



Cloth and Custom in West Sumatra

The Codification of Minangkabau Worldview

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I
*Village at the foot of
Mt. Merapi.*

One of the prominent Indonesian ethnic groups, the Minangkabau constitute 3% of the entire Indonesian population and one-quarter of the Sumatran population. The Minangkabau pride themselves on their matrilineal social system, believing this to provide the core of their customary law and the basis for their social identity. Known also for their literary flair, practicality, flexibility, and acute business sense, Indonesians of Minangkabau ancestry hold important political, economic, and domestic offices in the political mainstream of their country. These are a proud people who celebrate their traditional identity and participate actively in the affairs of their nation.

Local tradition places the origin of the Minangkabau world in the highlands of West Sumatra, an area of stunning natural beauty, which has probably been inhabited since at least the Neolithic period and probably much earlier. Here lies Mt. Merapi, the enigmatic

volcano usually hidden in clouds, from which the Minangkabau ancestors are supposed to have descended long ago (Fig. 1). Expanding outward from this center, referred to as the heartland (*darat*) of the Minangkabau world, is the migration area (*rantau*) where some one-half of the Minangkabau people live. The *rantau* is located in the western coastal lowlands of West Sumatra and in all the adjacent Sumatran states. A substantial number of Minangkabau have also made their home in other parts of Indonesia, as well as in Malaysia where the state of Negri Sembilan was formed from groups tracing their origin to the Minangkabau heartland sometime in the 18th century (Fig. 2).

Matriliney and migration constitute two crucial axes in the social life of the sexes. Traditionally, young men were expected to leave their homes and villages in order to prove their worth, leaving their sisters and mothers securely in charge of the matrilineal property.



2
Map of West Sumatra and surrounding region.

3
The matrilineal long-house with roof in the shape of buffalo horns.



4
Women in buffalo-horn headdresses.

While away from their villages men were expected to provide economic support to their mothers and wives. Although separated from the matrilineal household during their years in the *rantau*, men played a crucial role along with their kinswomen in the economic and social continuation of the matrilineage, and they continue to play this role today.

Women remain in the village with their kinswomen, where they form a structurally central core which upholds the lineage and customary law. As one woman said: "Women cannot leave their home to go somewhere like men do. A woman stays in the place

where she was born and upholds Minangkabau custom [*adat*]. The way a woman behaves is part of custom; she keeps *adat* going through her behavior." The co-resident core of kinswomen is reinforced by the practice of matrilocality. Traditionally, women live with their families in the matrilineal longhouse. This house, with its distinctive roof type (Fig. 3), symbolizes both matrilineity and Minangkabau ethnic identity. The buffalo-horn shape of the roof top is repeated in the ceremonial headdress worn by women (Fig. 4).

The Minangkabau mother enjoys an ideologically and structurally central position. In the Minangkabau 'state myth,' *Bundo Kanduang*, a queen, whose name in translation means "real mother," is considered the source of wisdom, the original queen who "stood by herself, created together with the universe," and who is equal in fame to the kings of the "Land of Rum, the Land of China, of the Seas, and of a four-branched lineage." Today, this myth is enacted in a musical form (sung narrative drama) which displays the Minangkabau concept of their history (Fig. 5). It is not surprising that in the literature of the past and even today, the Minangkabau are often referred to as "matriarchal," but Nancy Tanner's term "matrifocal" is a more apt term for it preserves the structurally central position of the mother while leaving room for the very important contribution men make to Minangkabau culture (1974:133).

Men occupy the main leadership roles, and are also seen as the upholders of customary law. They maintain this position by virtue of their knowledge of the *adat* words and

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Bundo Kanduang, in an all-male production of a sung narrative drama.



speeches so essential to the proper performance of customary ceremonies (Fig. 6), which, in turn, are framed by the equally indispensable contributions by women of ceremonial food and the traditional costumes worn at these ceremonies. Thus, although the roles of men and women are kept separate, these roles form the interconnected strands of the rope of *adat* that upholds and perpetuates the Minangkabau world.

This paper presents an analysis of the materialization of Minangkabau *adat* in traditional textiles (called *songket*). These textiles provide more than the material for the colorful costumes worn for all traditional ceremonies (Fig. 8). The way in which *songket* is worn and the symphony of motifs woven into the fabric make a statement to the world at large, a statement that gives form to Minangkabau worldview and feeling to the tone, character, and quality of Minangkabau life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood. Although not every Minangkabau can speak with the same degree of authority about the meaning of traditional clothing, those who do can engage the investigator in a discourse on Minangkabau worldview and expected behavior as codified by their *adat*. Because weaving is solely a woman's occupation, the following focuses primarily on women's contribution to the perpetuation of Minangkabau traditional culture. It is important to keep in mind, however, that men understand the meaning of many of the weaving motifs, which are also found in the designs carved by men on traditional houses and are heard, in verbal form, in the proverbs men speak on ceremonial occasions.

