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Local Educational Values through the Character Identity of Minangkabau Women in the Novel *Sabai Sunwoo*

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Abstract

This research discusses the educational values of character identity in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo* and their implication on the local cultural learning within a literary work that has a vital role. Furthermore, it aims to explore how the representation of character identity value is portrayed in the Minang women living in diaspora and how those values can provide recommendations for local culture-based teaching materials. The research results indicate the presence of the representation values of character identity education. First, Minang women as leaders have the character of wisdom in sacrifice, particularly in education. Second, religious norms as education, such as respecting social norms. Third, loyalty in identity values by complying with customary laws. Last, affection for naming practice as a cultural symbol.

Keywords: character identity values, Minangkabau women, educational implication

INTRODUCTION

Identity serves as a unifying element within the cultural system as well as the representation of the interconnected cultural system from one individual to others. In other words, identity refers to beliefs collectively shared as an ideology or faith. Therefore, identity is closely related to collective construction within a culture that is adhered to or occupied in the social environment of a certain community. Consequently, there are cultural values in an identity that are correlated from one to another in teaching something about life or principles within a community. It certainly has a connection with matrilineal culture that places a woman as the representation of her identity. Moreover, this system is always inherited based on the ancestral line that does not refer to a father anymore, but instead a mother (Yamarizky et al., 2023 :74). In essence, the inherited system is held tightly by the Minangkabau customary system to maintain its identity values.

Novels with a Minangkabau setting, particularly one entitled *Sabai Sunwoo*, accommodate those values. The context of this novel focuses on the Minang women as the representation of their character identity values. They present values that are believed to be humanistic teachings to understand cultural values. Minang women in this context are named *bundo kanduang*. In Minangkabau culture, Minang women hold privileged positions. They hold a respected position and have access to all, including the wealth of customary inheritance under the matrilineal principles (Sardini et al., 2022:6). Such a condition has created a heavy load regarding behavior, speech, etc. All of them must represent deeply about Minang women.

In addition, the conception of Minangkabau matrilineal culture has explained clearly about the female role (*Bundo Kanduang*), particularly in placing the position of women in the main sector (Setiawan, 2019: 93). This condition has implanted deeply the values of Minang



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identity in every relation of women as strong representation. Therefore, identity values are represented in literary works.

Values in a general view can be engaged with good or bad action. Thus, values can attract someone's interest to act without being forced and become a guiding principle for life (Gultom, 2024:149). Values play a vital role in guiding people to achievement desire, and they are the manifestation of serenity and peace in a practice of cultural arrangement. It is ethical to respond to a cultural system of a certain community. A value becomes something related to the surrounding world, including every action and practice of other people (Vakhovskyi, 2025:4).

Ultimately, the implementation of existing values belongs to a principle of cultural education, including in the learning process of local culture. It is a part of literacy that must be implanted, considering that literacy on the local culture is gradually diminishing across generations. For instance, the culture of traditional Javanese shadow puppetry that young people are getting rarely like it. They think that the performance of shadow puppetry is far from the recent modern reality of the young generation (Alfaqi, 2022 : 127). Such a condition is exacerbated by the use of various stage languages among young people. Students use the stage language of puppetry less than 7% of the time or in the limited category (Widodo et al., 2017 :1). For this reason, some efforts are necessary to reinstate the literacy aspect to local culture, including ethical integration to focus on the cognitive aspect of society that is perfectly woven (Labibah et al., 2025). This interconnection can grow something that can be passed down through generations to maintain a certain norm system and value as a life principle in daily interaction within the existing cultural structure (Suharini et al., 2024:234).

