



# Fabric as A Cultural Language: A Comparative Study of Symbolism in Shu Brocade and Solo Batik

## 织物作为文化语言：蜀锦与梭罗巴迪克纹样象征意义的比较研究

Dyah Tisnawati Aulia Meylana<sup>1\*</sup>, Clearezta Alika Yusman<sup>1</sup>, Sherafina Liv Wibisono<sup>1</sup>,  
Afin Nadhifah<sup>1</sup>, Rudiansyah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Cultural Science, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

corresponding author: [dtauliameylana\\_12@student.uns.ac.id](mailto:dtauliameylana_12@student.uns.ac.id)

**Abstract:** This study examines traditional textiles as a form of cultural language by analyzing the similarity and difference of philosophy, manufacturing techniques and symbols contained in Shu Brocade from Sichuan, China, and Solo Batik from Indonesia. Both types of textiles represent important cultural heritage, reflecting aesthetic values, historical development, and philosophical meanings within their respective societies. This study employs a descriptive approach with content analysis based on secondary data, namely academic journals, books, and visual documentation related to both types of textiles. The findings indicate that Solo Batik reflects Javanese cultural values through motifs such as Parang, Kawung, and Sidomukti, which symbolize strength, self-control, balance, harmony, as well as hopes for prosperity and well-being. These motifs are closely intertwined with social structures, spirituality, and the philosophy of life within Javanese culture. Conversely, Shu Brocade embodies Chinese philosophical concepts through a diverse array of motifs, such as plants, animals, geometric patterns, and mythological symbols like the dragon and phoenix. These motifs symbolize auspicious meanings, such as good fortune, harmony, strength, protection, and the balance of the universe, reflecting the relationship between humans, nature, and spirituality. Although they originate from different cultural backgrounds, both woven fabrics share similarities in their intricate production techniques, symbolic motifs, aesthetic richness, and their social and cultural functions. Both also serve as a medium for conveying cultural identity and preserving these values for future generations. This study concludes that Shu Brocade and Solo Batik are not merely artistic textile products but also meaningful cultural expressions that convey values, beliefs, and identity, thus necessitating their preservation and development to remain relevant in the modern era.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage; Shu Brocade; Solo Batik; Symbolism; Traditional Textiles

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**摘要:** 本研究通过分析中国四川蜀锦与印度尼西亚梭隆蜡染在哲学理念、制作工艺及象征符号上的异同,探讨传统纺织品作为一种文化语言的形式。两种织物均代表重要文化遗产,反映了审美价值、历史发展与哲学意涵。采用描述性方法与内容分析,基于二手资料进行研究。结果显示,梭罗巴迪克通过帕让、加翁、希多穆克蒂等纹样体现爪哇文化价值观,象征力量、自制、平衡、和谐及福祉。蜀锦则通过植物、动物、几何及神话纹样展现中国哲学,象征吉祥、和谐、力量、保护及宇宙平衡。尽管文化背景不同,两者在工艺、象征纹样、审美及社会功能方面具有相似性,均作为传递文化认同与价值的媒介。研究认为,两者不仅是艺术产品,更是承载意义的文化表达,需加以保护与发展以应对现代挑战。

**关键词:** 文化遗产; 蜀绸; 苏罗蜡染; 象征主义; 传统纺织品

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional crafts are tangible example of cultural identity that reflect the aesthetic values, philosophy, and historical journey of a nation. In various parts of the world, textiles are not only seen as a basic necessity for clothing but also as a symbolic medium of expression that carries deep meaning. In this context, Chinese Shu brocade and Indonesian Solo batik are two important cultural heritage examples that have their own unique characteristics, both in terms of their production techniques and the meanings contained in each pattern.

Shu brocade, which comes from the Sichuan region, is known as one of the oldest weaving techniques in China, featuring rich patterns that symbolize luck, prosperity, and power. At the same time, Solo batik, as part of Javanese batik tradition, carries a deep philosophy related to life values, spirituality, and the social structure of the community. Symbols like the *parang*, *kawung*, and *sidomukti* are not just beautiful designs, but also represent the hopes and wishes that have been passed down from generation to generation.

