



Reinterpreting Abu di Ateh Tunggua: Power Relations and Male Responsibility in the Minangkabau Matrilineal System

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of Abu di Ateh Tunggua as a relational framework for understanding male position within the Minangkabau matrilineal kinship system. The role of the sumando has frequently been interpreted as a symbol of fragility or marginal status within customary structures. Using a qualitative, literature-based approach and conceptual analysis of customary norms, proverbial expressions, and the sumando typology, this study argues that Abu di Ateh Tunggua functions as an ethical metaphor that signifies responsibility, prudence, and relational awareness rather than structural subordination. In the Minangkabau context, men are not vested with proprietary authority within the wife's lineage; instead, their legitimacy is grounded in moral obligations toward the nuclear family and the broader kin network. The article further identifies transformations in male roles in response to urbanization, education, and migration, highlighting ongoing negotiations between customary values and contemporary social change. These findings contribute to discussions of masculinity in matrilineal societies by demonstrating that authority may be constructed through social responsibility and collective recognition rather than ownership. The study underscores the importance of interpreting cultural expressions as analytical tools for examining power relations within indigenous kinship systems.

Keyword: Minangkabau, Matrilineal Kinship, Sumando, Relational Legitimacy.

Introduction

Contemporary literature consistently positions the Minangkabau as one of, and in some references the largest, matrilineal communities in the world. Halimatussa'diyah et al. describe the Minangkabau as one of the largest matrilineal societies worldwide, while Yunarti characterizes them as the world's largest matrilineal Muslim community. Similarly, other studies cite the view that the Minangkabau constitute the largest matrilineal ethnic population (Jamilah et al., 2024; Putri, 2023; Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, there is conceptual nuance in the formulation of these claims. Some sources prefer the phrase "one of the largest" rather than "the largest," such that the validity of the assertion depends upon the criteria of categorization employed, for instance whether the comparison concerns matrilineal Muslim communities or matrilineal populations globally (Jamilah et al., 2024; Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024).

Institutionally, the Minangkabau matrilineal system is characterized by maternal descent, exogamous marriage practices, a tendency toward matrilocal residence, and the inheritance of pusako tinggi by women. Within this structure, men do not occupy the position of property owners but instead function as supervisors and custodians responsible for maintaining the continuity of inheritance and the stability of the kin group (Jamilah et al., 2024).

Most studies on Minangkabau society focus primarily on the position of women and the ownership of inherited property, including both harato pusako and pusako tinggi. Research in customary and inheritance law repeatedly emphasizes the classification of inheritance and its implications for beneficiaries along the maternal line (Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024; Putri, 2023). In analyses of Pariaman marriage traditions, particularly the practice of bajapuik or uang japuik, the matrilineal system is likewise interpreted through the assumption that inheritance rights reside with women (Yulidia & Sudiro, 2025; Tamrin et al., 2024; Saprina & Rahmi, 2024). Several studies even assert that matrilineal norms strengthen women's positions in the ownership and management of resources, although in practice social dynamics and inconsistencies remain evident (Ananda & Syawali, 2024).

The dominance of this focus on inheritance ownership has led to interpretations of men's position as structurally subordinate. However, such reduction does not fully capture the complexity of power relations within the Minangkabau matrilineal system. On the one hand, men do not possess inheritance rights and are not the center of lineage continuity. On the other hand, they hold significant social mandates as mamak within their natal families and as sumando within their wives' families (Jamilah et al., 2024; Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024).

It is within this context that the adagium bak abu di ateh tunggua becomes analytically relevant. This expression is frequently used to describe the position of the husband in a matrilocal household, often portrayed as easily displaced and lacking roots within the wife's clan structure (Jamilah et al., 2024; Putri, 2023). This article proceeds from the assumption that the adagium should not be read merely as a metaphor of marginality but must be repositioned as a relational concept for understanding the distribution of

power and male social legitimacy within the matrilineal kinship system.

In academic literature, Minangkabau men are often interpreted as structurally subordinate because the matrilineal principle links clan membership and inheritance of pusako tinggi to the maternal line, while men are associated primarily with supervisory and custodial roles. Moreover, in social practice husbands typically reside in the wife's household, reinforcing

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interpretations of limited structural authority (Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024; Nadia et al., 2022).

