has its own distinct cultural characteristics that can be incorporated as motifs in Kerinci batik products, representing the socio-cultural identity of the region. These motifs include decorative elements, plants, animals, and cultural objects specific to Kerinci, such as betel leaf, tigers, the Grand Mosque, and the lapik motif, which is a cultural symbol in Kerinci.

The batik produced by Kerinci artisans includes both cap (stamped) and tulis (hand-drawn) batik. Cap batik is the most commonly produced type due to its faster production process, typically taking one to two days. On the other hand, tulis batik requires more time and is generally more intricate in its execution (Mandegani et al., 2018). Cap batik is popular among consumers due to its affordability, making it accessible to people from all walks of life. Kerinci batik products can be worn by people from all backgrounds because the motifs used symbolize the distinctive characteristics of Kerinci.

The researcher's interest in Aksara Incung as the identity of Kerinci batik stems from the fact that Aksara Incung possesses aesthetic values. The Incung script is transformed into batik motifs by combining cultural objects and decorative elements using the batik technique, which carries implicit meanings within them. This is what brings aesthetic value to Aksara Incung in Kerinci. However, currently, there are few who understand and recognize Aksara Incung, its origins, its forms, and even fewer who can read it.

The literature review was conducted to compare with the research being conducted. There are several books and research findings about Aksara Incung. Arfensa's book titled "Sastra Incung Kerinci" provides an overview and information about Incung literature. It introduces the forms of Aksara Incung and its letter characters, as well as explaining the history of Aksara Incung. The similarity lies in the topic of discussion, which is Aksara Incung, but it does not discuss Kerinci batik. This book is used as a reference for studying Aksara Incung as the identity of Kerinci batik

(Arfensa, 2003). On the other hand, Iskandar and Syaputra's book titled "Khazanah Aksara Incung" discusses information about Aksara Incung to understand the content of manuscripts written in Incung script. The book also contains the history of Aksara Incung. The commonality lies in the object of study, which is Aksara Incung, but it does not mention Kerinci batik (Zakaria & Syaputra, 2017). These two books are used as the main references to gain a deeper understanding of Aksara Incung.

Based on the conclusion of the above discussion, it is evident that this research yields a distinct difference in terms of the focus of the study, which is based on aesthetic considerations. Through a literature review related to Aksara Incung, including books, research papers, and journals with a similar topic titled "Aksara Incung as the Identity of Kerinci Batik," no relevant sources have been found thus far. This indicates that this research can contribute new insights and knowledge to enrich the understanding of the relationship between Aksara Incung and Kerinci batik.

### **Argumentation**

The Aksara Incung in Kerinci batik can be considered as one of the esteemed and cherished identities of the community. As native Kerinci people, we should take pride in the historical heritage, especially in the Aksara Incung, which serves as an inspirational motif for Kerinci batik.

Why is this theme of great importance to discuss? Because the younger generation needs to know that many aspects of Kerinci culture are disappearing in the present time. As young individuals, we have a responsibility to revive, preserve, and develop our ancestral heritage, such as the incung script, which is utilized as an authentic motif in Kerinci batik.



## **Method**

The research titled "Incung Script as an Identity in Kerinci Batik" is a qualitative study. Qualitative research involves seeking data and facts through research and descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis means providing descriptions or portraying the research findings. The study was conducted in the batik industry, among consumers, and cultural experts of Kerinci. The research was conducted in Sungai Penuh, Kerinci City, Jambi Province. Three batik industries, namely Karang Setio, Incung, and Daun Sirih, were included in the study.

Data collection is a method used to obtain desired data in accordance with the research objectives. In qualitative research, data collection is typically done through participant observation. The researcher used several data collection techniques, such as literature review, observation, interviews, and data collection matrices.

The research objectives are as follows: (1) to explain the development of the Incung script motif in Kerinci batik, (2) to express ideas derived from the Incung script in the creation of batik motifs, and (3) to understand and explore the meaning contained in the Incung script as a cultural product of the past society. The research method employed a qualitative approach, involving observation, documentation, and interviews with batik craftsmen and enthusiasts. Data collection was conducted through participant observation, and the research locations were Kerinci Regency and Sungai Penuh City.