As time moves forward and globalization continues, traditional fabrics face challenges to be preserved and to remain relevant among younger generations. However, many studies show that the symbolic value in traditional textiles continues to be a major attraction that helps them stay relevant (Hidayat, 2019; Zhang, 2020). Therefore, comparing Shu brocade and Solo batik is important for understanding how two different cultures can share similarities in interpreting symbols and aesthetics in traditional fabric.

Based on that background, this article aims to analyze the symbolic meanings found in Shu brocade and Solo batik, as well as to identify their similarities and differences as representations of culture. It is hoped that this study can contribute to efforts to preserve cultural heritage and enriching understanding of the philosophical values contained in traditional textiles.

## 2. METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis based on secondary data. This approach aims to describe in detail and systematically the various symbolic meanings found



in Shu brocade and Solo batik, presented in the form of classified and descriptive data. Sugiyono (2019) states that descriptive research emphasizes the objective depiction of data based on field facts. On the other hand, Krippendorff (2018) asserts that content analysis allows for the structured identification and interpretation of meaning within texts or visual elements.

Research data sources include scientific literature such as journals, books, and visual documentation related to Shu brocade and Solo batik. The data elements analyzed include motifs, symbols, and philosophical values inherent in both traditional fabrics. Data collection was conducted through documentary research, specifically by tracing, analyzing, and documenting information from relevant sources. The data was then categorized based on motif type, symbolic meaning, and socio-cultural function. Using this method, the study is expected to yield a more structured and objective understanding of the symbolic meanings of Shu brocade and Solo batik, including their similarities and differences.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 History of Solo Batik

Solo Batik is a textile cultural heritage originating from the city of Surakarta in Central Java Province. Like batik from other regions in Indonesia, Solo Batik has its own distinctive characteristics, evident in its motifs, colors, and the its embedded philosophy. Solo Batik is generally characterized by *sogan* (golden brown) hues and patterns rich in symbolic meaning, reflecting the refined, courteous, and philosophical values of Javanese culture.

The development of Solo Batik is inextricably linked to the political dynamics of Java, particularly during the era of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom. Following the Giyanti Agreement on February 13, 1755, the Mataram region was divided into two realms: the Surakarta Sultanate and the Yogyakarta Sultanate. This event had a profound impact on various aspects of life, including the development of art and culture, particularly the art of batik.

During this period of division, various royal assets, including batik fabrics, were taken to Yogyakarta. This prompted the Kasunanan of Surakarta to develop a new cultural identity, including in the field of fashion. In this context, Pakubuwono IV played a key role in creating a distinctive Surakarta batik style that later became known as the “*Gagrak Surakarta*” style. This style emphasizes simplicity, elegance, and the use of softer colors compared to the Yogyakarta style.

Over time, Solo batik motifs have evolved and undergone innovations, both in terms of form and meaning. Motifs such as *parang*, *kawung*, and *sidomukti* serve not only as decorations but also embody profound philosophies related to hope, power, and the balance of life. Furthermore, the development of batik in Indonesia is closely tied to the golden age of the Majapahit Kingdom and the spread of Islam on the island of Java, which have also influenced the patterns and symbolic values within batik.

Thus, Solo Batik can be understood not merely as a textile craft product, but also as a representation of the historical, political, and cultural journey of Javanese society. Its continued existence to this day serves as evidence that batik has been able to endure and adapt amidst the



changing times, while simultaneously preserving the traditional values passed down through generations.

### 3.2 The Variety of Solo Batik

Solo batik truly boasts a wealth of motifs that not only serve as visual adornments but also carry profound philosophical meanings. Each motif reflects the worldview, hopes, and cultural values of Javanese society, passed down through generations. Among the many existing motifs, several key ones are characteristic of Solo batik, such as *Parang*, *Kawung*, and *Sidomukti*.

The *Parang* motif is one of the classic motifs closely associated with the royal court. Its diagonal pattern, resembling waves or the swing of a machete, symbolizes strength, resilience, and an indomitable spirit. Additionally, this motif also embodies the values of self-control and continuity in life. Recent studies by B. Prasetyo (2021) suggest that the *Parang* motif is understood as a symbol of moral and spiritual strength in Javanese culture; historically, it was even classified as a restricted motif, permitted only for use by certain social circles.

The *Kawung* motif features symmetrical geometric patterns of interlocking circles, resembling the fruit of the sago palm or lotus flowers. This motif symbolizes purity, balance, and harmony in life. Its four main elements are often interpreted as symbols of cosmic balance, reflecting the relationship between humans and nature and their environment. Recent research indicates that the *Kawung* motif is also associated with the values of self-control and harmony in life within Javanese philosophy.