This reading of subordination is also frequently connected to the encouragement of merantau. Ethnographic studies indicate that a matrilineal system in which inheritance is primarily allocated to women encourages men to seek livelihoods outside their place of origin (Yasmin & Baiduri, 2024).

Nevertheless, several studies emphasize the ambivalence of men's positions. Adat may constrain masculine space in certain respects, yet in other domains it strengthens male authority within specific customary arenas (Sulistiyati, 2023). Research on gender stereotypes and migrant household dynamics also indicates that men continue to exercise dominant roles in decision-making and control over resources (Afifah, 2024; Husna & Wahyuni, 2025). Thus, interpretations based solely on structural subordination fail to explain the full complexity of power relations at play.

Literally, *bak abu di ateh tunggua* means "like ash upon a hearth." The expression is used to depict the position of a husband or father within a matrilocal Minangkabau household, where the husband resides in the wife's *rumah gadang*. In popular understanding, the husband is often perceived as a figure easily displaced and lacking rootedness within both the house and the wife's clan (Jamilah et al., 2024; Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024).

Such interpretations tend to be reductive because they overlook the fact that, within the framework of adat and Islamic norms (*syarak*), men continue to bear several key functions. First, the husband acts as the economic provider and financial supporter of the family (Jamilah et al., 2024; Tamrin et al., 2024). Second, as *mamak*, men hold social responsibility toward their nieces and nephews and the continuity of the maternal line (Yulidia & Sudiro, 2025; Ananda & Syawali, 2024). Third, in the context of *pusako tinggi*, men perform custodial and supervisory functions to prevent misuse of inherited property (Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the adagium is more appropriately understood as symbolizing a tension between being an outsider within the domestic sphere and being a bearer of customary and economic mandates, rather than as definitive evidence of male subordination (Jamilah et al., 2024; Saprina & Rahmi, 2024).

This article repositions the adagium *Abu di Ateh Tunggua* as a relational concept that underscores the notion that male social legitimacy within the Minangkabau matrilineal system is constructed through ethical responsibility rather than material ownership. Power is not centered on rights to inheritance but negotiated through sustained social practice and collective recognition (Jamilah et al., 2024; Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024).

Through this approach, the Minangkabau matrilineal system is understood not as a reversal of patriarchy but as a configuration of power relations grounded in the distribution of social responsibility. The male position thus becomes dynamic and relational, dependent upon the quality of contribution and ethical legitimacy within the kinship network.

Previous Studies

Anthropological scholarship on Minangkabau society was fundamentally established by several classical scholars whose works remain primary references in the study of Minangkabau kinship and adat. Among the most influential are A. A. Navis, Tsuyoshi Kato, and P. E. de Josselin de Jong.

In *Alam Takambang Jadi Guru: Adat dan Kebudayaan Minangkabau*, A. A. Navis conceptualizes adat as a value system that shapes the Minangkabau social structure, including its matrilineal principles and the relationship between adat and Islam. Navis emphasizes that the Minangkabau kinship system is not merely a mechanism of inheritance but an ethical framework regulating the distribution of social roles between men and women. He also explains the position of men as *mamak*, who bear social responsibility toward their nieces and nephews despite lacking individual ownership rights over *pusako tinggi* (Navis, 1984).

Through his work *Adat Minangkabau dan Merantau*, Tsuyoshi Kato makes a significant contribution by linking the matrilineal system to economic dynamics and migration. Kato demonstrates that the practice of merantau cannot be separated from the matrilineal structure that places men outside the center of inherited property ownership. However, he also argues that migration is not merely a consequence of structural subordination but part of a broader social and economic strategy for maintaining balance within the kinship system (Kato, 2005).

Meanwhile, P. E. de Josselin de Jong, in his structural study of Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan, positions Minangkabau society as an important case in anthropological kinship theory. He views the Minangkabau matrilineal system as a complex social structure in which maternal descent, communal ownership, and the authority of the *penghulu* form a distinctive relational configuration. This structural approach underscores that the distribution of male roles cannot be understood in isolation but must be interpreted within the broader symbolic and institutional system of adat (Josselin de Jong, 1960).

