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Sufism, Local Wisdom, and Institutional Identity: A Semiotic Interpretation of the UIN Saizu's Emblem

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Abstract: Institutional emblems in Islamic higher education are less studied empirically compared to the broader fields of Islamic architecture, manuscript illumination, and decorative arts. This research explores the philosophical, spiritual, and cultural significance of the emblem of Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto (UIN Saizu) and details how these meanings form a unified visual identity. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study combines Peircean semiotics with modern visual-grammar theories. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with four key institutional figures responsible for designing, endorsing, and interpreting the emblem, along with document analysis, conducted from January to March 2021. Results reveal that each visual element, such as the term Allah depicted as a mountain, the paired *Kudi* blades, the green background, the yellow circle, the five-feathered wings, the prostrating figure, the paired feather roots, the book, and the blue gemstone, serves both as an institutional identifier and as a symbol embodying Sufi values like tawhid, *tazkiya al-nafs*, and *ma'rifatullāh*. These elements also encode the civic principles of Pancasila and Banyumas local wisdom. The emblem functions as a visual dhikr, integrating religious devotion, civic duty, and cultural identity into a cohesive institutional symbol.

Contribution: This study contributes to the study of Sufism within the semiotics of institutional branding, offering a replicable model for interpreting emblems as condensed expressions of Sufi values and providing Islamic higher-education institutions with a framework for designing visually grounded, culturally rooted, and civically engaged visual identities.

Keywords: visual semiotics; UIN Saizu's emblem; Islamic symbolism; institutional branding; local wisdom

Introduction

Visual identity plays a crucial role in representing an institution's values, mission, and philosophical foundations to the public.¹ In the context of Islamic higher education, an emblem is not merely an aesthetic feature but a semiotic construct that encodes layers of meaning derived from theological principles, cultural narratives, and socio-political commitments. Islamic art and design have historically used geometric forms, symbolic colors, and Arabic calligraphy to convey profound concepts such as *Tawhid* (divine unity), *tazkiya al-nafs* (spiritual purification), and *ma'rifatullāh* (gnosis).² These visual expressions act as vehicles for transmitting sacred meaning and building collective identity within the Muslim *umma*.

Although visual identity has been extensively studied in the fields of branding, design communication, and semiotics,³ scholarly inquiry into institutional emblems in Islamic higher education, particularly those integrating Sufi philosophical concepts and local cultural wisdom, remains limited. Much of the literature on Islamic visual culture instead focuses on architecture, manuscript illumination, and decorative arts,⁴ while emblematic symbols are underexplored despite their capacity to synthesize spiritual, cultural, and national narratives into a unified visual form.

Previous research offers only partial purchase on this gap. Studies of university branding show that emblems, mottos, and slogans are a primary vehicle through which higher-education institutions construct identity for external audiences. Still, this literature is dominated by Western and, increasingly, Middle Eastern cases and rarely engages Sufi philosophical content. Work on biomorphic and symbolic visual identity shows that consumers read emblems as carriers of values, not just marks of recognition. At the same time,

¹ Pamela W. Henderson and Joseph A. Cote, "Guidelines for Selecting or Modifying Logos," *Journal of Marketing* 62, no. 2 (1998): 14–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299806200202>.

² Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), 58; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 4.

³ Henderson and Cote, "Guidelines for Selecting or Modifying Logos"; Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 3rd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2021), 12, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857>.

⁴ Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 45; Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas Online* 6, no. 1 (1988): 12–21, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993-90000230>.

research on Islamic sacred art traces how geometric abstraction and calligraphy encode theological concepts such as divine unity.⁵ Neither line of inquiry has been brought to bear on the emblem of a State Islamic University (UIN) in Indonesia, where Sufi cosmology, local ethnic symbolism, and Pancasila are pressed into a single sign, a notable absence given Indonesia's position as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, where the visual identities of Islamic universities must navigate religious devotion, civic responsibility, and local heritage at once.⁶ Empirical studies of how this integration is embedded in institutional emblems remain scarce, leaving a theoretical and practical gap in the understanding of sacred symbolism within institutional branding.

This study addresses that gap by examining the emblem of Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto (UIN Saizu) through the lens of Peircean semiotics and contemporary visual semiotic theory. Using a qualitative descriptive method and in-depth interviews with four key institutional figures directly involved in the emblem's design and interpretation, this research demonstrates how Islamic spirituality, Sufi symbolism, local wisdom, and national ideology are harmonized within a single institutional identity. The findings contribute to the theoretical discourse on Islamic visual culture and offer practical insights for integrating aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions into the branding of higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Peirce's Semiotic Theory

Semiotics provides a systematic framework for interpreting the meanings embedded in visual symbols. Peirce's triadic model, comprising icons, indexes, and symbols, remains influential in analyzing how visual signs communicate.⁷ Icons resemble their referents, indexes indicate a causal or factual connection, and symbols rely on conventional or culturally agreed meanings. Contemporary semioticians such as Kress and van Leeuwen extend this framework into visual

⁵ Gülrü Necipoğlu, *The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), 61.