Meanwhile, the *Sidomukti* motif is closely associated with the hope for a prosperous and happy life. The word “*sido*” means “to become” or “to continue,” while “*mukti*” means “prosperity.” Thus, this motif is often used in wedding ceremonies as a symbol of a prayer that the newlyweds may enjoy a harmonious life, filled with happiness and glory. Recent academic studies also confirm that the *Sidomukti* motif carries symbolic value in the form of hope.

### 3.3 The Philosophy of Solo Batik

Solo batik motifs not only serve as decorative elements but also embody philosophical values that reflect the Javanese people’s worldview. Each motif carries specific symbols and meanings tied to spiritual, social, and ethical values in daily life. Among the many motifs, the most representative are *Parang*, *Kawung*, and *Sidomukti*.

The *Parang* motif is known as a symbol of strength, resilience, and the continuity of life. Its diagonal pattern, resembling waves, depicts humanity’s unceasing struggle to face life’s challenges. Additionally, this motif is rich in meanings of self-control and spiritual strength. Recent studies suggest that *Parang* is understood as a representation of moral values and inner resilience in Javanese culture, and has a close connection to the social structure of the royal court.

The *Kawung* motif features a geometric design with symmetrical circles, resembling the fruit of the sago palm or a lotus flower. Philosophically, it symbolizes purity, balance, and the harmony of life. Its four main elements are often interpreted as symbols of cosmic balance or the relationship



between humanity and the universe. Recent research also indicates that the *Kawung* motif contains philosophical values that connect aesthetics, mathematics, and spirituality within Javanese culture.

Meanwhile, the *Sidomukti* motif is closely associated with the hope for a prosperous and happy life. “*Sido*” means “to become” or “to continue,” while “*mukti*” means “prosperity.” That is why it is often used in wedding ceremonies as a symbol of the wish for a life filled with happiness, peace, and glory. According to recent research, *Sidomukti* embodies the philosophy of hope “prosperity, honor, peace, and tranquility” for its wearers, particularly within the context of family life.

These three motifs demonstrate that Solo batik is not merely a visual art form, but also a medium for conveying life values. The philosophy within it reflects a balance between aesthetics, spirituality, and Javanese socio-cultural norms, ensuring that batik remains a culturally rich and relevant identity to this day.

### 3.4 History of Shu Brocade

Shu Brocade is one of the oldest traditional textiles in China, originating from the Sichuan region, specifically the city of Chengdu. In the history of Chinese textiles, Shu Brocade is referred to as the “*mother of Chinese brocade*” due to its age spanning thousands of years and its significant influence on weaving techniques in other regions.

Its history dates back over 2,000 years to the era of the ancient Shu state and the Warring States period (403–221 BCE). At that time, Sichuan had already become a major center of silk production in China, with rapidly advancing weaving techniques. Archaeological evidence indicates that patterned weaving was already in use during the Han Dynasty, demonstrating just how advanced its textile technology was.

By the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–24 CE), the production of Shu Brocade reached the peak of its glory. This fabric was not only used for noble attire but also became a primary commodity along the Silk Road. The imperial government even established a special office to oversee its production due to its high economic value.

In subsequent periods, particularly along the Silk Road, Shu Brocade was influenced by cultural interactions with Central Asia. Its local motifs began to incorporate foreign elements, resulting in increasingly diverse and artistic patterns.

In modern scholarship, Shu Brocade is viewed not merely as a textile product, but also as a cultural heritage that embodies the historical, artistic, and identity values of Chinese society. Research by Yuanmao Fu (2025) indicates that Shu Brocade has played a crucial role in the development of Chinese textile culture, both as a symbol of social status and as an artistic expression. Other studies also confirm that its survival for over two millennia demonstrates the strength of tradition and innovation in this craft.

### 3.5 The Variety of Shu Brocade

Sichuan Shu Brocade features a remarkably rich variety of motifs and patterns, which have evolved alongside history and cultural interactions. This diversity extends not only to its visual forms but



also to their sources of inspiration, pattern compositions, and the symbolic meanings embedded within them.