The values of character identity inside the novel *Sabai Sunwoo* represent the condition of Minang migrant women who still preserve the values of Minang women characteristics as ideal figure, obeying the prevailing norm, attitude, and perspective in internalizing their original culture both in the homeland and migrant land. The character of the novel directly encounters new cultural constructions that are experienced and gives impacts in the ways of thinking and acting while living away from home. In fact, migratory culture tends to identical with men, while to women, it can maintain matrilineal tradition as an identity (Oktaviani et al., 2022:4). All matters concerning heritage distribution in matrilineal culture tend to consider the significance of maternal lineage. Therefore, for Minang men, a specific term of Kampong *paguno balun*, or encouragement to migrate, occurs due to the limitations in the migrant land, and men have additional roles there (Wirasty, 2020:12-13). Migration culture for men has more responsibilities, so it can contribute significant impacts to the homeland (Aprial, 2020:230).

In response to this condition, there has been a transformation in the migration culture for Minangkabau women. This shift has positioned the tradition of migration as no longer being conducted solely by men but also by women. The fundamental reasons for this shift comprise occupational reasons and education as the main factor. The last factor of encouragement to migrate comes from spousal support, as women accompany their husbands in the migratory journey (Nadia et al., 2022:5). This phenomenon raises questions of how the educational values of character identity remains deeply embedded among Minangkabau women.

This phenomenon has prompted this research to examine the values of character identity of Minang women as depicted in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo*, serving as a component of character identity education in response to the cultural shifts associated with migration. The



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approach employs the representation theory of Stuart Hall about the meanings produced, interpreted, or exchanged by a specific cultural group within a community (Hall, 1997:17). This perspective serves as a conceptual framework to understand the cultural meanings through communication in symbols of interaction (Sofia & Sunjaya, 2024:3). Thus, the construction of meaning representation refers to the cultural practices (Barker, 2005:15). Representation constitutes a significant field of inquiry and is integral to cultural studies for analyzing phenomena concerning socio-economic, cultural, and political matters. (Alamsyah, 2020:2). Eventually, representation exists to shape perceptions or meanings for developing an identity construction (Setiaji et al., 2023:35).

One of the previous studies related to this topic was conducted by Noor et al (2022), discussing about a novel *Anak Rantau* as a relevant approach to values-based character education in the learning process. This research demonstrates that the content relates to the character educational values such as friendship and traditional culture as a legitimation of the implanted character identity.

The further research was carried out by Mujtaba et al (2023), focusing on the use of novel *Segala yang diisap Langit* for teaching literary at a school, particularly Vocational School. The research accommodates local values presented in the novel to educate about identity specifically Minangkabau locality through a literary work holistically. Meanwhile, the other research of Yustika et al (2024) discusses about the representation of identity resistance of Minangkabau migration culture which currently has dynamic development. This study also shows that a cultural system forms society to exist such as the expression of "*dimano bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung*". In addition, the role of *mamak* is also significant for cultivating character identity within Minangkabau culture, despite the fact that it ultimately must confront various challenges of era.

Next, the research of Aldi and Khairanis (2025) reveals the relevance of Minangkabau traditional values as a medium of character education. Minangkabau traditional values contribute to strengthening spiritual awareness and social ethics as the principle of life for Minang society. Furthermore, the research of Karuniawan (2025) investigates the portrayal of matrilineality in the novel *Segala yang diisap Langit*. In addition, it highlights forms of Minangkabau matrilineality as part of a constructed identity, particularly by depicting the role of women in negotiating identity constructions. It serves as part of the cultivation of character identity, especially through literary works.

Based on the foregoing discussions, this research aims to investigate how the process of identity representation can be embedded. Minang migrant women (diaspora) still demonstrate their strong identity. It also analyses the use of identity representation for learning local values in both Indonesian and English in particular.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method to explain identity values in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo*. The approach implements the representation theory of Stuart Hall concerning the meanings produced, interpreted, or exchanged in a certain cultural group of community (Hall, 1997:17). The word "representation" means a world constructed by a society or social group that is understood as a cultural practice (Barker, 2005:15). Every daily behavior of society represents the values that become symbols constructed as people beliefs (Giles dan Middleton, 1999:56-57). The representation illustrated in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo* presents the images of character identity values through the female character who encounters various



cultural problems, particularly in representing the characteristic values of Minang culture through literary works.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Minangkabau Woman as a Leader

The novel *Sabai Sunwoo* strongly reflects leadership values through its main character, a Minang woman who must have a new adaptation. Dayang does not accompany her husband anymore for going back to Korea. This condition has encouraged Dayang to take risks and responsibilities due to her divorce. Moreover, the character of Dayang is depicted as the one who is ready to sacrifice everything. Thus, the values of Minangkabau women, who embody maternal qualities, are clearly portrayed through the representation of the philosophical roles embedded within them. Accordingly, the discussion of Minangkabau women's leadership is reflected in modern Indonesian novels.