⁶ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulama" in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Southeast Asia Publications Series (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 12; Ariel Heryanto, *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), 33.

⁷ Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 4.

grammar, analyzing how composition, color, and spatial arrangement convey meaning.⁸ In emblem design specifically, semiotics reveals how form, color, and structure can embody complex cultural and philosophical narratives.⁹

Applied to Islamic visual culture, this framework helps explain why geometric patterns, arabesques, and calligraphy function as symbolic manifestations of divine unity (*Tawhid*) rather than as ornament alone.¹⁰ Islamic art's characteristic abstraction reflects the transcendence of God, avoiding figurative representation while using symmetry and proportion to evoke metaphysical principles;¹¹ In Sufi contexts, visual elements serve as meditative tools for contemplation,¹² and color symbolism, green for paradise, blue for wisdom, reinforces theological themes.¹³ Reading through Peirce's model, an institutional emblem can be treated as a layered sign, operating iconically (resembling a mountain, a book, a figure in prayer), indexically (pointing to a regional or institutional origin), and symbolically (carrying conventionalized meaning that must be culturally learned); this threefold reading is the lens applied to the UIN Saizu emblem below.

The Use of Emblems in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education

Visual identity is a core component of institutional branding, serving as a strategic medium for communicating values, mission, and positioning to stakeholders.¹⁴ As the central element of visual identity, emblems play a decisive role in building brand recognition, trust, and emotional connection with an institution; effective emblems combine visual simplicity with symbolic richness to ensure both memorability and meaning.¹⁵ Within higher education specifically, visual identity must balance academic credibility, institutional heritage, and cultural relevance, producing a brand image that resonates with diverse

⁸ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 45.

⁹ David Machin, *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), 22; Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 45.

¹⁰ Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, 61; Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, 7.

¹¹ Necipoğlu, *The Topkapi Scroll*, 70.

¹² Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 5.

¹³ Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 44.

¹⁴ Henderson and Cote, "Guidelines for Selecting or Modifying Logos," 22; T.C. Melewar and Elif Karaosmanoglu, "Seven Dimensions of Corporate Identity: A Categorisation from the Practitioners' Perspectives," ed. John M.T. Balmer, *European Journal of Marketing* 40, no. 7/8 (2006): 846–69, <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610670025>.

¹⁵ Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, "Seven Dimensions of Corporate Identity."

audiences;¹⁶ this balancing act is amplified in the Indonesian Islamic higher-education sector, where a university's emblem is expected to signal religious legitimacy, national belonging, and local rootedness at once.

In Indonesia, Islamic institutions operate at the intersection of religion, national ideology, and local culture. Pancasila, as the state's philosophical foundation, coexists with Islamic teachings to promote unity in diversity,¹⁷ Recent scholarship on Sufism and Pancasila shows that values such as *tawassuṭ* (moderation), *tawāzun* (balance), and *i'tidāl* (justice) in Sufi ethics align closely with Pancasila's principles.¹⁸ Local wisdom, expressed through traditional motifs, colors, and symbols, further enriches institutional branding by grounding it in indigenous identity: character-education research in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools has shown that when an institution's brand identity is built around local wisdom, it strengthens community engagement and social legitimacy rather than functioning as surface decoration.¹⁹ Taken together, this body of work indicates a discernible trend among Indonesian Islamic higher-education institutions toward emblems that layer religious, national, and local-cultural signification. What remains largely absent from this literature, however, is a sustained account of how these three registers, Islamic spirituality, Pancasila, and local wisdom, are simultaneously encoded within a single university emblem through a Sufi philosophical lens. This gap is what the present study addresses through the case of UIN Saizu.

Method

The focus of this investigation is the official emblem of Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto (UIN Saizu), treated as a single, bounded visual artefact composed of discrete but interrelated elements, including the term Allah, the mountain (*Gunungan*) contour, the paired *Kudi* (traditional blade of Indonesia, especially in the Javanese area), the color green, the yellow

¹⁶ Chris Chapleo, "Brands in Higher Education," *International Studies of Management & Organization* 45, no. 2 (2015): 150–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2015.1006014>.

¹⁷ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 15; Heryanto, *Identity and Pleasure*, 40.

¹⁸ Sri Maryati, Abdul Basit Atamimi, and Ahoillah Islamy, "The Paradigm of Social Sufism in Pancasila Ideology," *Paradigma* 20, no. 2 (2023): 247–60, <https://doi.org/10.33558/paradigma.v20i2.7061>.

