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The Symbolic Meanings and Philosophical Values of Siak Riau Malay *Songket* Motifs from a Cultural Semiotics Perspective

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Abstract:

Siak Riau Malay Songket Weaving is a cultural heritage of traditional attire that serves as a symbolic medium conveying the moral, religious, and worldview values of the Malay community. Social change and cultural commodification have shifted how the philosophical meanings embedded in *songket* motifs are understood. Previous studies have mainly focused on aesthetic aspects, weaving techniques, and economic value, while studies employing Barthes' cultural semiotics to examine the symbolic meanings of *songket* motifs remain limited. This study aims to analyze the symbolic meanings, philosophical values, and cultural functions of *Siak Malay Songket* weaving motifs. The research employs a qualitative-descriptive method using Barthes' cultural semiotic approach. Data were collected through interviews, observation, documentation, and archival studies of *Riau Malay* culture. The analysis identified the visual forms of the motifs, interpreted their denotative and connotative meanings, and related them to the cultural values of the Siak Malay community. The findings reveal that *songket* motifs function not only as visual ornaments but also as representations of moral values, life balance, resilience, politeness, and cosmological awareness. *Songket* motifs also serve as a medium for character education, a regulator of social ethics, and a symbol of the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and God. This study enriches the field of cultural semiotics and supports the preservation of *Siak Malay* cultural identity amidst globalization.

Keywords: *Siak Songket Weaving, Cultural Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Symbolic Meaning, Malay Philosophical Values*

Abstrak:

Tenun Songket Melayu Siak Riau merupakan warisan budaya busana adat yang berfungsi sebagai media simbolik yang memuat nilai moral, religius, dan pandangan hidup masyarakat Melayu. Perubahan sosial dan komodifikasi budaya menyebabkan pergeseran pemahaman terhadap makna filosofis motif songket. Penelitian sebelumnya lebih banyak berfokus pada aspek estetika, teknik kerajinan, dan nilai ekonomi, sedangkan kajian semiotika budaya Barthes terhadap makna simbolik motif songket masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis makna simbolik, nilai filosofis, dan fungsi budaya motif Tenun Songket Melayu Siak. Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif-deskriptif dengan pendekatan semiotika budaya Barthes. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara, observasi, dokumentasi, dan studi arsip budaya Melayu Riau. Analisis dilakukan dengan mengidentifikasi bentuk visual motif, menafsirkan makna denotatif dan konotatif, serta menghubungkannya dengan nilai budaya Melayu Siak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa motif songket tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai ornamen visual, tetapi juga merepresentasikan nilai moral, keseimbangan hidup, ketangguhan, kesantunan, dan kesadaran kosmologis. Motif songket juga berfungsi sebagai media pendidikan karakter, pengatur etika sosial, dan simbol hubungan harmonis antara manusia, alam, dan Tuhan. Penelitian ini memperkaya kajian semiotika budaya serta mendukung pelestarian identitas budaya Melayu Siak di Tengah era globalisasi.

Kata Kunci: *Tenun Songket Siak, Semiotika Budaya, Roland Barthes, Makna Simbolik, Nilai Filosofis Melayu*

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Introduction

In the life of the Malay community in Siak, Riau, *songket* woven fabric remains central to traditional ceremonies, including weddings, customary coronations, and religious celebrations. *Songket* serves as a symbol of social identity and honor and as a medium for conveying the Malay community's moral and religious values; therefore, it is not merely traditional clothing (Rodgers, 2015; Ab. Aziz, 2021; Sapitri et al., 2022; Hasnah et al., 2025). Motifs such as *pucuk rebung (bamboo shoots)*, *tampuk manggis (mangosteen calyx)*, *itik pulang petang (ducks returning at dusk)*, and *awan larat (flowing clouds)* reflect the Malay worldview of moral growth, social harmony, and spirituality (Hidayat & Hestyana, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2024; Hidayat & Roselani, 2025; Hidayat & Pangesti, 2026). However, the growth of the modern textile industry and the rising production of machine-made songket have shifted the forms, colors, and symbolic meanings of traditional motifs (Kerlogue, 2000; Ramona et al., 2025; Uchino, 2005). This trend has contributed to a declining understanding among younger generations of the philosophical values embedded in songket, leading to a gradual reduction in *songket's* role as a medium of cultural communication (Utama & Sugito, 2016; S. Lestari & Riyanti, 2017; Eryanti, 2025). Therefore, research on the philosophical meanings of Siak Malay songket motifs is important as an effort to preserve Malay cultural identity amidst globalization.