These three classical studies constitute the conceptual foundation for understanding the Minangkabau matrilineal system. However, despite offering comprehensive descriptions of customary structures and social roles, these works have not explicitly developed cultural adagium as analytical instruments for examining male power relations and responsibility. This gap forms the point of departure for the present study.

In both classical anthropological scholarship and subsequent research, discussions of Minangkabau men have generally focused on two central positions: as *mamak* within the natal family and as *sumando* within the wife's family. This emphasis has tended to be descriptive and structural in orientation, explaining functions, authority, and role boundaries according to prevailing customary norms.

As *mamak*, men are positioned as authoritative figures within the maternal lineage. They are responsible for guiding their nieces and nephews, managing and safeguarding *pusako tinggi*, and representing the kin group in customary affairs. Within this framework, the *mamak* is frequently portrayed as a moral and social pillar sustaining the continuity of the maternal line. However, such descriptions largely remain at the level of normative function mapping, without elaborating the relational dimension of power that accompanies this role.

Conversely, as *sumando*, men are understood as individuals who enter the wife's family structure through marriage. They do not possess rights over the *rumah gadang* or inherited property, and their position is circumscribed by customary norms that designate them as outsiders within the wife's clan structure. The literature tends to emphasize the temporary and conditional nature of this position, particularly in contexts of conflict or divorce. Nevertheless, this interpretation often situates the *sumando* solely within a framework of structural limitation, without analyzing how his social legitimacy is constructed through ethics, economic responsibility, and the capacity to maintain relational harmony.

This descriptive tendency indicates that most studies continue to map the roles of *mamak* and *sumando* as normative categories within the kinship system rather than as analytical tools for examining the distribution of power, negotiation of authority, and dynamics of social responsibility. Consequently, the position of Minangkabau men is frequently interpreted through a binary opposition between customary authority in the natal family and structural limitation in the wife's family, without exploring the tensions and dialectics between these two domains.

In this context, a more conceptual reading is required, one that not only explains the functions of *mamak* and *sumando* but also positions them as arenas for the production of power relations and social legitimacy within the Minangkabau matrilineal system.

Although both classical and contemporary literature provide relatively comprehensive descriptions of the roles of *mamak* and *sumando*, most studies remain confined to normative mapping of male functions and structural positions within the matrilineal system. Customary adagium, including the expression *bak abu di ateh tunggua*, are generally employed as symbolic illustrations or cultural ornaments that reinforce descriptive narratives of male limitation rather than as systematically analyzed conceptual categories.

This tendency results in a representational reading in which the adagium is understood as a reflection of social conditions but not developed as an analytical instrument for examining how power relations are distributed, negotiated, and legitimized within the kinship structure. In other words, the adagium is more often treated as a static cultural metaphor than as an epistemological device capable of revealing the relational mechanisms linking responsibility, authority, and social legitimacy.

As a consequence, power relations within the Minangkabau matrilineal system are frequently reduced to issues of inheritance ownership and lineage, without investigating how moral authority, social responsibility, and communal recognition are produced through customary practices and symbols. The absence of a conceptual reading of the adagium has led analyses of male positions to become confined within a dichotomy of subordination versus domination, rather than viewing them as dynamic relational configurations.

This gap underscores the necessity of repositioning the adagium *bak abu di ateh tunggua* as an analytical instrument for interpreting the distribution of power grounded in responsibility and ethics within the Minangkabau matrilineal system. By treating the adagium as a category of analysis, scholarship can move beyond mere role description and begin to elucidate the relational logic that sustains the social structure.

Research Gap

Although numerous studies have examined the position of Minangkabau men through their roles as *mamak* and *sumando*, no conceptual analysis has explicitly positioned the adagium *Abu di Ateh Tunggua* as a relational analytical framework. The adagium has generally been understood as a cultural metaphor representing the social condition of men, yet it has not been developed as a theoretical instrument for examining the distribution of power, legitimacy, and responsibility within the matrilineal system.