¹⁹ Istianatul Hasanah, Hefniy Hefniy, and Abdul Wahid Zaini, "Strengthening Brand Identity: Embracing Local Wisdom through Character Education Management," *Indonesian Journal of Education and Social Studies* 2, no. 2 (2023): 83–94, <https://doi.org/10.33650/ijess.v2i2.3435>.

circle, the five-feathered wings, the institutional name, the prostrating figure, the paired feather roots, the book symbol, and the blue gem. Each element is analyzed both individually and as part of the emblem's overall compositional structure.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the philosophical, spiritual, and cultural meanings embedded in the UIN Saizu emblem. A qualitative descriptive design was chosen because it is particularly suited to producing comprehensive, in-depth accounts of complex social and symbolic phenomena rather than testing predefined hypotheses.²⁰ It also allowed interpretation of the emblem's visual elements through the combined lens of Islamic philosophy, Sufi symbolism, and local cultural wisdom within a semiotic framework.

Data were drawn from primary interview data and institutional documentation. The primary source consisted of four key informants with direct roles in designing, endorsing, and interpreting the emblem of UIN Saizu: its designer, K.H.D. Zawawi Imron; the Chair of the University Senate, Prof. Dr. Abdul Wachid B.S.; and the university's rectors for 2019–2023 and 2023–2027, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Roqib and Prof. Dr. Ridwan, M.Ag. These participants were selected through purposive sampling for their central involvement in conceptualizing, approving, and articulating the emblem's meaning.²¹ The secondary source consisted of institutional documents, design drafts, and official descriptions of the emblem, used to triangulate the interview data.

Data were collected between January and March 2021 through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, focused on the philosophical and symbolic meaning of each emblem element, the integration of Islamic, Sufi, national, and local values in the emblem, and the institutional identity the emblem was intended to convey. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim; documents and design drafts were reviewed alongside the interviews to corroborate and enrich the interpretation.

Prior to each interview, all informants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and intended use of their statements, and gave informed consent for the interview to be recorded and for their names and institutional

²⁰ Margarete Sandelowski, "Whatever Happened to Qualitative Description?," *Research in Nursing & Health* 23, no. 4 (August 2000): 334–40, [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X\(200008\)23:4334::AID-NUR93.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4334::AID-NUR93.0.CO;2-G).

²¹ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015), 264.

roles to be identified in the resulting publication, given their public positions in relation to the design and endorsement of the UIN Saizu emblem. No sensitive personal data beyond the informants' professional testimony was collected; interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely and accessible only to the research team; and informants were free to decline any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. The university granted institutional permission for the study, including the use and reproduction of the emblem's visual elements for scholarly analysis.

Data were analyzed using Peircean semiotic analysis²² combined with visual-grammar principles,²³ proceeding through four interrelated steps: identifying the visual elements of the emblem (shapes, colors, symbols, and textual components); classifying these elements as icons, indexes, or symbols; contextually interpreting the visual forms in relation to Islamic theological concepts, Sufi teachings, local tradition, and national ideology; and synthesizing these interpretations holistically into a coherent account of the institution's philosophical and spiritual identity. Coding was conducted manually using thematic-coding strategies,²⁴ which allowed themes to emerge from the data while retaining theoretical alignment with semiotic principles.

To ensure credibility, the study applied member checking by returning preliminary interpretations to the participants for feedback.²⁵ Triangulation across interviews, documents, and visual analysis, together with peer debriefing among academic colleagues, strengthened the study's dependability. An audit trail was maintained to enhance confirmability, and thick description was used throughout to support the transferability of the findings to comparable institutional contexts.

Results and Discussion

Following Peirce's model, the analysis below proceeds in four steps for each element of the emblem: identifying the geometric or figurative shape used, classifying its sign-type (icon, index, or symbol), connecting the shape to its

²² Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, 2:2–9.

²³ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 45.

²⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

²⁵ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, 1985), 301.

contextual meaning, and interpreting that meaning holistically within the emblem as a whole.²⁶

History of the UIN Saizu's Emblem

The present emblem cannot be separated from the institution's transformation from an Islamic state institute into a state Islamic university. The institution's lineage runs from the Tarbiyah Faculty of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta (1964–1994), through the Tarbiyah Faculty of IAIN Walisongo Semarang, based in Purwokerto (1994–1997), to State Islamic College (STAIN) Purwokerto (1997–2014) and State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Purwokerto (2014–2021). On 11 May 2021, Presidential Regulation No. 41 of 2021 transformed IAIN Purwokerto into Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto (UIN Saizu), named after the Banyumas-born cleric, journalist, writer, and former Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. This transformation required a new emblem that could represent a broader academic mandate spanning religious and general sciences, while remaining rooted in the university's Islamic, Sufi, and Banyumas heritage.