Previous studies have shown that Malay *songket* is a cultural artifact that embodies symbolic values, social identity, and local wisdom of the Malay community. Asmidar and Prihatin (2022) explain that Siak *songket* motifs used in traditional bridal attire represent the Riau Malay community's philosophy of life. Suroyo et al. (2024) emphasize that Malay *songket* contains spiritual values and environmental ethics that reflect the relationship between humans and nature. Meanwhile, Guslinda and Kurniaman (2016) found that the function of *songket* has shifted from an exclusive royal symbol to a cultural commodity used by the wider community. Symbolic studies on other Malay *songket* traditions include Lestari and Hera (2021), Riski (2023) on the symbolic meaning of *naga besaung* in Palembang *songket*, and Neng Sari and Yuliarma (2024) on Jambi *songket*, all of which demonstrate that *songket* motifs contain symbols of cosmology, power, and local worldviews. Studies have also shown that songket symbolism contributes to historical awareness and cultural education among younger generations (Samosir, 2023). Nevertheless, most previous studies still focus on social functions, aesthetics, or cultural values in general, while in-depth studies on the symbolic structure and philosophical values of Siak Malay *songket* motifs remain relatively limited (Imelda et al., 2023). Thus, the novelty of this research lies in its interpretative and contextual philosophical analysis of Siak Malay *songket* motifs within the framework of the Siak Malay worldview.

Given these issues, this study aims to reveal the community's philosophical perspectives on Siak Malay *songket* motifs as part of Malay cultural heritage and to explain the functions of these motifs in the community's social and cultural life (Mee,

2010; Nakatani, 2015). Specifically, this study focuses on interpreting the symbolic meanings of *songket* motifs that have developed within the Siak Malay tradition and their relevance to the local community's moral, religious, and cultural values (Hidayat et al., 2026). Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) how does the community perceive the philosophical meanings of Siak *songket* motifs as Malay cultural heritage? and (2) what functions do these motifs serve in the cultural and social life of the Siak Malay community?

This study is expected to make both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches research on Malay culture, particularly in cultural symbolism, textile semiotics, and local cultural philosophy, by analyzing Siak Malay *songket* motifs. Practically, the findings may serve as a medium for cultural education for younger generations and support efforts to preserve Malay cultural heritage in Riau. In addition, this study may serve as a reference for artisans, academics, and local governments in developing cultural preservation policies based on local wisdom amid the growth of the creative industry and cultural globalization.

Method

This descriptive qualitative study was conducted at three *songket* weaving houses in Siak Regency, Riau Province, namely *Tenun* Wan Fitri, Winda *Songket* Riau, and *Rumah Tenun Kampung* Bandar. These three locations were purposively selected because they continue to preserve hereditary *songket* weaving traditions, actively produce and promote woven products, and are recognized as major centers of Siak *songket* weaving.

The informants in this study were the owners and managers of the weaving houses in Siak, namely Fitri Handayani, owner of *Tenun* Wan Fitri (I1); Winda Wati Azman, owner of Winda *Songket* Riau (I2); and Mrs. Ruhaya, manager of *Rumah Tenun Kampung Bandar* (I3). The data consisted of utterances from in-depth interviews and direct observations of *songket* weaving activities. Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore the meanings of motifs and related cultural values, while observations were carried out to examine the weaving process and motif forms. Observations were conducted directly at the weaving locations, while interviews were conducted via semi-structured WhatsApp messages. Documentation focused on motif forms, woven products, and weaving activities. To maintain systematic data organization, each interview result was coded according to the order of informants, namely I1, I2, and I3 (Miles et al., 2014).

Data analysis employed Barthes' (1972) cultural semiotic theory, which views signs and symbols as a two-level system of signification consisting of denotation and connotation (Barthes, 1967, 1977). This approach was used to represent the moral, social, and spiritual values of the Siak Malay community. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, motif categorization and coding, interpretation of symbolic meanings, and conclusion drawing. The data were presented formally in tables and informally through descriptive explanations to contextualize the cultural meanings (Barthes, 1967, 1977).

Results and Discussion

Result

The findings of this study consist of three main aspects: (1) the denotative meanings of Siak *songket* motifs; (2) the connotative and philosophical meanings of

Siak *songket* motifs as representations of the worldview of the Siak Malay community; and (3) the functions of *songket* motifs as guidelines for the lives of the people of Siak Regency, Riau Province. The explanation is presented as follows.

1. Denotative Meaning of Siak Songket Motifs

Based on interviews with three informants, coded I1, I2, and I3, nine dominant motifs were consistently used across the three weaving locations, namely the *Pucuk Rebung*, *Tampuk Manggis*, *Siku Keluang Banji*, *Siku Awan*, *Siku Tunggal*, *Sekuntum Bunga*, *Mata Panah*, *Tabir Bintang*, and *Daun Tunggal*.