The Relationship Between Adat and Weaving

Most behavior is discussed by the Minangkabau in terms of its fit with *adat*. Often a person's reputation is based on his or her expertise in *adat* lore. *Adat*, an Arabic word, is referred to by scholars as tradition, custom, or "customary law." According to Abdullah, a Minangkabau social scientist, *adat* pervades Minangkabau thinking and philosophy: it is "the whole structural system of society"; it forms "the entire value system, the basis of all ethical and legal judgment, as well as the source of social expectations" (1966:1). A male leader said:

Adat is central to our life, it determines the way we act, and gives us rules for living. Without *adat* people would be like wild animals in the jungle: the strong would conquer the weak, the tallest would defeat the shortest, and the strongest would hold down the smallest.

Discussing the etymology of the word, a female *adat* leader said:

A means not; *dat* means stress or tension. So, *adat* means without stress or tension. *Adat* is a system which does not put stress on the people because it is flexible, practical, democratic, rational and systematic.

Another saying makes *adat* part of natural law, the principle which existed before all else. According to this saying,

When nothing was existent, the universe did not exist
Neither earth nor sky existed
Adat had already existed.

The Minangkabau refer to this saying in distinguishing between "*adat* which is truly *adat*" and "*adat* which is made *adat*." The first kind of *adat* refers to those aspects that are enduring and cannot be changed, such as the matrilineal principles of clan exogamy and of inheritance. These principles, they say, have not changed over the centuries despite numerous external influences such as patrilineally-oriented Islam and modernization. The other type of *adat* refers to rules decided by the consensus of village household leaders, that are the result of local historical circumstances. The principle of flexibility means that different *adat* rules develop in each village because of the process of obtaining consensus regarding expected behavior in new circumstances. This process is reflected in the following proverb:

In different grass there are different grasshoppers
In different ponds are different fish
In different villages there is different *adat*.

Discussions about *adat* quickly become considerations of rules for behavior and the underlying philosophy that forms these rules. Discussions about *adat* also wander into the realm of symbolism because the precepts are expressed in proverbs, epigrams, and house carving, and are enacted in ceremonies and curing practices as well as encoded by the motifs of traditional textiles. Folk exegesis of sung narrative drama, the motifs of textiles, the organization of traditional clothes and ceremonies are phrased in terms of the grammar of *adat Minangkabau*. *Adat* is expressed through all the senses—speaking, eating, seeing, touching, and hearing—and is rendered in mundane, abstract, performative, and magical forms.

Adat ceremonies are rife with meaning. Food prepared and served by women, words spoken by men, ritual interaction in same-sex groups and between men and women, and the way in which traditional dress is worn are glossed in terms of *adat*. Informants say that traditional ceremonies and dress are 'the skin of *adat*.' The ceremonies mark major episodes

"Without *adat* people would be like wild animals in the jungle . . ."

6
Men sitting at an *adat* ceremony.

7
Women carrying food to an *adat* ceremony.



in the life cycle (birth, circumcision, marriage, and death) and other major events such as building a traditional house and the ascension to hereditary titles by men. The traditional clothes and headdresses worn by men and women on these occasions (Fig. 9) are woven with motifs that can be translated by an expert into a series of proverbs and epigrams. Even the way the clothes are worn and the form into which the headdress is shaped tell a story about rules for living. In these ceremonies, then, *adat* becomes a living form; the message and the medium are merged with the performance.

The key element that connects the motifs of traditional textiles and *adat* precepts is the reference that both make to nature. The Minangkabau see no opposition between nature and culture; appropriate behavior entails the studied imitation of nature. In response to the anthropologist's probing about culture, the following epigram is nearly universally repeated:

Take the small knife used for carving
Make a staff from the *lintabuang* tree
The cover of *pinang* flowers becomes a winnow
A drop of water becomes the sea
A fist becomes a mountain
Nature is our teacher.

Nature, as encoded by the Minangkabau, provides the model to which all aspire and upon which *adat* is based. Nature is the basis for constructing an ontology and rules for behavior. Informants say:

We study everything around us; human life, animals, plants, mountains, hills, and rivers. Nature surrounds us in all the events of our lives. The rules of *adat* are based on nature. Like nature, *adat* surrounds us.

Thus, the meanings that the Minangkabau impute to nature are reflected in their code for behavior and are tangibly expressed in their weaving. Asking about weaving leads us to the core symbols of Minangkabau ethos and world view.