The design process and its rationale were reconstructed through interviews with the four informants directly involved: the emblem's designer, poet, and cultural figure K.H.D. Zawawi Imron; the Chair of the University Senate, Prof. Dr. Abdul Wachid B.S., closely involved in deliberating and endorsing the emblem's philosophical content; and the university's two most recent rectors, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Roqib (2019–2023), under whose leadership the transition to university status was pursued, and Prof. Dr. Ridwan, M.Ag. (2023–2027), who has continued to articulate the emblem's meaning to the academic community. Interviews were conducted between January and March 2021, immediately preceding the institution's formal change of status, when the new emblem's design and philosophical grounding were being finalized.

According to the designer, the emblem was conceived not as a conventional corporate mark but as a condensed theological and cultural statement, in which shape, color, and number were each chosen to carry specific meaning.²⁷ The resulting composition brings together seven visual elements: the term Allah rendered as a mountain (*Gunungan*); a pair of *Kudi*, traditional Banyumas blades whose silhouette forms the mountain's outline; a green field; a

²⁶ Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, 2:2–9.

²⁷ K.H.D. Zawawi Imron, designer of the UIN Saizu emblem, personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, January 2021.

yellow circle; five symmetrical white feathers on each of two wings; the institutional name; a human figure in the posture of *sujud*; three paired feather roots; a book; and a blue gem. The remainder of this section interprets each element in turn.



Figure 1. The official emblem of Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto with a description of each part. *Source: Authors' own illustration (2021).*

UIN Saizu's Emblem and Its Semiotic Meaning

Table 1. Semiotic Classification and Interpretation of the UIN Saizu's Emblem Elements

Emblem Element	Visual Description	Philosophical Meaning	Spiritual-Islamic Dimension	Socio-Cultural Dimension	Semiotic Classification (Peircean Sign Type)
Term "Allah" in Gunungan form	Arabic calligraphy of "Allah" shaped as a Gunungan (wayang motif) at the center.	God as the source and orientation of life; sacred axis mundi	<i>Tawhid</i> ; billāh-lillāh-fillāh orientation of human acts	Represents centrality of God in Javanese wayang cosmology	Symbol (sacred script); Icon (mountain/Gunungan shape)
Pair of Kudi	Two traditional Banyumas weapons forming the Gunungan	Balance of life, duality, and protection	Human responsibility in <i>ḥablun minallāh & ḥablun minannās</i>	Local wisdom of Banyumas cultural heritage	Index (dual weapons pointing upward); Symbol (balance of life)
Green background	Dominant background color	Life, growth, renewal, balance	Paradise, barakah, tranquillity	Ecological awareness; harmony with nature	Symbol (color as signifier of life)

Yellow circle	Circular golden-yellow line enclosing emblem	Cycle of life, mortality vs eternity	Reminder of <i>akhīra</i> vs <i>dunyā</i>	Universal metaphor of temporality	Symbol (eternal cycle); Icon (sun-like form)
Pair of 5-feathered wings	Symmetrical wings with 5 feathers each	Balance between religion and nation	Right wing: Rukun Islam; Left wing: Pancasila values	Harmonizing spiritual and civic life in NKRI	Index (dualism & symmetry indicating balance)
Blue gem	Central sapphire-like gem	Rarity, wisdom, depth	<i>Ma'rifatullāh</i> , purification of the soul	Cultural association with preciousness	Symbol (precious enlightened knowledge)
Figure in sujud (prostration)	Person depicted in sujud posture	Submission and humility before God	Ihsan, <i>'ubūdiyyah</i> , muraqabah	Visual reminder of prayer as core identity	Icon (resembles real prayer gesture); Symbol (devotion)
Three paired feather roots	Root forms at the base of wings	Foundation of virtue: <i>Islām–Imān–Ihsān</i> (right) and <i>Ilm–'Amal–Akhlaq</i> (left)	Sufi triadic spiritual stages	Local expression of rootedness in life	Index (rooted stability); Symbol (spiritual foundation)
Open book	Book placed at the base of the emblem	Knowledge as life foundation	Qur'an as al-Kitab; epistemology of tauhid	Education, literacy, social transformation	Index (knowledge base); Symbol (integration of science & faith)
Brand name "UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto"	Institutional text element	Legacy of national-Islamic scholar	Integration of faith, knowledge, and deed	Identity of institution & civic contribution	Index (denotation of institution); Symbol (ideological legacy)

The Word *Allah* Rendered as a Mountain (*Gunungan*)

The word "Allah" at the center of the UIN Saizu emblem signifies that all activity of the academic community, alumni, and, by extension, humanity in general is grounded in Allah (*billāh*) and the principle of monotheism. At a minimum, action should be *billāh* (with Allah); ideally it becomes *lillāh* (for the sake of Allah); and, at its most complete, *fillāh* (immersed in Allah). In Sufism, this triad represents a progressive deepening of divine consciousness: *billāh*

reflects human reliance on God in all activity, *lillāh* signifies the intention that all action be directed solely toward God, and *fillāh* represents the highest spiritual state in which a servant is immersed in divine love and will.²⁸