Based on interviews with three informants coded as I1, I2, and I3, nine dominant motifs were consistently identified across the three Siak Malay songket weaving centers, namely *Pucuk Rebung*, *Tampuk Manggis*, *Siku Keluang Banji*, *Siku Awan*, *Siku Tunggal*, *Sekuntum Bunga*, *Mata Panah*, *Tabir Bintang*, and *Daun Tunggal*. In Barthes' semiotics (1967), denotative meaning refers to the literal meaning that emerges from the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In this study, denotative meanings were analyzed using the lexical meanings of the motif names and the visual forms they refer to, drawing on the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) and other lexical sources.

Denotatively, these motif names refer to literal objects derived from plants, animals, and natural phenomena. The *Pucuk Rebung* motif refers to the young bamboo shoot, *Tampuk Manggis* to the mangosteen fruit's calyx, and *Daun Tunggal* to a single leaf. The *Siku Keluang Banji* motif depicts the shape of a large bat's wing, whereas *Siku Awan* and *Siku Tunggal* refer to angular or folded forms resembling an elbow. Meanwhile, *Sekuntum Bunga* refers to a flower bud, *Mata Panah* to the pointed tip of an arrow, and *Tabir Bintang* to the arrangement of stars in the sky. Based on their referential sources, these motifs can be grouped into three categories: flora-based motifs (*Pucuk Rebung*, *Tampuk Manggis*, *Sekuntum Bunga*, and *Daun Tunggal*); shape- or angle-based motifs (*Siku Keluang Banji*, *Siku Awan*, and *Siku Tunggal*); and motifs based on objects and celestial phenomena (*Mata Panah* and *Tabir Bintang*). Based on the explanation above, the denotative meanings of Siak Malay *songket* motifs are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Denotative Meanings of Siak Malay Songket Motifs, Riau

No	Type of Motif	Meaning in English	Denotative Meaning
1	*Pucuk Rebung*	Bamboo Shoot Tip	The upper part of a young bamboo shoot
2	*Tampuk Manggis*	Mangosteen Calyx	The calyx of the mangosteen fruit
3	*Siku Keluang Banji*	Banji Bat Wing	The shape of a large bat's wing
4	*Siku Awan*	Cloud Elbow	A shape resembling the curve of clouds
5	*Siku Tunggal*	Single Elbow	A single angular elbow-like shape
6	*Sekuntum Bunga*	Flower Bud	A flower that has not yet bloomed
7	*Mata Panah*	Arrowhead	The pointed tip of an arrow
8	*Tabir Bintang*	Star Arrangement	The arrangement of stars in the sky
9	*Daun Tunggal*	A Single Leaf	A One Leaf

Based on the table above, the denotative meanings of Siak Malay *songket* motifs generally derive from literal objects closely related to the everyday life of the Malay community, such as plants, animals, objects, and natural phenomena. The naming of the motifs is based on the visual resemblance between the motif forms and the objects

they represent. Therefore, denotative meaning serves as the initial foundation for the formation of symbolic meanings at the subsequent stage.

2. The Philosophical Meaning of Siak Songket Weaving Motifs as a Representation of the Siak Malay Community's Worldview

Connotative meanings arise from the values, worldview, ethics, and cosmology embedded in the Siak community's beliefs about *songket* motifs. These motifs embody cultural beliefs and myths that serve as guidelines for the life of the Riau Malay community. The following section presents an analysis of nine Siak *songket* motifs using Barthes' semiotic framework (1972, 1977).

2.1. **Philosophical meaning of the *Pucuk Rebung* motif**

The *Pucuk Rebung* motif in Siak Malay songket symbolizes growth, hope, and character formation for younger generations. Informants explained that bamboo shoots represent the early stage of life, which must be nurtured carefully so individuals grow in accordance with Malay customs and religious teachings. One informant stated that the motif symbolizes "*pertumbuhan dan harapan generasi muda*" *[growth and hope for the younger generation]*. In addition, the straight form of bamboo shoots is interpreted as a symbol of morality, integrity, and steadfast principles. Therefore, the *Pucuk Rebung* motif serves not only as a decorative ornament but also as a representation of moral education, discipline, and the Malay community's hopes for future generations with noble character.

2.2. **Philosophical Meaning of the *Tampuk Manggis* Motif**

The *Tampuk Manggis* motif in Siak Malay songket symbolizes harmony between outward appearance and inner virtue. Informants explained that the motif teaches the importance of cultivating a pure heart and noble character rather than merely displaying physical beauty. This meaning closely aligns with the Malay proverb *"kulitnya pahit, isinya manis" [bitter on the outside, sweet on the inside]*, which emphasizes inner goodness and wisdom. In addition, the mangosteen calyx is interpreted as a symbol of protection and sacrifice because it shields the fruit within. Therefore, the *Tampuk Manggis* motif represents politeness, moral integrity, wisdom, and the balance between external appearance and inner character in Malay culture.