Moreover, the *sumando* typology has more frequently been treated as a normative classification or moral evaluation within customary discourse rather than as an analytical instrument for investigating mechanisms of power and social ethics. As a result, the dynamics among authority, responsibility, and male legitimacy within the Minangkabau kinship structure have not been elaborated in a systematic and conceptual manner.

Research Questions

Based on the preceding background and identification of the research gap, it is necessary to formulate research questions that explicitly position the adagium and customary typologies as analytical devices rather than as merely normative descriptions. This study proceeds from the assumption that the Minangkabau matrilineal system does not merely distribute ownership but also regulates power relations and social responsibility through symbolic expressions and customary classifications. Accordingly, the focus of the inquiry is directed toward a conceptual reading of the adagium *Abu di Ateh Tunggua* and the *sumando* typology within a relational framework.

The research questions are formulated as follows:

How does the adagium *Abu di Ateh Tunggua* represent and construct male power relations within the Minangkabau matrilineal kinship system?

How can the *sumando* typology within Minangkabau adat be interpreted as a mechanism for distributing social responsibility and ethical legitimacy among men?

Objectives and Contributions

This study aims to reposition the adagium *Abu di Ateh Tunggua* not merely as a symbolic expression within Minangkabau tradition but as a relational concept that can be employed to analyze the distribution of power and male social responsibility within the matrilineal kinship system.

Furthermore, the study develops the *sumando* typology as an instrument of social analysis that enables a more systematic interpretation of mechanisms of legitimacy, moral evaluation, and the formation of male authority within the structure of the family and the customary kin group.

Theoretically, this research seeks to contribute to the advancement of matrilineal studies by offering a relational perspective on the concept of power, namely, a conception of power that is not grounded in structural ownership but in ethical responsibility and social recognition. In doing so, the article enriches scholarly discourse on gender relations and kinship within customary societies while also opening space for dialogue between indigenous concepts and contemporary social theory.

Method

Research Design and Approach

This study constitutes a conceptual literature review employing a qualitative and interpretative approach. The research focus is not directed toward the collection of empirical field data but toward a critical analysis of scholarly literature, customary texts, and symbolic expressions related to the Minangkabau matrilineal system. This approach was selected because the primary objective of the study is to reconstruct meaning and formulate a conceptual framework concerning power relations and male responsibility within the kinship system.

Data Sources

The data sources consist of three principal categories. First, scholarly journal articles and academic books addressing the Minangkabau matrilineal system, the roles of *mamak* and *sumando*, inheritance law, and gender dynamics (Jamilah et al., 2024; Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024; Putri, 2023; Sulistyati, 2023). Second, studies examining social practices such as migration (*merantau*), marriage traditions, and household relations among Minangkabau migrants (Yasmin & Baiduri, 2024; Afifah, 2024; Husna & Wahyuni, 2025). Third, customary expressions and the *sumando* typology, which are treated as conceptual sources for interpreting the construction of social legitimacy.

The literature was selected based on the following criteria: (1) direct relevance to the Minangkabau matrilineal system and gender relations; (2) publication within the period 2000–2025 to ensure analytical currency, while still incorporating foundational classical works; (3) publication in indexed journals, reputable academic proceedings, or recognized academic publishers; and (4) explicit discussion of inheritance (pusaka), the roles of mamak and sumando, or power relations.

Inclusion criteria comprised articles and books that substantively address the structure of the Minangkabau matrilineal system, the distribution of inheritance, the roles of mamak and sumando, or gender relations within customary contexts. Exclusion criteria included: (1) popular writings lacking academic references; (2) works that mention Minangkabau only descriptively without structural analysis; and (3) publications whose scholarly sources cannot be verified.

Through this selection process, a total of 20 primary sources were analyzed in depth, consisting of 13 journal articles and 7 academic books. This number is not intended as a statistical representation but as a sufficient conceptual corpus for constructing a theoretical synthesis. The majority of the articles were drawn from indexed journals and reputable academic publishers.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature review. This process involved identifying relevant scholarly sources, selecting materials based on their alignment with the research focus, engaging in critical reading, and documenting conceptual findings related to the distribution of power, social legitimacy, and social responsibility within the matrilineal system.