This meaning aligns with the Sufi principle that no deed carries value without orientation toward God: the Qur'an, in Surah An-Nisa' 4:114, links worth in charitable action to the phrase *ibtighā'a marqātillāh* (seeking Allah's pleasure), implying that scholarship and social interaction likewise become means of drawing closer to God only when so oriented.²⁹ Placing the word Allah at the emblem's center is accordingly not decorative but a visual *dhikr*, a fusion of aesthetic form with spiritual content.

Circular Concept Map: Symbolic Interpretation of Lafadz Allah

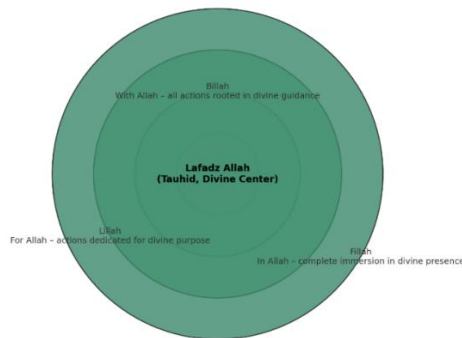


Figure 2. Close-up of the term Allah rendered in Gunungan (mountain) form at the center of the UIN Saizu emblem. *Source: Authors' own illustration (2021).*

The mountain (*jabal*) in which the word is set carries a parallel local and spiritual register. Locally, the mountain evokes the cultural landscape of the Indonesian archipelago and the values that grow from local tradition; spiritually, it can be read as *jabal al-ḥikma*, the mountain of wisdom, a reminder that Islamic values can be acculturated with local tradition without losing their essence.

²⁸ K.H.D. Zawawi Imron, personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, February 2021.; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 45; Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 233.

²⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 88; William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 45.

Historically, the mountain is also associated with revelation and contemplation, as in the account of the Prophet Muhammad's retreat to the Cave of Hira, and in Sufi usage it is read as a symbol of the ascent toward *ma'rifa*.³⁰ The pairing of the term Allah with the mountain therefore condenses monotheism, Sufism, and local wisdom into a single, integrated visual statement.

The Paired *Kudi* Forming the *Gunungan*

A significant yet easily overlooked element of the emblem is the pair of *Kudi*, traditional weapons of the Banyumas region, whose blades are placed symmetrically on either side of the composition and converge upward to form the *Gunungan* contour. Within Javanese iconography, the *Kudi* is not merely a weapon but a symbol of strength, protection, and moral legitimacy, embodying a cosmic dualism between defending life and upholding justice; as Burckhardt observes, traditional forms in both Islamic and Nusantara art function less as pure ornament than as vehicles mediating between the worldly plane and spiritual reality.³¹

From a Sufi perspective, the paired *Kudi* can be read as the dual relational axis of human existence, *ḥablun minallāh* (the vertical relationship with God) and *ḥablun minannās* (the horizontal relationship with fellow human beings), which together constitute the believer's complete spiritual identity, resonating with Muhammad Iqbal's concept of *khudi*. This God-directed selfhood propels the individual toward prophetic transformation.³² From the standpoint of Banyumas local wisdom, the *Kudi* is a cultural marker signalling the university's commitment to remaining grounded in local identity while engaging global academic discourse; in semiotic terms, it functions both as an index, pointing directly to Banyumas heritage, and as a symbol, since its associations with balance and protection are collectively recognized.³³

The Green Colour

According to K.H.D. Zawawi Imron, green was chosen for the UIN Saizu emblem not only because it suits the institutional identity but for its profound

³⁰ Edgar Walter Francis IV, "Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals for Protection and Healing: Religion and Magic in the Writings of Ahmad Ibn Ali Al-Buni (d. 622/1225)" (University of California, 2005), 40; Sachiko Murata and William Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1994), 210.

³¹ Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, 61.

³² Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 195.

³³ Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, 2:9.

symbolic register: green signifies freshness, life, and the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and God, and was intended to depict the peaceful spirit of Islam at one with nature.³⁴ This reading is consistent with the wider symbolism of green as regeneration, fertility, tranquillity, and sustainability,³⁵ which is why the color is common in the visual identities of organizations working in environmental, health, and social sectors.