1.1 Prudent Attitude in Sacrifice

The word "sacrifice" in this sub-chapter refers to the characteristics of Dayang, who is represented as a character who is willing to sacrifice. She has a mother figure, lives in diaspora, and becomes a leader who is selfless in sacrifice for her daughter after getting divorce from her husband, namely Professor Han, in Korea. Moreover, when the character decides not to return to her original house, Dayang's sacrifices serve as not only the cultural symbol but also the identity of leadership and wise behavior of Minangkabau women. As an identity symbol, a Minang woman has the privilege of rights for managing heritage assets. However, Dayang finally decides to live independently in the migrant area with her daughter. She eventually decides not to return to her homeland, as stated as follows:

That may be the easiest option, but it would leave Mum dependent on your grandparents forever.
(Basral, 2022:13-135)

Such a condition has made her decide for independence and not become a burden for her family in Minang. This characteristic then becomes the positive value of Dayang's attitude, who wants to become independent in developing her career even after her divorce. She never gives up or complains when she has to adapt to the environment of Jakarta. This behavior shows new leadership as *Bundo Kanduang* in migrant land. In this context, Dayang is wise in managing her daughter, who grumbles about living in Jakarta and has been comfortable living in Korea. Reluctantly, Dayang displays frugality in managing her finances to avoid extravagance, as shown in the following quotation:

Mum's money is limited, Sab. We have to buy a car and fulfill other needs such as your schooling and insurance funds. (Basral, 2022:134)
Moreover, we have to save money a lot at least for the first five years. (Basral, 2022:134)

On the other hand, her capability in adapting and receiving everything displays a value that is represented in the character of Minang woman leadership in handling bigger problems. Sabai takes his mom's decisions as a good lesson for always thanking in any situation. Thus, this character is developed through a long process experienced by the subject as a person who has been prepared to be *Bundo Kanduang* in Minangkabau. This independent attitude is reflected in the behavior and mindset of Minangkabau woman leadership.



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1.2 Sacrifice for Education

Dayang's sacrifice in the novel can be seen from her understanding of her daughter, who still tries to adapt to a new social environment. She keeps thinking about her daughter's adaptation process and future. In this context, Dayang never surrenders to finance her daughter without begging money from her ex-husband as a result of her divorce. Her sacrifices can be noticed from:

Are you sure to enroll in the Public School? Don't think about the school fees. Mum doesn't mind spending money for your education. (Basral, 2022:184)

Yes, Mum, Sabai replied. Her eyes fixed on the schedule her mother had made:

Monday: Course of Yamaha keyboard in Melayu Village at 15-16.

Tuesday: Dance extracurricular at school at 13-14

Wednesday: Balet course at Namarina Tebet at 15-16

Thursday: Taekwondo course at Youth Center at 15-16

Friday: Dance course at Tim at 15-16

Saturday: Swimming course at Youth Center at 6-7
(Basral, 2022:196)

Dayang has sacrificed for her daughter's education to prepare her for a brighter future. In other words, Dayang has actualized the Minang woman to an identity representation through social status. In the novel *Sabai Sunwoo*, the social status of Minang women is portrayed effectively in the way of Dayang taking her daughter for reaching high education in the limited condition of life in Jakarta. A sense of care constitutes a positive aspect of Dayang's leadership as she navigates life in a migrant land and seeks to cultivate independence in facing diverse challenges. Hence, the values of sacrifice are presented positively, especially within the educational context as depicted in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo*. Dayang furnishes her daughter with the value of character identity education in terms of general lessons and religious lessons of the *Ngaji* course that serves as fundamental to Minang women. For Dayang, *Ngaji*, or reciting the Qur'an, is crucial, as depicted in the following quotation:

Sabai's other courses are stopped by Dayang except *Ngaji* course which still last privately on Friday evening with Ustazah Maisaroh. Sabai has been capable of reading *Juzz Amma* fluently and memorized the most part of the last *juz* of Al Qur'an, except some long *Surah* such as An Naba', an Naziat, Abasa, and Al Muthafifin (Basral, 2022:203)

This quotation reminds us of the conflict in 98. Religious education has a central position, and Dayang facilitates it. The value of religious education is also actualized in this novel when Dayang tries to ask Sabai to diligently wake up early in the morning and pray for *Subuh*. The following quotation depicts it:

Sweetheart, let's pray for Subuh. It's our first one in this house," Sabai stretched and let out a big yawn. "I'm sleepy, Mum."
"Come on, come with me," Dayang said, lifting her child, and Sabai bewildered.
(Basral, 2022:143)

Another educational value is reflected in the wise attitude of Dayang in teaching her daughter to regulate finances and understand business strategy. Such teachings are identical to training kids to wisely manage money and conduct business. It can be seen from the quotations below:

One year after Sab held a private party without her mom's permission, everything finally came to light. Mum asked about the skyrocketing credit card bill. Sab denied it for some reasons, but Mum eventually found out the truth. After that, our relationship began to grow in disharmony. (Basral, 2022:272)

Initially, Sab wondered why we didn't start our own business, which could generate extra benefits. Mum said that running a business may require more time, and if it fails, we will get tremendous losses. Besides, we don't have business experience in that field. Meanwhile, if we help give financial support to other people in need, our business will become an act of worship as we assist people in difficulties. (Basral, 2022:284)

Both quotations show us about Dayang's wise attitude in teaching everything including excels in managing assets and conducting businesses that carry spiritual significance, always mindful of future strategies. All of them reflect the values of Minangkabau women, serving as an educational value in effective management and wise judgment in both entrepreneurship and financial operation.

2. Religious Norm as Education

The representation of religious norms in the novel involves the cultural aspects and factors supporting the characters. This novel has religious values as an aspect of identity and represented through the behavior of all characters. Value aspects and characters have a close relationship in the literary works.

2.1 Respecting Social Norm (modesty)

Religious norms become the specific values in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo*, not only presenting the representation of identity education through religious values, but also displaying directly the religious relationship particularly for Minang women. Religion in this novel is not limited to universal understanding, but it covers various traditional norm, behavior, and clothes which affect the values of novel. Minang has a central role which affect all aspects and religious action in the novel. The novel *Sabai Sunwoo* depict them clearly by providing the character of Dayang who is really careful in action. Even in her social environment, Dayang always wants to adapt so as not to disobey the existing norms. The tension began with the arrival of Han Sunwoo, a Korean economics professor who fell in love with Dayang. However, in the story, Dayang felt anxious and wished to end the conversation with Han during the night, as shown in the following quotation:



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As Minangkabau girls, we are not accustomed to being alone for hours with a stranger. (Basral, 2022:43)

This quotation describes the value of customary law, particularly in Minangkabau culture, which embraces *syarak basandi kitabullah*. This value becomes the main reason to importantly maintain the relationship with someone, specifically a person who is not the *mukhrim*. Thus, this novel also provides reflective value, particularly in the religiosity aspect experienced by Dayang. The rest of the values serve as the representation of identity on how Minang women are positioned in the tradition, which does not contradict *syarak basandi kitabullah*.

3. Adherence to Identity Values

The representation of the loyalty value of identity in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo* certainly involves the customary law aspect or regulation that must be obeyed. The construction of external culture also influences it. Thus, it is necessary to know the way the subject can preserve the local identity as the values that must be respected and held tightly in a certain phenomenon.