Each source was analyzed not only at the descriptive level but also with attention to its underlying theoretical assumptions. Accordingly, the collected data functioned as a foundation for constructing an argumentative synthesis rather than merely summarizing previous research findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out in three principal stages. First, a textual and symbolic analysis of the adagium *bak abu di ateh tunggua* was undertaken to identify its literal, connotative, and metaphorical structures. Second, a process of social contextualization was conducted by situating the adagium and the *sumando* typology within the framework of the matrilineal kinship system, as well as within the dynamics of the roles of *mamak* and *sumando* as discussed in the literature.

Third, conceptual construction was performed by synthesizing the results of the symbolic and contextual analyses into a **framework of power relations grounded in responsibility. At this stage, the study formulated the proposition that men's social legitimacy within the Minangkabau matrilineal system is produced through ethical and relational mechanisms rather than through material ownership alone.**

To minimize interpretative bias, three strategies were employed. First, literature triangulation was conducted by comparing findings across various disciplines, including anthropology, customary law, and gender studies. Second, reflective reading was applied by repeatedly testing the consistency of interpretations against customary texts and secondary literature. Third, **theoretical assumptions guiding the analysis were made explicit, thereby clarifying the researcher's epistemological position and enabling critical evaluation.**

This analytical approach allows the study to move beyond normative description toward a more systematic conceptual formulation concerning the distribution of power in matrilineal societies.

Methodological Transparency and Epistemological Limitations

As a text-based study, this research entails certain epistemological limitations. First, the analysis relies on written representations and academic documentation and therefore does not directly capture lived social practices in the field. Second, **the symbolic interpretation of the adagium cannot be entirely separated from the researcher's hermeneutic standpoint, despite the application of triangulation and critical reflection.**

The corpus of literature analyzed is selective and thematic in nature and is not intended to constitute a comprehensive systematic review of all publications concerning Minangkabau society. The study is oriented toward conceptual construction rather than empirical generalization. By explicitly stating these limitations, the research positions its findings as theoretical propositions open to further testing, refinement, or critique through field-based inquiry and alternative methodological approaches.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: power relations theory, kinship perspectives in matrilineal societies, and the symbolic approach in cultural anthropology.

First, power relations theory is employed to conceptualize power not as a fixed possession or individual attribute, but as something produced and negotiated within networks of social relations. Within this framework, power is not necessarily located in material control or formal structures; it may also manifest in the form of responsibility, moral legitimacy, and social recognition. This approach enables an interpretation of the position of Minangkabau men as a relational configuration shaped through role interaction rather than solely through inheritance or formal authority.

Second, kinship perspectives in matrilineal societies are utilized to examine how descent, inheritance, and residential structures shape the distribution of social roles. In matrilineal systems, authority, ownership, and responsibility are not always vested in the same actors. The distinction between proprietary rights over *pusako* and the obligation to safeguard the continuity of the kin group constitutes a defining characteristic that influences the construction of male positions as *mamak* and *sumando*. This perspective clarifies that the matrilineal system is not merely an inversion of patriarchy but rather a social configuration with its own distinctive logic of role distribution.

Third, the symbolic approach in cultural anthropology is employed to interpret customary adagium and typologies as social symbols that encapsulate collective meanings. From this perspective, customary expressions are not understood merely as cultural rhetoric but as representations of values, norms, and relational structures embedded within society. Through symbolic analysis, the adagium *Abu di Ateh Tunggua* and the *sumando* typology can be examined as conceptual instruments that both reflect and shape social practices within the Minangkabau kinship system.

Together, these three theoretical frameworks enable the integration of symbolic analysis with an examination of power relations and kinship structures, thereby producing a more comprehensive interpretation of the position of men within the Minangkabau matrilineal system.

Research Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, which are conceptual and interpretative in nature. The findings are not derived from empirical field data but from a process of literature analysis, symbolic interpretation of the adagium, and theoretical synthesis concerning power relations and kinship structures within Minangkabau society. Accordingly, the results constitute a conceptual construction formulated through critical engagement with customary texts and relevant scholarly works.