Songket Motifs, Nature, and Expected Behavior

The term *songket* applies to both the design woven into the textile and the product itself, and refers to the use of supplementary gold or silver weft threads which were introduced into Indonesia through international trading. The term derives from the word *jungket* or *sungkit* which means to elevate the warp thread in a loom and to insert a supplementary gold, silver, or colored weft thread to create motifs on the surface of the woven cloth. Sumatra, including West Sumatra, was

involved in international trading for many centuries before European contact. Gold and silver thread, brought from China and India, were exchanged for local produce and items of local wealth. Gold mined in West Sumatra was particularly in demand, bringing considerable prosperity to the Minangkabau people from a very early period, probably earlier than the 14th century when the Minangkabau-Javanese king, Adityawarman, came to West Sumatra.

Generally, West Sumatran gold and silver cloth (*kain songket*) is classified as follows: (1) *kain songket balapak* (Fig. 10) is woven with heavy gold or silver designs over the entire surface; (2) *kain songket batabua* or *batabur* (Fig. 11) is woven with gold and/or silver motifs more widely dispersed. The latter is also called *kain songket babintang*, after the starlike motifs, *bintang*, that decorate the background which is woven of solid colors of green, red, black or purple. These names are widely understood in West Sumatra, even though in certain areas other names may be substituted to distinguish the two types of *kain songket*.

Kain songket is decorated with geometric patterns depicting the flora and, more rarely,

Table 1

GLOSSARY

adat—Minangkabau custom, tradition, rules for living
aka cino—"China root," a spiral motif similar to the fern tendril motif
batang pinang—pinang tree motif
bintang—starlike motif
darat—heartland of the Minangkabau world
itiak pulang patang—baby duck motif
jungket, sungkit—to elevate warp thread in a loom and insert a supplementary gold, silver or colored weft thread; the term from which *songket* derives
kain songket—West Sumatran gold and silver cloth
kain songket balapak—a type of *songket* woven with heavy gold and/or silver designs over the entire surface
kain songket batabua or *batabur* or *babintang*—a type of *songket* woven with gold and/or silver motifs more widely dispersed
kaluak paku—fern tendril motif
penghulu—clan leader
ponte—the traditional loom
pucuak rebuang—bamboo sprout motif
rantau—migration area around the Minangkabau heartland
sajamba makan—ceremonial plate and weaving motif
sayik galamai—ceremonial cake and weaving motif
sarung—tube skirt
songket—traditional Minangkabau textiles

the fauna of surrounding nature (Figs. 12, 16). *Songket* motifs resemble motifs carved on houses and mosques and those used in embroidery. The geometric motifs consisting of spirals, triangles, meanders, circles, squares, and many other linear forms are probably of considerable antiquity.

The majority of *songket* motifs are based explicitly on models from nature. The importance of nature in behavior and daily life is clear in the many uses the Minangkabau make of the motifs listed in Table 2. For example, there is the bamboo tree, a widely used tropical plant found throughout West Sumatra. The bamboo sprout (Figs. 13–15), *pucuak rebuang* (Minang dialect), is a ceremonial food when mixed with coconut juice, hot chili, other spices and meat. When the bamboo sprout grows and becomes hard it is utilized for different purposes, such as for fences, baskets, household implements, etc. These uses of the bamboo are reflected in the following proverb:

When the bamboo is young, it is called *rebuang*
When it is mature, it is called *batuang*
When a person is still young he has a name
When he is grown he has a title and position
When a person is still young he is useful
When he is old he is helpful.


This saying is typical of many similar proverbs that liken the classification of uses or qualities of natural objects to appropriate behavior.

For example, a well-known proverb (often depicted visually on houses and tapestries) draws on natural symbols to describe the key roles expected of men. In this proverb the *kaluak paku*, the fern leaf tendril (Figs. 16–18), is the key metaphor.

Fern leaf tendril, *balimbing* nuts
Shake the shell of a coconut
Plant pepper with the roots
Seat your child and guide your nephew
Think about your village people
Prevent your village from destruction
And keep up the tradition.

The fern leaf tendril motif, as noted before, has many meanings. The above proverb suggests that, like the tendril, a man should be fair and tactful in social relationships in order to preserve *adat*. This motif also symbolizes Minangkabau character, which is supposed to be gentle, humble, and easily adjustable. The inward curve of the tendril suggests that men should think first of their own families (both the family of their mother and that of their wives), while the outward curve suggests that people should also concern themselves with the larger problems in the village outside the family.

TYPICAL MOTIFS IN TEXTILES

	fern tendril
	ceremonial cake
	pinang tree tree of life corn flower
	curving ribbons
	the duck goes home at sunset
	bamboo sprout
	goat's eyes
	wild snake
	ceremonial rice
	ceremonial plate
	wicker design
	heap of sirih leaves
	interlocking chains

A similar message is reflected in the form of the ceremonial headdress worn by men. The top of the headdress must be perfectly flat despite the fact that it joins unlike parts. This indicates that the senior male must be fair to all his family, both near and far relatives. If he is given a clan title and becomes a clan leader (*penghulu*), he has responsibility

"The majority of songket motifs are based . . . on models from nature."

to the children of his matrilineage. He must treat all children alike, including his own. The creases in the front of the headdress symbolize the joining of all heads of families into one clan. These creases also represent steps of the *adat* house as well as procedures to be followed in *adat* discussions. These discussions begin in the close family and then extend outward to include the senior males and females as well as the clan leaders. The headdress has two sides, one with a narrow fold and the other with a wider fold. The wider fold indicates that a father carries his children. The narrower side indicates that an

Table 2

uncle leads (that is, educates) his nephew. The material is square but, after folding, the headdress is round. The round shape and the flat top signify the evenness and similarity with which all the parts are to be treated.