3.1 Complying with Customary Laws

In this novel, the value of loyalty to tradition is attached to the character of Dayang who always obeys to customary laws. When she met a Professor from Korea who has different cultural background and state, she kept obey the tradition. This obedience did not give significant obstacles for Dayang to marry the Professor. This condition demonstrates her devotion to traditional values. Moreover, she wants Profesor Han to grasp the local culture as a process of negotiation depicted as follows:

“Other matters are weightier than age and LDR, she said.”

“Such as?”

“You have to discover that on your own, Dahan. I don’t wish to compel you to learn Minang culture. (Basral, 2022:55)

Those quotations show how Dayang worries about her future husband, who may not be able to comprehend Minang culture. Thus, Dayang involves negotiation in understanding different cultural conditions she experiences. However, Dayang does not expect that culture will be a consideration for her relationship. To Dayang, the worst thing may happen if there is cultural incompatibility. It makes Dayang under pressure, though she is afraid of disobeying the customary laws.

4. Affection for Naming as a Cultural Symbol

Another identity value is affection for naming as a cultural symbol. Dayang wants to name her daughter “Sabai.” There is an interesting thing about Dayang's character. Although she lives in Seoul and has kinship with Korea, she still tries to attach her identity by giving a local name to her daughter. The name “Sabai” possesses cultural meaning as follows:

“In Minangkabau, my homeland, there is a traditional story of a person named Sabai nan aluih, a beautiful girl who is soft, hard worker, and most



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people like her. She is brave against arbitrariness id the condition forces her to do so.” Dayang explained. (Basral, 2022:70)

The name “Sabai” contains the philosophical value of identity regarding Dayang’s love for Minang tradition, although she has lived in Korea. Identity bonding serves as a symbol that cannot be separated from reality. Thus, the attachment of the name "Sabai" saves an expectation or dream about a Minangkabau woman in the future. Traditionally, the name “Sabai” refers to a local woman who has the characteristics of being hardworking and impartial. The name is reflected in the Sabai’s behavior and practice of working hard.

We start from zero again, with fashion shows in middle-class malls rather than the high ones. It was an enormous mental challenge for Sab, given the drastic downgrade. However, Sab has a strong willingness to prove that she has a tough and resilient spirit. (Basral, 2022:283)

This quotation reveals Sabai’s value of hard work. The name symbolizes an identity of a Minang woman who has the character of toughness in any situation. Sab’s story provides educational values of hard efforts and perseverance spirit. Hence, ideological reflection on the values in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo* depicts a struggle of a Minang diaspora woman who still attaches to her identity symbol.

5. Educational Implication Based on the Local Culture

The novel *Sabai Sunwoo* has an educational implication of becoming a reflective teaching material, particularly about Minangkabau culture. The novel contains educational value of the character identity of a Minang woman who has typical practice and behavior. It presents religious education as the fundamental matter in life. This condition has been in accordance with Minang culture under the philosophy of *syarak basandi kitabullah* that becomes a part of identity construction. Another educational implication is about the wise attitude of a woman leader that can be a role model for students, female in particular. This novel can be used for implanting bravery in behavior, wisdom in taking risks, smartness in businesses, and goodness in managing heritage property based on the characteristics of matrilineal women. The last educational implication of this novel regards the love of local culture. This novel also presents the internalization of someone’s character identity since the beginning through a given name. The character will be reflected through behavior and attitude. Based on the above explanation, the educational values of character identity in the novel *Sabai Sunwoo* are recommended to be an innovation in learning materials that are based on the local culture. They can be connected to Indonesian school subject and English in particular.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The educational values of female character identity play a vital role in Minang culture. They strengthen the behavior and speech of Minang women, reflecting their identity. In conclusion, the novel *Sabai Sunwoo* presents the reality of values through the literary works, particularly the local wisdom values, which become the reflection of the recent cultural values. Besides, local wisdom values provide educational implications based on the local culture as an embedded identity. Therefore, literary works refer to a mimetic process of an author to depict the condition of an era. In addition, the educational values of character



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identity also present implications for local culture-based learning, specifically to develop students' comprehension about their cultural identity. It provides recommendations for teaching material innovation using local literature for learning Indonesian or English in particular.

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