This approach enables the development of an argument that positions the adagium and customary typologies as analytical instruments for understanding the distribution of responsibility, social legitimacy, and the configuration of power relations within the Minangkabau matrilineal system.

Abu di Ateh Tunggua as a Relational Position

The conceptual findings of this study indicate that the adagium Abu di Ateh Tunggua is more appropriately understood as representing a relational position rather than a symbol of structural fragility. In lexical and symbolic interpretation, ash is the residue of a process of combustion. It exists as a trace of transformation rather than as an independent entity. Meanwhile, the tunggua or tree stump represents the remaining trunk that signifies the continuity of roots and foundation. The relationship between ash and stump thus illustrates a conditional association, in which the existence of ash depends upon context and upon the entity to which it adheres.

Within the Minangkabau social framework, this metaphor depicts a male position that is not anchored in the center of structural ownership yet retains significant functional presence. Such presence is conditional in the sense that social legitimacy is determined by the capacity to perform roles and sustain relationships. As husbands or fathers in a matrilocal system, men do not possess rights over the rumah gadang or pusako tinggi, yet they remain economic and moral actors who support the continuity of the nuclear family.

These findings demonstrate a close relationship between presence and social legitimacy. A man's presence does not automatically generate authority; rather, it must be constructed through responsibility, ethical conduct, and tangible contribution within the kinship network. This legitimacy is dynamic and may strengthen or weaken depending on the quality of relationships established. In other words, the male position within the matrilineal system is neither fixed nor inherent but produced through sustained social practice.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes that the role of Minangkabau men is grounded not in structural ownership but in social mandate. The distinction between proprietary rights and custodial responsibility indicates that authority is not always synonymous with material possession. As mamak, for instance, men do not individually own pusako tinggi, yet they bear collective responsibility for safeguarding and overseeing its continuity. Similarly, as sumando, legitimacy is not determined by ownership claims but by the consistent fulfillment of economic and ethical functions within the wife's family.

Thus, Abu di Ateh Tunggua represents a configuration of power relations based on responsibility. Power is not centered on control over property or formal structures but distributed through social mechanisms that demand accountability and communal recognition. In this context, the adagium is not a symbol of subordination but a metaphor for a social position that requires men to continually construct legitimacy through ethical practice and social contribution.

Distribution of Power within the Nuclear Family

The conceptual findings further indicate that Abu di Ateh Tunggua articulates a relational configuration of authority within the nuclear family. Although material inheritance in the form of pusako tinggi follows the maternal line, authority within the conjugal and parental sphere operates through shared responsibility rather than exclusive ownership.

In the matrilocal household, men do not hold genealogical claims to the house or inherited property. Nevertheless, they exercise influence through economic provision, moral guidance, and participation in decision-making processes recognized by the family. Authority, therefore, is neither genealogically embedded nor structurally guaranteed; it emerges through relational performance and sustained ethical commitment.

This arrangement illustrates that power within the nuclear family is distributed rather than monopolized. It depends on reciprocal recognition among family members and is maintained through the fulfillment of obligations. Consequently, authority in the Minangkabau matrilineal system is relational, dynamic, and contingent upon responsible engagement within the domestic sphere.

The Position of Sumando within the Wife's Family

The conceptual findings demonstrate that the position of sumando within the wife's family is constructed through a relational logic distinct from that of a man within his natal lineage. As an affinal member who enters through marriage, a sumando does not genealogically belong to the wife's clan. He occupies domestic space without possessing rights over the rumah gadang or pusako tinggi. His presence is therefore anchored not in matrilineal descent but in a marital bond that is social and moral in character.

This configuration generates certain structural vulnerabilities, particularly in situations of marital conflict or divorce. Because the sumando lacks proprietary claims to the house and inheritance, his residential legitimacy may cease when the marital relationship ends. Such vulnerability is often interpreted as a form of subordination. Conceptually, however, it is more accurately understood as a consequence of a matrilineal system that distinguishes between descent and marriage. The sumando's position is therefore conditional, dependent upon the continuity and quality of the social relationships he sustains.