Another important motif drawn from nature and reflecting social relations is the *itiak pulang patang*, the baby duck motif (Fig. 19). An S-shaped design, this motif provides a horizontal border separating the various statements made in textiles and wood (Fig. 20; see also Figs. 12, 16). People are to act like baby ducks, from the family to the highest level of the village: they go together in a file to the pond and swim in group formation. Although baby ducks may swim boldly out away from their mother, they always come back. Flexibility is a key trait of ducks: they can walk on

8
Women dressed in songket.

9
Bride and her attendants at a wedding ceremony in Koto Baru.



10
Sarung from Koto Gadang; a good example of kain songket balapak. Within the diamond-shaped ceremonial cake motif is the hooked-shaped motif of the fern tendril. Interlocking chains and ceremonial rice motifs can also be seen.

11
Shawl for an older married woman, made in Payakumbuh; an example of kain songket babintang. The diamond shape in the center of the border is an example of the ceremonial cake motif. The fern tendril appears within the diamond. The inside border is an example of the corn flower or the tree of life.

land and swim in the water. The use of *itiak pulang patang* indicates that the Minangkabau are flexible, adaptive, and above all corporate in their actions. As baby ducks go in a file following some leader, clan chiefs lead the people and their nephews. The communal and corporate nature of Minangkabau life is echoed in a well-known *adat* proverb:

Sharing slights, sharing shames,
Sharing burial sites, sharing graveyards
If going up a mountain, climbing together,
If going down a ravine, descending together,
Jingling together like iron,
Chirping together like chickens,
If there is good news, sent for,
If there is bad news, coming to help.

(Kato 1978:5-6)

Borders such as those formed by the fern leaf tendril or the baby duck reflect *adat's* stress on cooperation. Besides these motifs there are scattered motifs of flowers or stars that appear in the center of a fabric and symbolize the spreading of villages and lineages. While these are arranged in the center of the fabric (appearing down the center of the *sarung* or tube skirt; see Fig. 12), they are always bound by the border motifs which means that the villagers are also bound and surrounded by the rules of *adat*.

Other important motifs are *sajamba makan*, a ceremonial plate, and *sayik galamai*, a ceremonial cake. *Sajamba makan* is a large plate, big enough for four people. On this plate should be placed four kinds of ceremonial food. If the plate is not properly arranged the

The Origins of Minangkabau Motifs

The geometric designs of textiles and carving probably represent ancient designs constructed from observation of natural phenomenon, as many resemble Neolithic, Megalithic, and Bronze Age designs. Van der Hoop suggests that the spiral evolved from a kind of leaf, the triangle from the shape of a mountain or hill, the meander from the shape of a cloud, and the circle from the shape of the moon (1949).

The similarity between the *songket* designs and those carved on menhirs (free-standing stones placed upright in the ground; see Figs. 15, 18) found in West Sumatra is striking. The most common motifs carved on menhirs are the spiral and the triangle. The name of the spiral motif is *kuluak paku* (fern tendril) and the name of the triangular motif is *pucuak rebuang* (bamboo sprout). Both of these motifs are commonly found in textiles and in house carving. On the menhirs these motifs are said to symbolize fertility and the clan leader (*penghulu*). The menhir itself is considered to be a status symbol of the *penghulu*. Thus, a group of menhirs represents a group of *penghulu* from each clan and shows the importance of clan heads in the Minangkabau historical past. In weaving designs the representation of *penghulu* is found in the shape of rows of bamboo sprout motifs on the border of a cloth.

host and hostess will be embarrassed and feel guilty. This is why, during the preparation of the ceremony, they should ask the senior male members of their lineage for suggestions. Everything should be done properly, such as placing a seat for the honored guest and for the clan leaders. A seat must be reserved for the honored guests so that they do not sit in the wrong place. Such rules are explained in a stylized dialogue between the representatives of the host and the guests. They are the male clan leaders who have a talent for oral literature and speaking in verse. In this dialogue each representative takes his turn to speak. The *sajamba makan* is one of the main foci of the ceremony and is part of the dialogue.