2.3. **Philosophical Meaning of the *Siku Keluang Banji* Motif**

The *Siku Keluang Banji* motif in Siak Malay songket draws inspiration from the shape and behavior of bats, which are seen as active, cautious, and adaptable. Informants explained that the motif symbolizes hard work, perseverance, vigilance, and self-control in everyday life. One informant noted that the motif is associated with *"kerja keras dan ketekunan" [hard work and perseverance]*, reflecting the Malay belief that individuals should remain diligent, careful, and disciplined in facing life's challenges. Bats are also regarded as selective because they eat only ripe fruit, making them symbols of wisdom and restraint. Therefore, the *Siku Keluang Banji* motif represents resilience, adaptability, carefulness, and moral discipline in Malay culture.

2.4. **Philosophical meaning of the *Siku Awan* motif**

The *Siku Awan* motif in Siak Malay *songket* symbolizes adaptability, wisdom, and harmony in life. Inspired by the movement of clouds that follow the wind, the motif reflects the Malay belief that people should be flexible in the face of social change while remaining committed to customary and religious values. In addition, clouds are understood as part of God's creation that connects the sky and the earth, giving the motif spiritual and cosmological significance. Therefore, the *Siku Awan* motif represents a balance among humans, nature, and God, as well as spiritual awareness within the Siak Malay worldview.

2.5. **Philosophical Meaning of the *Siku Tunggal* Motif**

The *Siku Tunggal* motif in Siak Malay *songket* symbolizes steadfastness, integrity, and consistency in life. Its firm, angular form represents strong principles and moral resolve that are not easily shaken by circumstances. Informants explained that the motif is closely tied to obedience to customary values and religious teachings in Malay culture. In addition, the motif is interpreted as a symbol of authority and moral responsibility in fulfilling social roles. Therefore, the *Siku Tunggal* motif reflects firmness, discipline, and commitment to maintaining social and cultural values within the Siak Malay community.

2.6. **Philosophical meaning of the *Sekuntum Bunga* motif**

The *Sekuntum Bunga* motif in Siak Malay *songket* symbolizes moral beauty, politeness, and the potential for goodness in human life. In Malay culture, flowers are associated with gentleness, dignity, and beneficial behavior, especially as representations of feminine virtues. One informant explained that the motif reflects the belief that humans should possess good character and be useful to others. Flowers are also interpreted as symbols of purity and growth because they represent the beginning of fruit and the start of a good life. Therefore, the *Sekuntum Bunga* motif represents gentleness, hope, moral dignity, and the importance of nurturing goodness from an early stage of life.

2.7. **Philosophical Meaning of the *Mata Panah* Motif**

The *Mata Panah* motif in Siak Malay *songket* symbolizes firmness, precision, and clear direction in life. In Malay culture, arrows represent strength, discipline, patience, and accuracy in decision-making. One informant described the motif as a symbol of *"kekuatan, ketelitian, dan ketepatan" [strength, precision, and accuracy]*, reflecting the ideal character of individuals who are focused and determined in achieving their goals. In addition, the arrowhead's sharpness symbolizes firmness and consistency in upholding moral values and customary teachings. Therefore, the *Mata Panah* motif embodies resilience, discipline, and determination within the Siak Malay worldview.

2.8. **Philosophical meaning of the *Tabir Bintang* motif**

The *Tabir Bintang* motif in Siak Malay *songket* symbolizes guidance in life, spiritual hope, and the relationship between humans and God. In Malay culture, stars are seen as symbols of direction and guidance amid uncertainty and darkness. One informant explained that the motif represents *"petunjuk hidup dan harapan spiritual" [guidance in life and spiritual hope]*, reflecting the belief that humans should remain guided by faith and moral values. In addition, stars are associated with hope, steadfastness, and divine guidance, while the term *tabir [veil]* suggests that spiritual truth must be understood through wisdom and experience. Therefore, the *Tabir Bintang* motif embodies spirituality, cosmic order, and awareness of God's greatness within the Siak Malay worldview.

2.9. **The Philosophical Meaning of the *Daun Tunggal* Motif**

The *Daun Tunggal* motif in Siak Malay *songket* symbolizes simplicity, humility, and the continuity of life. In Malay culture, leaves are regarded as natural elements that provide benefits without seeking attention, making them symbols of modesty and social responsibility. One informant stated that the motif represents *"kesederhanaan dan kemandirian" [simplicity and independence]*, reflecting the ideal character of individuals who remain humble while contributing to society. Informants also explained that leaves symbolize the cycle of life and the interconnected relationship among humans, society, and nature. Therefore, the *Daun Tunggal* motif represents balance in life, humility, and harmony between humans and the natural world. Based on an in-depth

explanation of the philosophical meaning of Siak *songket* motifs, the following is a summary of their connotative meanings.