In this context, the legitimacy of a sumando does not rest upon material ownership but upon ethical conduct and responsible action. As husband and father, he bears economic and moral obligations toward his wife and children. Social recognition is formed through tangible contribution, the ability to maintain familial harmony, and adherence to customary and religious norms. Such legitimacy is dynamic and must be continuously sustained through everyday social practice.

These findings underscore that the position of sumando is not merely a symbol of structural limitation but a site for negotiating power relations grounded in responsibility. Power in this context does not manifest as ownership or formal dominance but as social recognition obtained through ethical consistency. Accordingly, the position of sumando demonstrates that within the Minangkabau matrilineal system, male authority is constructed through relational legitimacy rather than material control.

The Sumando Typology as an Evaluative Mechanism

The findings of this study indicate that the sumando typology in Minangkabau tradition functions not merely as a moral classification but as an evaluative mechanism regulating men's social legitimacy within the wife's family. This typology operates as a cultural instrument for assessing the extent to which a sumando fulfills his responsibilities, upholds relational ethics, and maintains

harmony within the matrilineal kinship structure. Through this framework, customary norms do not simply describe behavior; they establish normative standards that determine the continuity of a man's social position.

Sumando Kacang Miang represents a violation of relational boundaries. This type refers to a man who excessively interferes in the internal affairs of the wife's kin group, provokes conflict, or adopts a disruptive and provocative stance that unsettles communal balance. Within the framework of power relations, such behavior is regarded as an attempt to exceed the limits of legitimacy granted to a sumando. The consequence is a weakening of social recognition, as he fails to maintain proportionality in his role as an affinal member.

Sumando Lapiak Buruak illustrates a failure to fulfill social and economic responsibilities. Inability or unwillingness to work, contribute, and sustain the family reflects the absence of the functional basis upon which a sumando's legitimacy rests. From a relational perspective, this type loses social cohesion because it does not meet the ethical mandate inherent in the position. Legitimacy that should be constructed through concrete contribution collapses as a result of neglecting these obligations.

Sumando Langau Hijau represents a more serious moral transgression, such as infidelity or deviant conduct that damages the honor of the wife's family. Within the matrilineal system, such violations affect not only personal relationships but also the collective dignity of the kin group. Consequently, customary responses to this type tend to be firm, as moral breaches are perceived as threats to the stability of social relations as a whole.

In contrast, Sumando Niniak Mamak embodies the ideal figure, demonstrating the integration of economic responsibility, social maturity, and ethical leadership. This type affirms that the position of sumando is not inherently defined by limitation but may serve as a space for the actualization of strong social roles when enacted proportionally. He is able to preserve harmony within the wife's family while simultaneously maintaining his own dignity within the customary structure.

Taken together, these four typologies demonstrate that Minangkabau adat operates through evaluative mechanisms grounded in ethics and responsibility rather than material ownership. A sumando's legitimacy is determined by the quality of relationships he cultivates, not by claims to structural authority. Thus, the sumando typology functions as a cultural instrument for distributing and regulating power relations within the matrilineal system, affirming that a man's standing is measured through ethical consistency and social contribution.

Table 1. Summary of the Sumando Typology from the Perspective of Power Relations and Social Responsibility

No.	Sumando Typology	Primary Characteristics	Dimension of Violation / Ideality	Implications for Social Legitimacy	Meaning within Power Relations
1	Sumando Kacang Miang	Interferes excessively in the affairs of the wife's kin group, provokes conflict, exceeds role boundaries	Violation of relational boundaries	Legitimacy weakens due to being perceived as disrupting social balance	Power fails due to inability to maintain proportionality of role
2	Sumando Lapiak Buruak	Passive, unemployed or unwilling to work, does not contribute to the family	Failure of social and economic responsibility	Loss of social recognition for failing to fulfill ethical mandates	Power diminishes due to absence of tangible contribution
3	Sumando Langau Hijau	Infidelity or deviant behavior that undermines family honor	Serious moral violation	Social exclusion or severance of relations to preserve collective honor	Power is severed due to damage to the collective ethical foundation
4	Sumando Niniak Mamak	Responsible, maintains harmony, demonstrates social and economic competence	Ethical and leadership ideal	Gains social recognition and respect	Power is constructed through ethical legitimacy and social contribution

Discussion of Findings

This discussion emphasizes that reinterpreting the position of men within the Minangkabau matrilineal system requires moving beyond the dichotomy of female dominance versus male subordination. Although pusako tinggi is inherited through the maternal line, social management and collective responsibility continue to involve men as mamak and sumando. Power, therefore, is not concentrated in material ownership but dispersed across interdependent roles within the kinship network.