The four-pointed star pattern, with four flowers arranged around a center or four rectangles around a center, is prominent in textiles and carvings (see Fig. 12). This motif can represent the ceremonial plate of food or the four original clans. Each part must be an exact replica of the other parts. In the case of the ceremonial plate of food, it is an insult to serve one of the portions of different size than the other three. The person offered a different portion has the right to leave and can be followed by others. This is one of many

examples of the meaning of Minangkabau democracy—how everything between group and individuals must be even.

While the motifs mentioned above are closely interwoven with the Minangkabau stress on making nature a teacher, other aspects of textiles are influenced by external sources. For example, there is considerable historical evidence of influence from India and China, which came through trade. One of the Indian trade items was fabric, and many of the imported Indian textiles are still preserved by the older people as heirlooms. Some of the Indian motifs have been copied by weavers in the village of Koto Gadang. The Chinese influence is especially notable in embroidered cloth, in which a common motif is the phoenix (Fig. 21), and bright colors are juxtaposed.

Islam has also had a profound influence on textile designs. The use of human figures is absent, according to the dictates of the religion. Animal designs such as birds, chickens, ducks and, in a few cases, winged beasts can be seen in weaving and even more so in carving where these designs are integrated with floral motifs. Some informants say that as long as human and animal forms were not worshipped they could be employed as designs. Motifs introduced by Muslim traders from India are geometric in form. The geometric shapes on menhirs, which in all probability predate Islam, provide one source of confirmation of a basic Minangkabau belief that the elements of Islamic philosophy were compatible with an ancient Minangkabau cultural tradition.

Weaving Centers

The weaving centers are located in the heartland (Fig. 22), believed to be the origin of the Minangkabau people, where the original ancestors first established their settlements and codified the *adat* law system. According to legend, settlements occurred first in Tanah Datar, second in Agam, and third in Lima Puluh Koto (see Sudibyo, Boestami, and Sanday 1984 for a different view based on the evidence from the menhirs). The 14th century Minangkabau Kingdom is located in Tanah Datar, the area that contained the main sources of the gold that entered international trade. The weaving products of Tanah Datar probably marked royal status, and the most elaborate gold and silver *songket* comes from this region. The people report that formerly the women in all villages were weavers. Today there are only two weaving villages in Tanah Datar, Pande Sikek and Tanjung Sungayang (Figs. 12, 23). Pande Sikek is the most active weaving village, producing beautiful *songket* that is sold as far away as Jakarta, the center of the Indonesian national government. There is just one weaver left in Tanjung Sungayang, who claims that after she

dies there is no-one who will be able to replace her (Fig. 25).

In the Agam region there are no weavers who are still active. Formerly, however, elaborate *songket* was woven in this region in the villages of Koto Gadang (see Fig. 10) and Sungai Puar Banu Ampu, both near Bukittinggi. The forms and names of the motifs on the cloth from these areas suggest contact with India or China, contrary to motifs used in Tanah Datar that follow the rigid geometric shape. In Koto Gadang a motif called *akacino* ("China root") is similar to the spiral motif of the *kaluak paku*. The centerfield design of *songket* from Banu Ampu is similar to printed Indian textiles. The adoption of foreign motifs may be due to the tradition of the people in Agam involving themselves with commercial trade. It is also notable that during the occupation by the Dutch, the people in Agam, especially in Koto Gadang, adopted Dutch designs.

The third major area of the heartland, Lima Puluh Koto, is located to the east, close to Riau province. In this area there are two types of weaving centers today. In one area the weavers weave only for local consumption, and the *songket* bears a very close relationship to local *adat*. The other type of weaving center produces cloth which is sold throughout West Sumatra and in other parts of Indonesia as well. The traditional weaving is produced in several villages near the city of Payakumbuh (see Figs. 9, 11). The more commercial weaving is found in Kubang, located eight miles from central Payakumbuh.

Still another weaving center is located in Silungkang, which was traditionally part of the *rantau* although it now belongs administratively to Tanah Datar. This center produces traditional cloth worn in *adat* ceremonies and modern cloth worn for other occasions (Fig. 24). Silungkang and Kubang are similar in producing woven cloth that responds to a large market both within and outside of West Sumatra. The designs of these two areas are similar, often being adopted from European cross-stitch patterns found in embroidery books. Silungkang motifs are also borrowed from mosquito net designs.

Thus, the weaving centers can be divided into three types in terms of their marketing strategies. The first type is represented by the villages that produce primarily for local use, such as Balai Cacang, Koto nan Ampek and Muaro in Payakumbuh (Lima Puluh Koto) and Sungayang near Batu Sangkar (Tanah Datar). The second type, represented by one village, Pande Sikek, produces traditional woven *songket*, copying old patterns but also creating new arrangements by adopting new colors and designs. In this village, *songket* is woven to be used in *adat* ceremonies anywhere in West Sumatra, or *songket* that marks village identity in one area

may be copied for sale in that area. The third type produces *songket* for mass distribution as described above for the villages of Kubang and Silungkang.