The creation process of the Incung script motif involved three stages: exploration, design/motif creation, and realization. The batik coloring techniques used were *colet* and *celup*, using *remasol* and *naphthol* colors. The profound meaning of the Incung script in Kerinci culture was incorporated into batik motifs. This approach gave rise to various batik motifs that aligned with the local context and the contemporary era of Kerinci society, enabling Kerinci batik artisans to continuously innovate with a range of traditional and contemporary patterns to minimize consumer saturation. The presence of the Incung script motif added variety and contributed to the rapid development of batik in Sungai Penuh City and Kerinci Regency.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Incung script**

The Incung script is a script found in Kerinci Regency. Incung is a Kerinci term that means "slanted" or "tilted" (Mubarat, 2015). The emergence of the Incung script is one of the local wisdom that is still preserved. The Incung script is a valuable cultural product and a heritage with historical and traditional significance. It is considered a local genius, and its existence needs to be preserved as a cultural heritage (Mubarat, 2015). Currently, not many people in Kerinci are aware

of this local wisdom. The influence of technology has made people less curious about their local culture. Only a few individuals, such as cultural experts and researchers, are able to read the Incung script. The implementation of the Incung script in street names, government agencies, and Kerinci batik is an effort made by the government to preserve the local wisdom of Kerinci.

The Incung script belongs to the category of Sumatran scripts, specifically known as the Kaganga script. The Kaganga script is sometimes referred to as the Ulu script because it is believed to have originated and developed in the upstream areas of the inland regions of Sumatra (Sunliensyar, 2021). The term Kaganga is often used to refer to the Incung script of Kerinci because this region is located around the upstream area, as indicated by the numerous rivers flowing through the Kerinci region. Additionally, the Kerinci region is located inland, amidst the Bukit Barisan mountain range. The term "Incung" for the Kerinci script is known from ancient manuscripts written in the Incung script. Some ancient manuscripts written in the Incung script still exist and are preserved as heirlooms in the Kerinci region (Zakaria & Syaputra, 2017: 12). The Incung script of Kerinci is characterized by straight, jagged, and curved lines. The average inclination of the letter-forming lines is estimated to be 45 degrees (Mubarat, 2016).

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Segindo government, following the inscription of the Karang Berahi inscription. The Karang Berahi inscription is an inscription from the era of Srivijaya, discovered in 1904 by Kontrolil L.M. Berkhout on the banks of the Batang Merangin River. The inscription is located in the Batu Bersurat Hamlet, Karang Berahi Village, Pemenang Subdistrict, Merangin Regency, Jambi. The format and script of the Rencong script bear similarities to the writing found in that inscription.

The Incung script of Kerinci, in its development, has become less recognized by the Kerinci community itself. This can be attributed to various factors, including a lack of curiosity among the people and the influence of cultural practices and habits. In recent years, only a few individuals have known and been able to read the Incung script. However, the Kerinci government has made commendable efforts to preserve the Incung script through various revitalization initiatives (Powa, 2020). One of the efforts undertaken by the government is the implementation of the Incung script in street names and the names of institutions.

In addition, there is also creativity from youth organizations in Kerinci, such as the establishment of Incung schools for the community, as well as its presence in Kerinci batik products created by batik artisans. The Incung script is used as a motif in Kerinci batik. The Incung script is incorporated into the motifs, complementing the decorative patterns. The Incung script is applied in designs such as Kerinci, Batik Incung, and Kerinci Sekepal Tanah Surga. These Incung script motifs can be found on batik products, symbolizing the natural and cultural richness that represents the identity of the Kerinci community. Additionally, the Incung script is also utilized in a way that reflects the sounds of nature, such as incorporating leaf motifs into the writing of the Incung script using related words (Arfensa, 2003).

### **Kerinci batik**

Batik is one of the local cultures that is still preserved by communities in Indonesia. Each region in Indonesia has its own batik industry. In Kerinci itself, the emergence of the batik industry began in 1995 (Pitri et al., 2021). Batik in each region has its own distinctive characteristics with various colors and patterns (Murwati & Masiswo, 2013). Batik originated from Java and is still maintained and recognized by UNESCO. The word "batik" comes from the Javanese language, where "amba" means to write and "nitik" means dots. The combination of these two words means writing with wax (Trixie, 2020). The making of batik is traditionally done by women during their leisure time. Batik is created together using the technique of batik tulis, which involves using a canting tool and wax. The canting tool is a small copper bowl with a small pipe-like tip and a wooden handle. Nowadays, batik has evolved in terms of techniques. Batik can be made using the cap (stamp) and printing techniques. However, the highest quality batik is still considered to be

batik tulis or hand-drawn batik. Batik cap facilitates the production of mass-produced items by repeating the same pattern according to the desired design principles.