Generally, Shu Brocade variations can be classified based on motif themes, such as flora, fauna, geometric designs, as well as mythological motifs and symbols of good fortune. Flora and fauna motifs are the most dominant; these natural elements are used as symbols of natural beauty while also conveying meanings of good fortune and harmony. Research indicates that these patterns originated from observations of the surrounding environment, which were then distilled into distinctive artistic forms.

Additionally, there are variations of mythological and symbolic motifs, such as dragons, phoenixes, and other legendary creatures. These motifs are typically linked to traditional beliefs, symbolizing power, protection, and good fortune. Recent studies refer to these motifs as part of “*auspicious patterns*” that hold deep symbolic value and represent Chinese culture.

Other variations are evident in geometric patterns and design compositions. In the early period, before the Tang Dynasty, patterns tended to be simple with linear arrangements. However, over time and under the influence of the Silk Road, compositions became more complex, such as “*linked-bead*” patterns (interlocking circles) or combinations of elements within a single fabric. These changes demonstrate the influence of foreign cultures, which enriched the design of Shu Brocade.

It is not just about the patterns; there’s also variation in visual structure and dyeing techniques, such as color gradients, light-dark contrasts, and the shimmering effect of the weave. These characteristics create a 3D effect and enhance the fabric’s aesthetic appeal. Research indicates that dyeing techniques and color arrangements are designed to achieve visual balance and reinforce the symbolic meaning of the patterns.

The variations in Shu Brocade are not merely about visual beauty, but also reflect the cultural complexity, history, and symbolic values that have evolved over thousands of years. This diversity makes Shu Brocade an innovative traditional textile that remains firmly rooted in its cultural heritage.

### 3.6 The Philosophy of Shu Brocade

The variety of motifs in Shu Brocade not only showcases visual diversity but also represents the value systems, beliefs, and philosophies of Chinese society that have evolved over thousands of years. Each motif, whether floral, animal, geometric, or mythological, carries symbolic meaning that reflects humanity’s relationship with nature, spirituality, and the hope for a harmonious life.

One of its core philosophies is the concept of “*auspicious symbolism*.” Motifs such as flowers, clouds, and decorative patterns are not merely ornaments but are also prayers and hopes for prosperity, happiness, and a harmonious life. Recent research suggests these patterns act as “*cultural genes*” that preserve China’s cultural memory and symbolic values, passed down through generations in textile design.

Additionally, flora and fauna motifs reflect the philosophy of harmony between humans and nature. Flowers symbolize beauty and vitality, while birds and animals represent freedom, good



fortune, and strength. This inspiration from nature reflects the perspective of traditional Chinese society, which views nature as both a source of life and a source of aesthetic inspiration.

Mythological motifs such as dragons and phoenixes carry more complex philosophies, linked to power, cosmic balance, and spiritual protection. Dragons represent strength and authority, while phoenixes symbolize grace and harmony. Their combination is often interpreted as a balance between masculine and feminine energies. Textile studies suggest that these motifs connect art, belief, and social structure.

Meanwhile, geometric and symmetrical patterns depict order, balance, and perfection. Circular (medallion) or repeating patterns symbolize cosmic harmony and the order of the universe. This balanced composition also aligns with Chinese aesthetic principles that emphasize visual and symbolic harmony.

The philosophy of color is also significant: bright colors like red, yellow, and green are not merely aesthetic but symbolize luck, prosperity, and life. This combination creates visual balance while reinforcing the motifs' meanings.

In essence, the philosophy behind the variations of Shu Brocade reveals each motif as a complex form of cultural communication. It is not merely art, but a medium for conveying values such as harmony, balance, good fortune, and the relationship between humanity, nature, and spirituality. Therefore, Shu Brocade stands as a cultural heritage that is visually stunning and philosophically rich.

### **3.7 The Similarities Between Solo Batik and Shu Brocade**

Although they come from different cultural backgrounds, Solo Batik and Shu Brocade share many similarities as traditional textile heritage. Both are the result of local artisans' creativity, employing intricate techniques that require a high degree of precision. Solo Batik uses a wax-resist dyeing technique, while Shu Brocade involves complex silk weaving, both demonstrate exceptional skill and artistic value (Rahmawati & Roslyn, 2023).