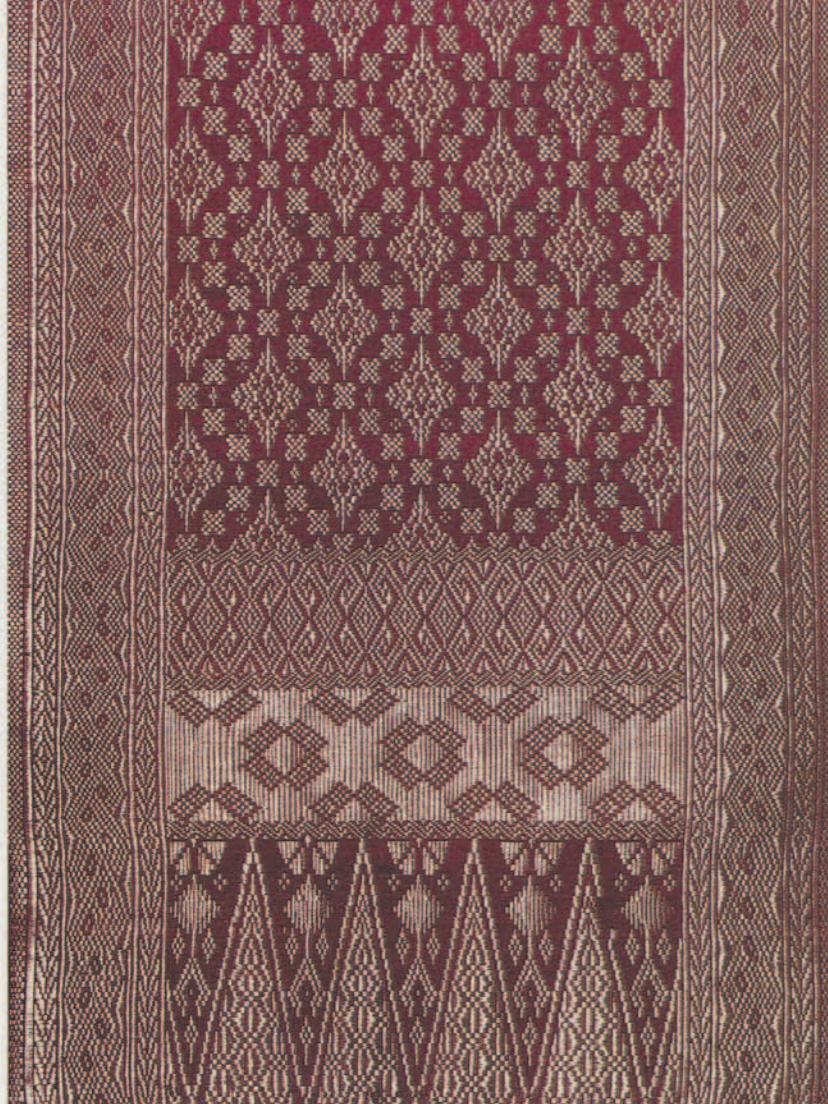
Among all weaving areas there is contact. For example, people in Silungkang specialize in dying thread of various qualities, and there are middlemen whose business is to go around bringing this thread to customers in other weaving areas. Weavers themselves never interact directly. If the weavers wish to study the techniques of another area they study the product; they never communicate directly with one another. Within a given area a weaver may discuss designs among her close friends and relatives, but she never speaks with the owner of a particular design.

Silungkang produces a special type of loom called ATBM (*Alat Tenun Bukan Mesin*) or "Loom without Machine." This loom was invented in west Java after World War II and later introduced into Silungkang and Kubang. Most of the weaving areas now use this new loom which can produce more cloth than the traditional loom (called *ponte*). The traditional weaving areas of Payakumbuh still use the traditional loom, which is placed under the house or close to the kitchen.

There are many male weavers in the ATBM home industry of Silungkang. Male weavers, however, ordinarily do not produce *songket*, but make other types of cloth. The one man who does weave *songket* learned the technique from his wife, who is famous for the quality of her *songket*.

The motifs and designs of each weaving area display a characteristic local style; however, by analyzing the motifs from each region, similarities are observable in the names given to the motifs. Using a sample of 26 pieces of cloth acquired for The University Museum from all over West Sumatra in both the active and nonactive weaving centers, informants from 7 of these areas were asked to name the motifs on the 26 pieces. In some cases identifications were readily made; in others, informants had no idea about the motif or the origin of the cloth.