Table 2. Philosophical Meanings of Siak *Songket*

No	Motif Type	Core Philosophical Meaning
1	*Pucuk Rebung*	Growth and moral education
2	*Tampuk Manggis*	Inner virtue and harmony
3	*Siku Keluang Banji*	Perseverance and vigilance
4	*Siku Awan*	Adaptability and spirituality
5	*Siku Tunggal*	Integrity and firmness
6	*Sekuntum Bunga*	Moral beauty and goodness
7	*Mata Panah*	Precision and determination
8	*Tabir Bintang*	Spiritual guidance
9	*Daun Tunggal*	Humility and simplicity

Based on the table above, the philosophical meanings of Siak Malay *songket* motifs reflect moral, spiritual, and social values that guide community life. Motifs such as *Pucuk Rebung* and *Sekuntum Bunga* emphasize growth, moral goodness, and human potential that should be nurtured from an early age, while *Tampuk Manggis* highlights the balance between outward appearance and inner virtue. The *Siku Keluang Banji*, *Siku Awan*, and *Siku Tunggal* motifs reflect perseverance, adaptability, and steadfastness in upholding customs and religious values. Meanwhile, *Mata Panah* symbolizes determination and a focus on goodness, *Tabir Bintang* represents spiritual guidance and divine direction, and *Daun Tunggal* emphasizes simplicity, humility, and human awareness of nature and the cycle of life. Overall, these motifs embody the Malay worldview that balances morality, spirituality, and social harmony.

3. The Function of Motifs in the Life of the Siak Community, Riau Province

The function of songket weaving motifs in the Malay community of Siak cannot be separated from the connotative meanings they carry. Through Barthes' semiotic approach, motifs are understood as cultural signs that convey the values, ethics, and worldview of the community that preserves this Malay cultural heritage.

3.1 **The Function of Forming Life Values and Character**

Songket weaving motifs in the Siak Malay community serve as symbolic media for transmitting life values and shaping Malay character. Various Siak *songket* motifs have educational functions in social life, through which moral values, social ethics, and the Malay worldview are passed down across generations. This educational function is especially reflected in the *Pucuk Rebung* and *Sekuntum Bunga* motifs, which represent growth, education, and the formation of human character from an early age to social and moral maturity.

The *Pucuk Rebung* motif is often interpreted as a symbol of growth, gradual education, and the search for identity. Based on interviews with Informants 1, 2, and 3, this motif reflects the Malay belief that bamboo shoots mark the beginning of life's journey toward maturity. Therefore, the *Pucuk Rebung* motif is often understood to represent parents' hopes for the younger generation. Meanwhile, the *Sekuntum Bunga* motif represents purity and human potential that has not yet fully blossomed. This condition symbolizes a person's social readiness within community life. Through this motif, Malay society instills values of gender ethics, character refinement, and respect for women as an important part of the social order. Thus, both the *Pucuk Rebung* and *Sekuntum Bunga* motifs serve as media for transmitting life values and shaping the

character of Malay society.

3.2 **The Function of Maintaining The Balance Of Malay Social Ethics**

Another function of Siak *songket* motifs is to serve as a symbolic reminder of the importance of balance between outward and inner aspects, as well as between individual interests and the social order. The *Tampuk Manggis* and *Daun Tunggal* motifs represent these values of balance. Connotatively, the *Tampuk Manggis* motif is interpreted by the community as a symbol of balance between outward appearance and inner character, as reflected in the Malay proverb *"kulitnya pahit, isinya manis" [bitter skin, sweet inside].* Meanwhile, the Daun Tunggal motif connotatively reflects the value of balance in social ethics.

Based on the statements of Informants 1 and 2, these two motifs share a related social function of balance. The *Tampuk Manggis* motif emphasizes balance through the values of wisdom and inner virtue upheld in Malay society, while the *Daun Tunggal* motif reflects balance through the values of simplicity and harmony that support ethical social life.

3.3 **The Function of The Fighting Spirit of The Malay People**

In the life of the Siak Malay community, songket weaving motifs also reinforce the identity of resilience, determination, and fighting spirit among the Malay people, especially in relation to the social role of men. These motifs are not merely aesthetic elements but also convey moral messages that emphasize the values of courage, responsibility, and readiness to face various challenges in life. Through the visual symbols embedded in songket motifs, the Malay community represents the ideal attitudes and characteristics that a Malay person is expected to embody in carrying out their roles within the family and community.

Siak *songket* motifs also symbolize resilience and determination, reflecting the fighting spirit of the Malay people. This function is closely associated with men in Malay society, as evidenced by the dominant use of the *Siku Keluang Banji*, *Siku Tunggal*, and *Mata Panah* motifs. These motifs convey moral messages that emphasize courage, strength, and precision in facing life's challenges.