Batik Kerinci is a type of batik that is made using the cap (stamp) technique. In Kerinci, batik is typically created by female batik artisans. The process of making batik requires patience and precision, and these are qualities that are often associated with women. The process of creating batik in Kerinci begins with soaking the fabric, followed by airing it out. Then, the fabric is stamped using tools that are coated with wax. After that, the fabric is dyed and boiled again to remove the wax and reveal the final batik design. The tools used for batik making in Kerinci include caps (stamps), canting tools, small stoves, frying pans, drying racks, and basins or buckets. The materials used include mori fabric, silk, and synthetic dyes such as naptol, indigosol, and remasol.

### **Kerinci Batik Motifs**

Regarding the study of Incung script as an identity in Kerinci batik, the intended identity is seen from the perspective of the applied batik motifs. Kerinci batik motifs consist of cultural objects, Kerinci decorative patterns, geometric patterns, flora, and fauna. The distinctive motif of Kerinci batik is the Incung script. The Incung script represents the local wisdom possessed by the Kerinci community. The Incung script, used as a motif, is created in the same form and character and applied to the fabric as a decorative motif. Apart from being a decorative motif, the Incung script is also utilized as a means to continually preserve it by incorporating it as a motif in Kerinci batik.

Based on the researcher's observation, all Kerinci batik products utilize the Incung script as a motif. The motifs used by batik artisans are almost similar across different industries. The practice of borrowing and lending cap tools has resulted in a reduction of distinctive characteristics in each industry's batik. The lack of design skills among Kerinci batik artisans also contributes to unsatisfactory batik products. The artisans' lack of knowledge about design principles leads to

imbalanced proportions in batik products. In the present day, the Kerinci batik industry needs to revisit the principles of design in order to produce high-quality products (Arfensa, 2003).

### **Elements of Line**

Kerinci batik products incorporate the Incung script as their motif. The Incung script is formed by straight lines, jagged lines, and curved lines with an average inclination of 45°. It is important to note that the Incung script itself is not written in an inclined manner, like cursive Latin letters. The Incung script is a regional script specific to Kerinci and has distinguishing characteristics compared to scripts used in other regions. Despite its similarity in writing style to other scripts, the Incung script still maintains its own distinct character.

The motifs in Kerinci batik that utilize the Incung script maintain the same script form. The Incung script is combined with Kerinci decorative patterns, floral motifs, fauna motifs, and traditional heirlooms. The motifs applied by Kerinci batik artisans include cloves, betel leaves, traditional houses, keris (dagger), carano (traditional jewelry), sunflowers, antlers, jangki (traditional ornament), curved nails, lapik (traditional woven cloth), coffee, Mount Kerinci, betel nut trees, tigers, semar leaves, madu amang (honey), karamenta (SKO ceremony flag), tea leaves, sendai stones, orchids, biloik padoi (traditional weaving pattern), sirih tanyo (betel vine), kambah leaves, cinnamon bark, lawang doors, bamboo shoots, semah fish, and lukah (Harken, 2021). These motifs are chosen for Kerinci batik to represent the natural and cultural richness of the Kerinci region. The application of these motifs aims to preserve the local culture and ensure that the community recognizes and identifies with their regional heritage.

### **Elements of Shape**

Shape refers to a small area that is defined by a contour (line) and/or differentiated by contrasting colors or varying degrees of lightness and darkness within the batik design (Kartika, 2020: 71). In Kerinci batik art, shapes are used as symbols of the artisans' emotions, expressing their ideas and concepts onto the fabric. During the process of creating Kerinci batik, there are modifications made to the motifs through stylization, which enhances the visual beauty of the design. Stylization involves stylizing the form of the motif without eliminating its original characteristics.