The most widely recognized motifs are: the bamboo sprout (*pucuak rebuang*), fern tendril (*kaluak paku*), ceremonial cake (*sayik galamai*), baby ducks (*itiak pulang patang*), and the pinang tree (*batang pinang*), among others. These motifs are also the most frequently mentioned in *adat* sayings and proverbs guiding moral values (see discussion above), perhaps because they refer to the elements of nature that are used for ceremonial food and building the traditional house. The bamboo sprout, fern tendril, and baby duck motifs are the most common ones carved on the menhirs (see Sudibyo, Boestami, and Sanday 1984). One may hypothesize that these motifs and their corresponding referents represent the unchangeable part of *adat*,



12 Shawl from Pande Sikek. In the center is the "beautiful girl" motif. The vertical border shows the interwoven rattan, fishes in the fish hook, and wicker designs. The wide horizontal border is an example of bamboo sprout and the tree of life (or corn flower). The ceremonial plate motif (four rectangles around a square) is bordered on either side by small strips of the baby duck motif.

13 A bamboo sprout.

14 A bamboo sprout carved in wood.

"adat which is truly adat," while the motifs that vary from place to place represent the changeable aspects of adat which develop in response to local circumstances.

The Relationship Between Adat and Weaving in Ceremonial Dress

The major ceremonial events, weddings and the inauguration of a clan leader, require wearing traditional textiles. In a wedding the costumes are worn by the bride and bridegroom and the bride's attendants (see Fig. 9). The bridal throne, on which the bride sits like a queen, is elaborately adorned with traditional textiles. The bridal bed, in the bride's house, is also elaborately decorated. The main focus of the wedding is the bride sitting on her bridal throne. In most villages the bride wears traditional costume and a crown, a heavy halo of imitation gold, jewels, and



13



14



15

15 Bamboo sprout carved on menhir.

16 Antique shawl from Pitalah. It shows a number of motifs including ceremonial rice, curving ribbon, wild snake, fence of the fern tendril, fern tendril, and baby duck.

flowers (see front cover). The bride's sarung is any kind of kain songket balapak, a heavy dense gold-thread design. Her blouse is velvet with embroidered metal flowers. In the highlands her shawl is also songket balapak; in coastal areas her shawl is embroidered. She wears many layers of imitation

... major ceremonial events ... require wearing traditional textiles."

gold necklaces (formerly these necklaces were probably of solid gold). She also wears a ring and two kinds of bracelets.

The queenly dress of the bride displays the importance of the role of women. In turn, the groom's dress symbolizes the importance of his role and obligations as a senior male or, possibly, a clan leader (Fig. 26). He wears the headdress for men which is folded in the manner described above to reflect his responsibilities to his own children and to those of his sister. The roles of women are symbolized



17 Fern tendrils.



17



18
Fern tendril carved on
menhir.

19
Ducks going home.

20
Baby duck motif carved
in wood.



by the yellowish gold color of her jewelry and the dense gold thread designs of her costume. These show a woman's richness and glory, and her economic importance, for she must support her family from her share of the maternal family's ancestral property.

The bride and groom are like a queen and a king for one day. They sit on a wedding couch that is adorned with textiles and embroidered cloth having symbolic meaning. For example, in Pande Sikek the bunch of cloth tied over the couch symbolizes the unity of the couple; the hanging cloths in the shape of a tongue indicate that they must use careful speech with one another. The hanging bird decorations around the top of the throne symbolize the peaceful life as they strive to understand and love one another. There are colorful banners of black, yellow, and red that also spread out from the top of the throne. The black color symbolizes the core of *adat*, that which cannot be changed and which the couple must always follow. The red is a symbol of their life together, and the yellow symbolizes their prosperity and glory.

Marriages also join two clans, and this joining is celebrated in the eating and exchange of food between the women of the two clans (see Fig. 7). The serving of the food in the ceremonial plate, *sajamba makan*, also makes statements about *adat* rules that must be followed in daily life (see discussion above).

The inauguration of the clan leader follows a similar procedure in serving ceremonial food. The newly appointed clan leader is served in formal ceremonial style at his mother's house and at the house of his wife's matrilineage. This ceremony also brings members of different clans together.

In Pande Sikek the man's costume on this occasion consists of a black shirt and trousers, which means that the clan leader is a knowledgeable and experienced man (see Fig. 26). The sleeves and the collar of the shirt are loose, and the sleeves and pockets are decorated with stripes of woven gold thread. The loose sleeves mean that he has authority to give advice to his nephews and to solve their problems in conformity with *adat*. The stripes on the sleeves identify him as a man who keeps to *adat* rules. The loose black trousers symbolize wisdom and flexibility in guiding villagers in any aspect of *adat*. The short *sarung* placed on his hips is red and has bamboo sprout designs woven in gold threads. The color and the designs mean that he is a brave and noble man. The belt, made from a piece of cloth, symbolizes his responsibility to guide his nephews in the rules of *adat*. The shawl on his shoulder symbolizes his wish that his nephews will not break *adat* rules. The close interrelationship between *adat* and traditional dress is also seen in Payakumbuh (see Kartiwa 1984).