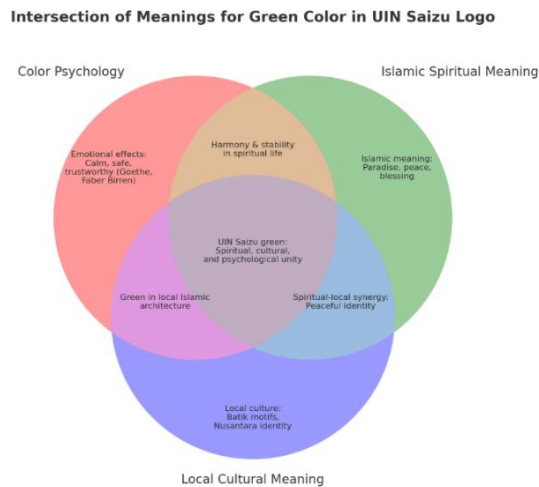


Figure 3. The green field of the UIN Saizu emblem, read as a symbol of life, renewal, and spiritual balance. *Source: Authors' own illustration (2021).*

Psychologically, green sits at the midpoint of the visible spectrum and is associated with an emotionally calming effect. Abdul Wachid B.S. connects this to Goethe's colour theory, in which green is described as a "middle color" that balances the active energy of red and yellow against the passive effect of blue.³⁶ Faber Birren similarly observed that green tends to evoke security, tranquility, and stability, which is why it is widely used in hospitals, banks, and educational institutions to project trustworthiness.³⁷ Spiritually, green carries strong

³⁴ K.H.D. Zawawi Imron, personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, January 2021.

³⁵ Edith Anderson Feisner and Ron Reed, *Color Studies* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 96; Frank H. Mahnke, *Color, Environment, and Human Response* (New York: Wiley, 1996), 42.

³⁶ Abdul Wachid B.S., personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, February 2021.; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, ed. Charles L. Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1810), 305.

³⁷ Faber Birren, *Color Psychology and Color Therapy: A Factual Study of the Influence of Color on Human Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), 118.

resonance in Islamic tradition, where it is associated with paradise, purity, and mercy, and is consistently used in mosque decoration, pulpits, and the flags of Muslim nations.³⁸ In Sufism the color is further read as radiating divine mercy; in Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology, all of nature reflects God's light, and green symbolizes the harmony between that divine light and worldly form,³⁹ a reading reinforced by Prof. Dr. Ridwan's observation that green in the UIN Saizu emblem carries a spiritual message about sustainability, balance, and purification of the soul within a Sufi framework.⁴⁰ Comparable associations recur outside the Islamic tradition: Taoist and Buddhist cosmology likewise reads green as the harmony of body and soul,⁴¹ consistent with the Sufi view of nature as a manifestation of God's attributes.⁴² Within the emblem, green thus carries the interlinked messages of *tawhid*, *tawāzun*, and *rahma* (compassion).

The Yellow Circle



Figure 4. The yellow circle bordering the UIN Saizu emblem, read as a symbol of the cycle of worldly life. *Source: Authors' own illustration (2021).*

The yellow circle symbolizes the limitations of worldly life, bounded by space and time: its closed form represents the cycle of human life, which inevitably has a beginning and an end, while yellow's association with sunlight

³⁸ Anwaar Mohyuddin and Nasra Khan, "Symbolic Representation of Color Green among Muslims," *IAHRW International Journal of Social Sciences Review*, no. 3 (2015): 374–78.

³⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 52.

⁴⁰ Ridwan, Rector of UIN Saizu (2023–2027), personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, March 2021.

⁴¹ Jiya Gupta, "The Heuristic Nature of Hues," *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2021): 1613–48, <https://doi.org/10.25215/0902.163>.

⁴² Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 49.

also evokes transience, the idea that worldly brilliance shines only briefly before fading.⁴³ In Islamic and Sufi thought, this is read as a reminder of death as certainty: worldly life is a transitory field of good deeds (*dār al-fanā*) oriented toward eternal life (*dār al-baqā*).⁴⁴ The circle itself is a recurring Sufi symbol for the soul's journey toward the divine center, a journey that, according to Kuehn's account of contemporary Sufi aesthetics, cannot be completed except through *fanā'* (self-annihilation) and union with absolute truth.⁴⁵ Abdul Wachid B.S. describes the circle in similar terms, as a visual representation of the inevitable cycle of life: birth, growth, aging, and death,⁴⁶ a reading consistent with the linear-cyclical conception of time in Islamic philosophy, in which life moves forward while remaining within the compass of divine decree.⁴⁷

Yellow itself carries a dual valence in Islamic color symbolism, signaling light and vitality but also destruction and transience,⁴⁸ and in Qur'anic illumination is used to mark the boundary between the sacred and the ephemeral.⁴⁹ Prof. Dr. Ridwan describes yellow as "like the light of dusk: beautiful, but soon gone, a reminder that all beauty in this world is fleeting."⁵⁰ Consistent with the ascetic principle that this world is not an end in itself; as Burckhardt notes, true humanity turns inward, toward the center of its own spirituality, a center that can equally be depicted as a circle.⁵¹ The circle's perfect form also recalls the geometric idiom used by the Indonesian Muslim artist Sadali

⁴³ K.H.D. Zawawi Imron, personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, January 2021.