The *Siku Keluang Banji* motif features a dynamic movement pattern associated with nighttime activity, symbolizing vigilance and endurance in difficult situations. It also represents resilience and adaptability under challenging conditions. The *Siku Tunggal motif*, with its angular form resembling an elbow, symbolizes the backbone of the family. Thus, it affirms the role of men as breadwinners in Malay families. The *Mata Panah* motif, characterized by its sharp, targeted form, represents focus, precision, and direction. According to Informants 2 and 3, these three motifs share a similar function as representations of the Malay people's fighting spirit: *the Siku Keluang Banji* motif symbolizes strength, the *Siku Tunggal* motif symbolizes responsibility, and the *Mata Panah* motif symbolizes precision of direction.

3.4 **The Function of the Continuity between Humans, Nature, and God**

Two other Siak *songket* motifs, Siku Awan and Tabir Bintang, serve as symbolic representations of the balance among humans, nature, and transcendent power. In the Malay cultural worldview, humans are understood as part of a broader cosmic order. Therefore, an ideal life must maintain harmony with nature while recognizing God as the source of universal order. This cosmological perspective is reflected in the Siku Awan and Tabir Bintang motifs.

According to Informants 2 and 3, the Siku Awan motif represents flexibility and wisdom guided by God. It serves as a symbolic guide for understanding changing circumstances and adapting harmoniously to the cosmic order. Meanwhile, the Tabir

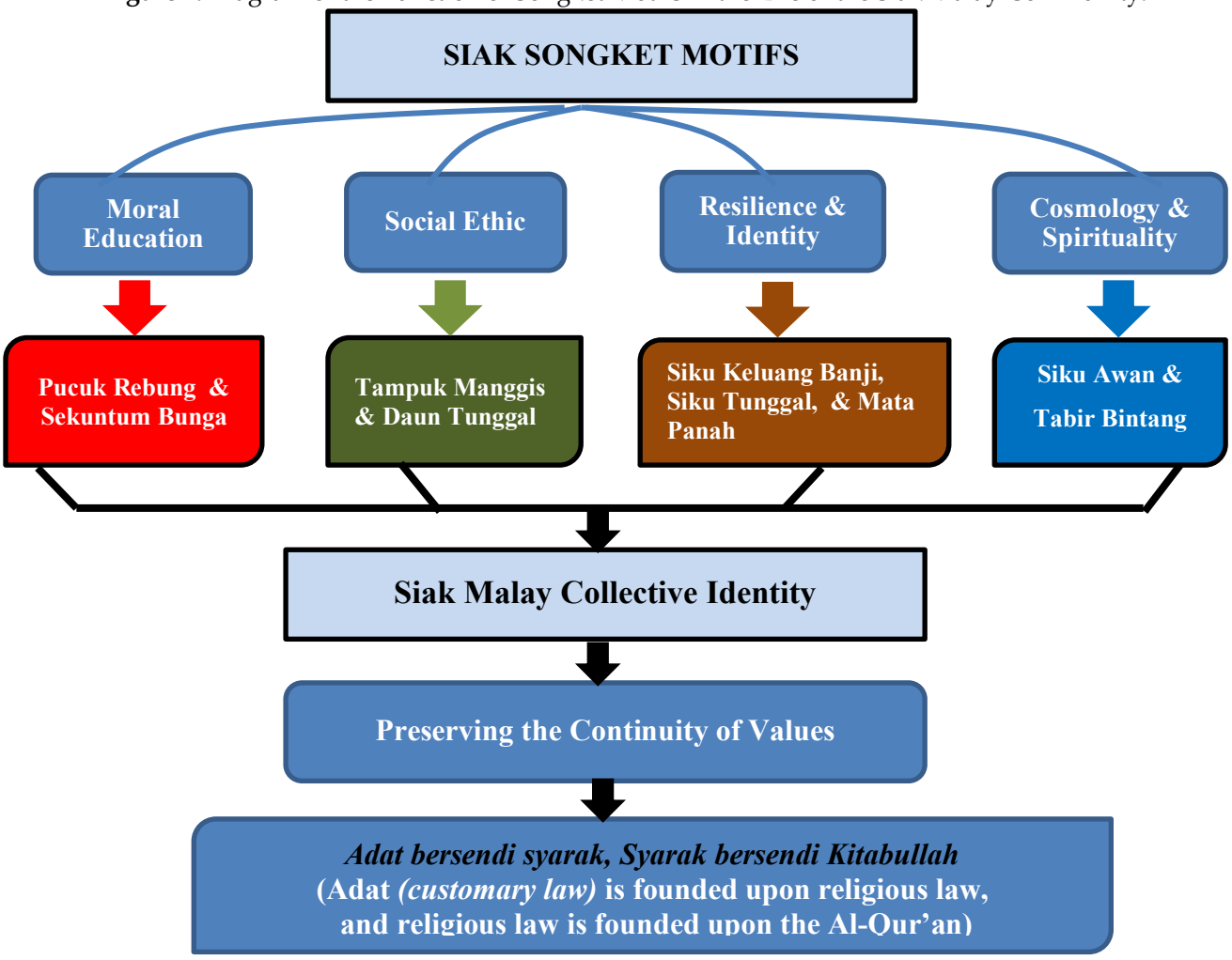
Bintang motif represents divine guidance. In Malay culture, ancestors traditionally used stars as guides at night when moonlight was dim. Thus, this motif symbolizes spirituality and the presence of God who protects the Malay community. Therefore, both the Siku Awan and Tabir Bintang motifs affirm the continuity of the cosmos among humans, nature, and God.