21
Chinese cloth embro-
dered with phoenix and
floral patterns.

22
Map of weaving centers
in West Sumatra.

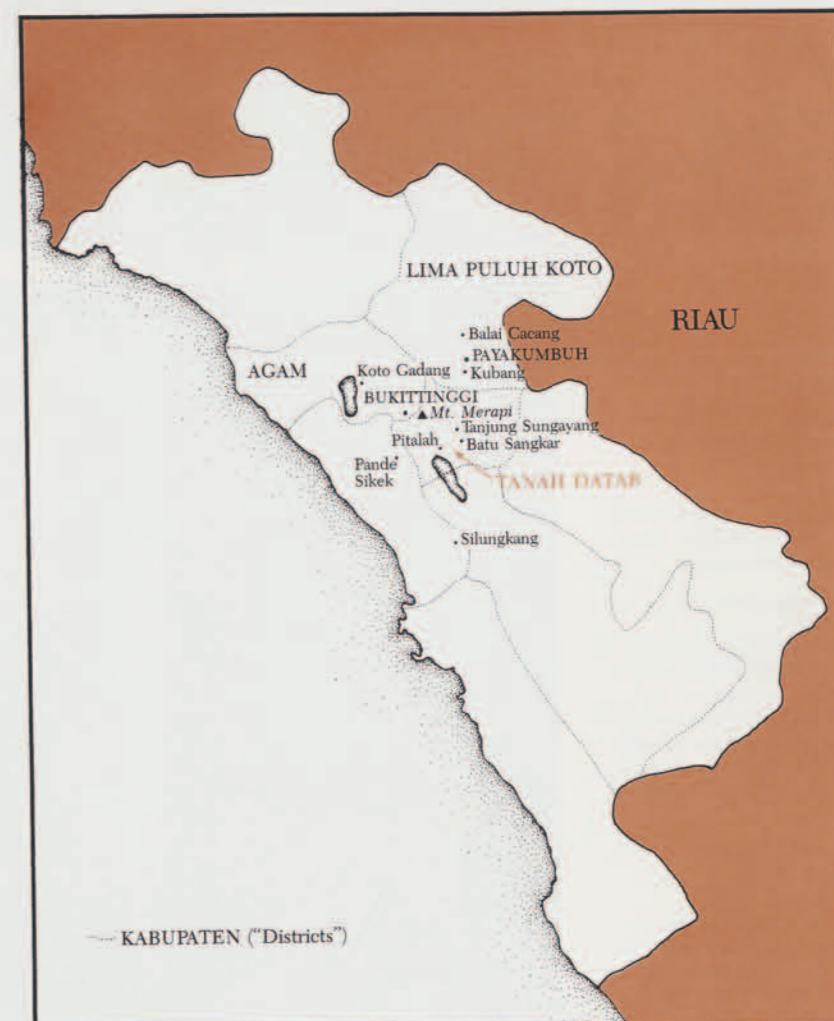
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The textiles shown in Figs. 10–12, 16, and 23 are part of The University Museum's collection of Minangkabau textiles.





23
Shawl used by males and females in Tanjung Sungayang. The border shows interwoven rottan, bamboo sprout or tree of life, and heap of sirih leaves. Other motifs are flora designs such as flowers, leaves, seeds, nuts, and tendrils.

24
Modern sarung from Silungkang. The main motif is the tree of life or corn flower.



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Conclusion

In West Sumatra, traditional arts, including weaving, represent the materialization of *adat*, that is, Minangkabau custom. Weavers apply the aesthetic standards of their *adat* by the way in which they compose and construct textile motifs. The way in which clothes are worn makes statements about rules for behavior. The motifs of weaving are drawn largely from the natural environment. Nature is the primary source from which the Minangkabau people draw the metaphors for being by which they externalize their moral values. The importance of nature is found in the main symbols of *adat*, in the motifs of ceremonial clothes and menhirs, in ceremonial food, in house carving, and in the proverbs spoken on ceremonial occasions. It is impossible to escape the centrality of the concept of nature for the Minangkabau. Some say that Islam and *adat* were compatible from the very beginning because both are based on nature.

Traditional clothes woven by women are called the skin of *adat*. These clothes are a visible and tangible materialization of the Minangkabau worldview. All women, including weavers, are conscious of *adat* rules and describe the way women should wear clothes at *adat* ceremonies. The colors, designs, shapes of the blouses, shawls, head-dresses, and *sarungs* are determined by the local *adat* and identify women as belonging to a particular region. The wearing of *songket* on ceremonial occasions, the motifs woven into the fabric reflecting the things of nature, and the transmission of cloth through the matrilineal lines reflect that part of *adat* that cannot be changed. This discussion of *adat* and weaving illustrates how the study of material culture can illuminate a way of experiencing, a view of the world, of self, and of society.



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25
Haji Rohani, the only remaining weaver in Tanjung Sungayang.

26
A clan leader dressed in songket.