⁴⁴ Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, 7.

⁴⁵ Sara Kuehn, "Contemporary Art and Sufi Aesthetics in European Contexts," *Religions* 14, no. 2 (2023): 196, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020196>.

⁴⁶ Abdul Wachid B.S., personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, March 2021.

⁴⁷ Virginia Hooker, "Seeing with 'The Eyes of the Heart': Dhikr and Fikr as Sources of Insight in Indonesian Islamic Art," in *Nazar: Vision, Belief, and Perception in Islamic Cultures* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 88.

⁴⁸ Mahsa Esmacili Namiri and Rafooneh Mokhtarshahi Sani, "Symbolic Meaning of Colours in Safavid and Ottoman Mosques," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2017): 91–123, <https://doi.org/10.1353/isl.2017.0003>.

⁴⁹ Tajammul Hussain, *Roads to Paradise: The Art of Illumination of the Qur'an* (London: The Matheson Trust, 2016), 8.

⁵⁰ Ridwan, Rector of UIN Saizu (2023–2027), personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, March 2021.

⁵¹ Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, 61.

in his design of the Islamic Students' Association (HMI) emblem, which conveys transcendence and monotheism.⁵²

Symmetrical White Five-Feathered Wings

Balanced Scales Diagram
Harmony Between Islamic Spirituality and National Ideals

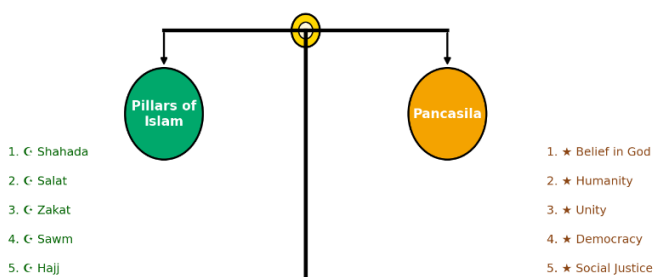


Figure 5. The paired five-feathered wings of the UIN Saizu emblem, symbolizing the harmony of religious and national values. *Source: Authors' own illustration (2021).*

The two wings, each bearing five feathers, express the harmony of religious and national values in Indonesian Muslim life. The five feathers of the right wing represent the five pillars of Islam: the *shahāda* (the Islamic declaration of faith), *ṣalāt* (prayer), *zakāt* (giving to charity), *ṣaum* (fasting), and *hajj* (pilgrimage), the structured foundations of a Muslim's devotional life, in which each act of worship is a concrete expression of obedience to God.⁵³ The five feathers of the left wing represent the five principles of Pancasila, divinity, humanity, unity, democracy, and social justice, understood not merely as constitutional principles but as values that must be lived in daily social conduct; read this way, Sufi values such as *tawassuṭ* (moderation), *tawāzun* (balance), and *i'tidāl* (justice) align closely with Pancasila's own principles.⁵⁴

The two wings meet in a single axis of orientation, God (*lillāh*), affirming that worship and national life alike must be directed toward the same source of value, so that no dichotomy separates religion and state when both are grounded in sincerity.⁵⁵ The wing's individual feathers, working together to support flight

⁵² Hooker, "Seeing with 'The Eyes of the Heart,'" 92.

⁵³ K.H.D. Zawawi Imron, personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, January 2021.

⁵⁴ Maryati, Atamimi, and Islamy, "The Paradigm of Social Sufism."

⁵⁵ Maryati, Atamimi, and Islamy.

and balance, echo the traditional Islamic association of wings with the angelic maintenance of cosmic order⁵⁶ and symbolize the gentleness and flexible strength expected of a believer who is simultaneously devout and a loyal citizen,⁵⁷ ultimately expressing *tawāzun*, the balance across the physical and spiritual, individual and social dimensions of life, in which the two wings must remain evenly weighted, like a fair scale.⁵⁸

The Name "UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri"

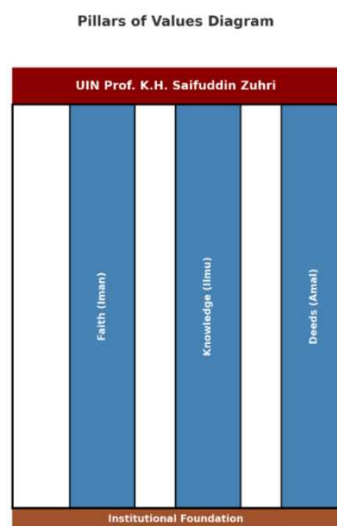


Figure 6. The institutional name element ("UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto") within the emblem. *Source: Authors' own illustration* (2021).