3.5 **Synthesis of the Function of Songket Motifs in the Cultural Life of the Siak Community**

Based on the discussion in the previous subsections, Siak *songket* motifs function as a system of cultural signs that contain and transmit the fundamental values of Siak Malay society. All analyzed motifs demonstrate symbolic functions that shape collective identity, preserve cultural continuity across generations, and reflect the Siak Malay community's worldview.

Siak *songket* motifs can be grouped into four main functions. First, they serve as a medium for moral education from an early age. Second, they help shape life values and social ethics. Third, they symbolize the fighting spirit of the Malay people. Fourth, they represent the cosmological continuity among humans, nature, and God. These four functions show that Siak *songket* motifs are integral to how the Malay community understands life and preserves its cultural traditions. The following section presents a diagram of the functions of Siak *songket* motifs.

Figure 1. Diagram of the Function of Songket Motifs in the Life of the Siak Malay Community.



Based on the research data, the functions of Siak *songket* motifs are closely tied

to the Malay cultural value system, passed down through generations, and expressed through visual symbols collectively understood by the community. These motifs serve not only as decorative ornaments or traditional clothing patterns but also as media for cultural education, conveyors of moral messages, and representations of the collective identity of the Siak Malay community.

The structure of meaning in Siak *songket* motifs can be classified into four main domains: moral education, social ethics, resilience and identity, and cosmology and spirituality. In the domain of moral education, the *Pucuk Rebung* and *Sekuntum Bunga* motifs emphasize the importance of moral development, character growth, purity, and refinement of character from an early age. In the domain of social ethics, the *Tampuk Manggis* and *Daun Tunggal* motifs represent the balance between outward appearance and inner character, simplicity, humility, and harmonious relationships among humans, society, and nature. Meanwhile, the domain of resilience and identity is reflected in the *Siku Keluang Banji*, *Mata Panah*, and *Siku Tunggal* motifs, which symbolize hard work, vigilance, decisiveness, integrity, and steadfastness in living according to custom and religion. The domain of cosmology and spirituality is reflected in the *Siku Awan* and *Tabir Bintang* motifs, which portray the harmonious relationship among humans, nature, and God and emphasize the importance of spiritual guidance in the life of the Malay community.

These functions demonstrate that Siak *songket* motifs constitute a cultural sign system that integrates moral, social, religious, and cosmological values into a unified Malay worldview. This aligns with the Malay philosophy, "*Adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah," which means that custom is founded upon Islamic law, and Islamic law is founded upon the Qur'an*. This philosophy emphasizes that custom and religious teachings form the primary foundation of the cultural identity and social life of the Siak Malay community.

Discussion

Siak Malay *songket* motifs function as a system of cultural signs that represent the worldview of the Malay community. At the denotative level, motifs such as *Pucuk Rebung, Tampuk Manggis, Siku Keluang Banji, Siku Awan, Siku Tunggal, Sekuntum Bunga, Mata Panah, Tabir Bintang*, and *Daun Tunggal* show a direct relationship with nature, plants, and visual phenomena closely associated with the life of the Malay community (Haron et al., 2014; I. P. Sari et al., 2020; Kartika et al., 2022). These literal meanings then develop at the connotative level into moral, spiritual, social, and cosmological symbols that are passed down from generation to generation through the tradition of *songket* weaving (Kerlogue, 2005; Wen & Md Yunus, 2026).

Philosophically, Siak songket motifs embody the Malay community's life values (Bose, 2026). The *Pucuk Rebung* and *Sekuntum Bunga* motifs underscore the importance of moral education and character formation from an early age (Anriana et al., 2023). The *Tampuk Manggis* and *Daun Tunggal* motifs convey balance in social ethics, while the *Siku Keluang Banji, Siku Tunggal*, and *Mata Panah* motifs symbolize strength, responsibility, and clarity of direction, reflecting the Malay people's fighting spirit (Davidson, 2019; Wei, 2025). Meanwhile, the *Siku Awan* and *Tabir Bintang* motifs express the harmonious relationship among humans, nature, and God, as part of the Siak Malay community's cosmological worldview (Parameswara et al., 2023).