Within the wife's family, the legitimacy of a sumando is relational and conditional. It is not determined by genealogy but by economic contribution, adherence to customary norms, and the ability to preserve familial harmony. Authority in this context is performative: it is generated through socially recognized actions rather than inherited as a structural right.

The adagium bak abu di ateh tunggua clarifies this logic. The metaphor underscores that a man's position is not genealogically embedded but must be sustained through responsibility. When read as an analytical category, the adagium reveals that social legitimacy in the Minangkabau matrilineal system is constructed through ethical and relational mechanisms.

Theoretically, this interpretation may be linked to several intellectual traditions. From the perspective of power relations that conceptualizes power as something produced within networks of social relations rather than as a fixed possession, as articulated by Foucault (1978), the Minangkabau matrilineal configuration demonstrates that legitimacy is built through practices of responsibility. Within kinship studies, the separation of authority from material ownership reinforces critiques of overly formalistic genealogical assumptions in the study of kinship, as discussed by Carsten (2004) and Schneider (1984).

From the standpoint of symbolic anthropology, customary adages may be understood as public symbols that condense systems of collective meaning and guide social action, as proposed by Geertz (1973). First, implicitly, this analysis aligns with a Foucauldian conception of power as relational rather than proprietary. Second, within kinship studies, the findings underscore that the distribution of authority in matrilineal societies is not identical to the distribution of ownership but instead reflects the allocation of social mandates within the kinship structure. Third, from a Geertzian symbolic perspective, customary adages function as public symbols that crystallize collective meanings and normative frameworks.

In sum, the Minangkabau matrilineal system presents a model of power distribution grounded in collective responsibility and social recognition. Power operates relationally and dynamically and therefore cannot be reduced to structural domination alone.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the adagium bak abu di ateh tunggua should not be understood as a symbol of male fragility or subordination within the Minangkabau matrilineal system. Rather, it represents a relational position in which men's social legitimacy is grounded in responsibility and collective recognition. The Minangkabau matrilineal system demonstrates a clear distinction between material ownership and social mandate. Although pusako tinggi is inherited through the maternal line, men

continue to hold significant roles as *mamak* and *sumando* in sustaining the social, economic, and moral continuity of the family. Authority in this context does not derive from proprietary rights but from the consistent fulfillment of responsibilities. Power within the Minangkabau matrilineal system therefore operates relationally and ethically. It is neither centralized nor transmitted as an absolute entitlement; instead, it is negotiated through socially recognized practices. This model offers a conceptual contribution to kinship and gender studies by demonstrating that the distribution of power can be grounded in social responsibility rather than structural domination alone.

Research Limitations

This research is based on literature analysis and symbolic interpretation and does not incorporate empirical field data. Consequently, its findings are conceptual in nature and are not intended to serve as a generalization of contemporary social practices across all Minangkabau communities. Furthermore, interpretations of the adagium and customary typologies are not entirely detached from the author's hermeneutic position, although efforts have been made to maintain argumentative consistency and theoretical coherence.

Implications and Recommendations

Academically, this study opens avenues for further ethnographic research to examine how men's relational legitimacy is enacted in urban settings, migrant communities, and contexts of modern social change. Practically, a relational reading of power may serve as a reference for strengthening customary policies that are more responsive to gender dynamics, particularly in family conflict mediation, inheritance management, and customary education.

For gender studies, these findings encourage an approach that does not rely solely on indicators of ownership or structural dominance but also considers the distribution of social responsibility as an analytical dimension. In this respect, the Minangkabau matrilineal system may serve as a reflective model for formulating policies and discourses that are more culturally grounded and contextually responsive.

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