Additionally, both feature distinctive motifs rich in symbolic meaning. Solo Batik motifs, such as *parang* and *kawung*, embody life philosophies, whereas Shu Brocade depicts flora, fauna, and mythological creatures symbolizing luck and harmony. This demonstrates that both serve as media for conveying cultural values (Kurniasari & Sungkono, 2026).

Visually, their colors are distinctive and aesthetically pleasing, serving as regional identities. Solo Batik is synonymous with soft, earthy tones, while Shu Brocade uses bright, contrasting colors. Both also serve social functions in traditional ceremonies and as status symbols, and are continuously developed within the creative industry to preserve cultural values.

The similarities between Solo Batik and Shu Brocade lie in their production techniques, symbolic meanings, aesthetic values, and their role as representations of cultural identity.

### **3.8 The Difference Between Solo Batik and Shu Brocade**

Solo Batik from Indonesia and Shu Brocade from China are two traditional textile heritages rich in cultural value. Although both share similarities in terms of their excellence and uniqueness as



traditional textiles, each retains distinctive characteristics that set them apart from one another. Through this comparison, we can see how both cultures express their identities and values through traditional fabrics.

One of the most striking differences between Solo Batik and Shu Brocade lies in the motifs used. Solo Batik is synonymous with motifs deeply rooted in Javanese culture, such as *parang*, *kawung*, and *sidomukti*. These motifs have simple, repetitive forms yet carry profound philosophical meanings. For instance, the *parang* motif symbolizes strength and the struggle of life, while *sidomukti* represents hope for happiness and prosperity. On the other hand, Shu Brocade features more complex and ornamental motifs, such as flora, fauna, dragons, phoenixes, and geometric patterns influenced by Silk Road culture. This distinction highlights that Solo Batik emphasizes symbolic simplicity, whereas Shu Brocade emphasizes visual opulence and dynamic design.

Another difference lies in the manufacturing techniques used for these two textiles. Solo Batik is made using the wax-resist dyeing technique, in which patterns are drawn by hand using a canting before dyeing takes place. This technique requires great precision and patience because the patterns are drawn directly by hand by the artisan. In contrast, Shu Brocade is created through silk weaving, where colored threads are arranged directly during the weaving process to form patterns. This weaving technique produces a distinctive sheen and texture that defines Shu Brocade. When compared, both techniques require specialized skills, though the approaches used differ.

From a cultural philosophy perspective, the two also exhibit significant differences. Solo Batik reflects the values of Javanese society, such as harmony in life, self-control, hope, and spirituality. This philosophy is evident in the selection of motifs, which inherently hold symbolic meanings for daily life.

Meanwhile, Shu Brocade places greater emphasis on the concepts of good fortune, power, cosmic harmony, and the relationship between humans and nature. The dragon and phoenix motifs frequently found in Shu Brocade symbolize strength, protection, and the balance between masculine and feminine energies. These philosophical differences demonstrate that every culture has its own unique way of expressing its values and beliefs through textiles.

Based on the comparison above, it can be concluded that although Solo Batik and Shu Brocade are both traditional textile heritages rich in cultural value, they have quite striking differences in terms of motifs, production techniques, and cultural philosophy. Solo Batik places greater emphasis on symbolic simplicity and the distinctive Javanese philosophy of life, whereas Shu Brocade highlights visual opulence and the distinctive Chinese cosmic symbolism. It is precisely these differences that make both so distinctive and distinct from one another, and that demonstrate the cultural richness possessed by each region.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that Solo Batik and Shu Brocade are two traditional textile heritages that hold immense cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical value. Both are not merely used for clothing but also serve as a form of cultural expression that reflects the identity, history, and worldview of their respective communities.



Solo Batik developed within Javanese culture, which is rich in symbolism, as seen in motifs like *parang*, *kawung*, and *sidomukti*, which represent strength, balance, and the hope for prosperity. Meanwhile, Shu Brocade from Sichuan has a long history as a classic Chinese fabric, featuring floral, faunal, and mythological motifs that symbolize good fortune, harmony, and power.

Although they come from different cultures, both share similarities in their intricate production techniques, motifs with symbolic meanings, and social functions within their communities. Their differences, in fact, enrich their cultural value and highlight the diversity of textile art worldwide.

Thus, Solo Batik and Shu Brocade are not only visually stunning but also symbols of cultural values that must be preserved. In this modern age, innovation and adaptation are necessary to remain relevant, while preserving traditions for future generations.

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