The findings of this study have strong social relevance for maintaining the continuity of Malay cultural identity amid globalization and cultural commodification (Yahya & Jones, 2021; Solomatina, 2024). In general, *songket* motifs are often used

merely as complements to traditional clothing; however, their function has expanded to serve as a medium for transmitting cultural values, religiosity, and social ethics within Malay society (Mee, 2014; Syafrini et al., 2020). The use of certain motifs in traditional ceremonies, family activities, and as symbols of social identity demonstrates that *songket* continues to hold a living social function that is collectively understood by the people of Siak (Syahrul et al., 2026).

From Barthes' semiotic perspective (1972), this study shows that Siak *songket* motifs operate on two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation (Leow, 2015). At the denotative level, the motifs refer to concrete objects such as bamboo shoots, flowers, clouds, leaves, and stars. At the connotative level, these visual signs become cultural symbols that represent the moral values, ideology, and worldview of the Malay community (Kartika et al., 2022; Wen & Md Yunus, 2026). Values such as living according to custom and religion, maintaining harmony between the outer and inner self, and preserving the relationship among humans, God, and nature undergo a process of naturalization, so they are accepted as a natural part of Malay life (Bendall, 2019). Thus, songket motifs can be understood as a medium of cultural representation that maintains the legitimacy of Malay customary values based on the principle, "*Adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah.*"

This study also shows that Siak Malay *songket* is a cultural text that preserves the collective knowledge of the Malay community (Abrams & Chapman, 2026). The structure of meaning within *songket* motifs reveals four main domains: moral education, social-ethical balance, fighting spirit, and cosmological spirituality (Zhang et al., 2018; Marbun et al., 2026). These four domains demonstrate that Malay society views life holistically, placing morality, social harmony, steadfastness of principles, and religiosity at the foundation of cultural life (Suroyo et al., 2026). These findings also expand previous studies that generally positioned *songket* only as a symbol of aesthetics and traditional identity, because this research demonstrates that songket motifs also function as a medium for transmitting socio-religious values and as a system of cultural education within Malay society.

The results of this study have important implications for preserving Siak Malay culture, particularly in education, cultural preservation, and the development of creative industries rooted in local traditions (Bose, 2026). The philosophical values embedded in ***songket*** motifs can serve as educational materials for local cultural education in schools and cultural institutions, helping younger generations not only recognize *songket* as a textile product but also understand its meanings and cultural values. In addition, systematic documentation and digitization of *songket* motifs are necessary to ensure that their philosophical meanings and social functions are not lost amid social change and cultural commercialization (I. P. Sari et al., 2020; Panjaitan et al., 2021; Anriana et al., 2023). Collaboration among local governments, customary institutions, academics, and *songket* artisans is also needed to strengthen research-based cultural preservation and the sustainable development of local culture.

Conclusion

The motifs of Siak Riau Malay *songket* weaving function as a system of cultural signs that express the Siak Malay community's worldview, moral values, and cosmology. Drawing on Barthes' semiotic analysis, each motif carries layered meanings: denotative meaning, the representation of visual forms; connotative meaning, symbols of social and customary values; and mythological meaning, the affirmation of Malay cultural ideology grounded in the philosophy "*adat bersendi*

syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah" (custom is founded upon Islamic law, and Islamic law is founded upon the Qur'an). The *Pucuk Rebung* motif represents moral growth and regeneration. The *Tampuk Manggis* symbolizes balance between the outer and inner self. The *Siku Keluang Banji*, *Siku Tunggal*, and *Mata Panah* emphasize strength, responsibility, and clarity of direction. The *Sekuntum Bunga* represents politeness and the dignity of women. The *Daun Tunggal* signifies simplicity and the continuity of life, while the *Siku Awan* and *Tabir Bintang* reflect the harmonious relationship among humans, nature, and God. Overall, these motifs serve as media for moral education, regulators of social ethics, reinforcers of cultural identity, and spiritual symbols within the Siak Malay community.

This study offers theoretical and methodological contributions to the study of Malay culture and cultural semiotics. Theoretically, this research extends Barthes' semiotics to interpret traditional weaving motifs as "*cultural texts*" that convey relationships among symbols, customs, and the Malay community's religiosity. This study also demonstrates that *songket* motifs serve as a medium for transmitting values and legitimizing cultural traditions within society. Methodologically, this study strengthens interpretive validity through triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as systematic coding of informants. In addition, this research offers novelty in its object of study by specifically examining Siak *songket* motifs, which remain relatively underexplored compared to other Malay *songket* traditions.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research informants were limited to artisans and weaving shop owners in Siak Regency, so the perspectives of younger generations, traditional leaders, and consumers were not broadly represented. In addition, the interpretive nature of the cultural semiotic approach still allows for subjectivity in interpretation. Therefore, future studies are recommended to expand the scope of participants and research areas, conduct comparative studies with other Malay *songket* traditions, and combine semiotic approaches with ethnography, historical studies, or visual anthropology to obtain a deeper understanding of the transformation of *songket* motif meanings within contemporary socio-cultural contexts.

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