The batik product mentioned above represents Kerinci batik with the Aksara Incung script motif combined with Kerinci decorative patterns. The motifs used in this batik product include the itik pulang petang (duck returning home at dusk) motif and the budaya manyengka (traditional



cooking with firewood and stone stove) motif. Synthetic colors are used in the creation of these motifs.

### **Texture Element (Surface of the Material)**

This two-dimensional batik product possesses texture, which refers to the tactile or smooth quality of a surface. Texture can be categorized into two types: implied texture and actual texture. Implied texture is the texture that appears rough but feels smooth when touched, while actual texture corresponds to its visual appearance, feeling smooth when touched if it appears smooth, and vice versa. Kerinci batik products utilize actual texture, specifically in the fabric choices of mori and silk. These fabrics have a smooth texture and are more receptive to color absorption compared to other fabrics.

Texture is an element of form that conveys the sense of a material's surface intentionally created and presented in an arrangement to achieve a certain form, aiming to provide a specific sensation on the surface of a two-dimensional artwork, whether it is real or implied (Kartika, 2020: 75).

### **Color Element**

Color, as color itself, simply serves as a sign on an object or item, or merely to differentiate one characteristic from another without any specific intention and without pretense. Colors do not need to be understood or internalized as their presence is only as a sign and, beyond that, as a surface enhancer. As a representation of nature, the presence of colors depicts the true nature of objects or the portrayal of a natural object according to what is seen. For example, green represents leaves and grass, while blue represents the sea, mountains, and the sky. These colors merely provide illustrations and do not contain any other intention except to depict what is observed. These colors are commonly used by naturalists, realists, and other representative works.

Color as a sign/symbol. In this context, the presence of color serves as a symbol or represents something that is traditional or a common pattern. The presence of color is extensively employed by traditional artists and is often used to provide color to wayang (shadow puppetry), traditional batik, and other artistic forms that have a traditional image. The presence of color here aims to convey a particular sign that is a common habit or pattern (Harken, 2021).

### **Spatial Element**

Space is a three-dimensional product that has length, width, and height (having volume) (Kartika, 2020: 79). Batik Kerinci is a product that is created in two-dimensional form. The

processing of fabric into a batik product is then transformed into three-dimensional products such as clothing, sarongs, and jackets. At first glance, Batik Kerinci products may appear similar to batik products from other regions. However, upon closer examination, Batik Kerinci possesses its own distinctive features, whereby each Batik Kerinci product showcases Aksara Incung as an identifying motif and embodies aesthetic values.

### **The application of Aksara Incung as the identity of Batik Kerinci**

The application of Aksara Incung as the identity of Batik Kerinci is done through its incorporation as a batik motif. Batik Kerinci consists of two types: Kerinci decorative batik and Incung batik. These two types of batik Kerinci serve as identities as they utilize motifs derived from the local environment, culture, and social customs of Kerinci. The identity of batik Kerinci lies in the motifs employed by the batik artisans, which depict the local wisdom and characteristics of the region.

Thus, the application of Aksara Incung as the identity of Batik Kerinci is manifested through its use as a batik motif. Aksara Incung can be found in Batik Kerinci products along with a combination of decorative motifs that represent the identity of the Kerinci region. The motifs employed include Aksara Incung, which is a writing system used by the Kerinci community. In addition to Aksara Incung, the batik artisans of Kerinci also incorporate decorative motifs inspired by flora, fauna, and cultural objects, further symbolizing the identity of Batik Kerinci.

### **Conclusion**

Aksara Incung is a writing system used by the Kerinci community. Its application can be seen in street names, institutions, as well as in Batik Kerinci, representing the local wisdom of Kerinci. There are 15 batik industries producing Batik Kerinci in the region. Batik Kerinci consists of two types: Kerinci decorative batik and Incung batik. These two types of batik Kerinci serve as identities, utilizing motifs sourced from the environment, culture, and social customs of Kerinci. The batik artisans of Kerinci employ both batik tulis (hand-drawn batik) and batik cap (stamped batik) techniques in their craft. The motifs of Aksara Incung and Kerinci decorative patterns serve as the identity of Batik Kerinci, drawing inspiration from the natural surroundings, cultural heritage, customs, and social culture of the Kerinci community.

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