The institutional name is not merely an identity marker but an affirmation of the university's commitment to Islamic-based knowledge in the broadest sense, encompassing general sciences and technology alongside religious learning, integrated within a framework of Islamic spiritual and ethical values. This reflects the integrative paradigm advanced by Muslim thinkers such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, who argued for the

⁵⁶ Muhammad Zain, Mukhammad Ilyasin, and Mustakim, eds., "Integration of Religious and Civic Values in Islamic Education," in *Proceedings of AICIS XIV* (Yogyakarta: Digilib UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2014), 210.

⁵⁷ Abdul Wachid B.S., personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, February 2021.

⁵⁸ Natasha Ryan, "Tauhid and Tasawwuf: Indonesian Sufism in Search of Unity" (Edith Cowan University, 2003), 22.

Islamization of knowledge, challenging the dichotomy between religious and worldly learning.⁵⁹

Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri, after whom the university is named, was a Banyumas-born cleric, cultural figure, writer, academic, and former Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; in his autobiography, *Guruku Orang-Orang dari Pesantren*, he emphasized education as a means of liberation and encouraged Muslims to think openly and critically within an Islamic framework.⁶⁰ Naming the university after him is thus both a gesture of historical respect and an ideological reminder that the ideal Muslim integrates faith, knowledge, and good deeds, in keeping with the integrative-interconnective approach influential in Indonesian Islamic higher education. In Japanese, the word "*saizu*" (size) can also be read as "the right measure," which the university has adopted as a reminder of proportion; read this way, the two symmetrical wings resemble a scale depicting the balance between complementary poles of life.⁶¹

The Prostrating Figure (*Sujūd*)

Another element of the emblem is a human figure in the posture of *sujud* (prostration), a powerful embodiment of the centrality of worship in Islamic life. Prostration represents the ultimate form of submission before God, encapsulating '*ubūdiyyah* (servitude) and *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence). Visually, the figure bows over what symbolically resembles a book, suggesting that all knowledge must lead to submission before the Divine, consistent with the Qur'anic emphasis that knowledge without devotion is incomplete;⁶² In Sufi thought, *sujud* is more than a physical act, representing the annihilation of the ego (*fānā*) and the realization of absolute dependence on God.⁶³

Semiotically, the figure functions as both an icon, resembling a human in prayer, and a symbol, since within Islamic culture *sujūd* universally signifies

⁵⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1980), 15; Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982), 14.

⁶⁰ Saifuddin Zuhri, *Guruku Orang-Orang Dari Pesantren* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1985), 210.

⁶¹ Ridwan, personal interview by the author, Purwokerto, Indonesia, March 2021.

⁶² Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, 7.

⁶³ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, 240.

devotion and surrender.⁶⁴ Its placement signals that the institution is founded on worship as the orientation of all intellectual and social endeavors, so that education cultivates humility and a consciousness of God's presence alongside worldly advancement.⁶⁵

The Three Paired Feather Roots

The wings are anchored at their bases by three pairs of feather roots, which are not merely decorative but carry symbolic depth. On the right wing, the three roots signify *Islam*, *Iman*, and *Ihsan*, the triadic foundations of Islamic spirituality drawn from the Hadith of Jibril;⁶⁶ On the left wing, they represent *‘Ilm* (knowledge), *‘Amal* (practice), and *Akhlāq* (ethics), reflecting UIN Saizu's mission to integrate the intellectual, practical, and moral dimensions of human development. Philosophically, the roots emphasize that the balance symbolized by the wings cannot be achieved without firm grounding: as a tree cannot flourish without deep roots, education and spirituality cannot grow without a foundation in faith, knowledge, and ethics.⁶⁷

Semiotically, the feather roots function as an index of stability and origin, indicating that the wings derive their strength from deeper principles, and as symbols of spiritual rootedness, echoing the idea that Islamic higher education must remain anchored in divine and moral foundations even as it aspires toward global relevance,⁶⁸ resonating with the wider Javanese and Nusantara pattern of representing harmony through triadic structures.

The Book (Knowledge)

The book symbolizes knowledge as the primary foundation of life. In Islamic tradition, the book is not only an intellectual medium but a symbol of revelation, since the Qur'an itself is called *al-Kitab*; the book in the emblem accordingly carries institutional as well as spiritual significance, indicating that knowledge is not neutral but must be pursued within the framework of *Tawhid*,

⁶⁴ Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1984), 30.

⁶⁵ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 19.

⁶⁶ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 52..

⁶⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 130.

⁶⁸ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 45.

the oneness of God as the source of all truth and wisdom.⁶⁹ Within an Islamic epistemological framework, knowledge must lead a person toward *ma'rifatullāh*, a profound awareness of God, rather than merely expanding worldly horizons,⁷⁰ and knowledge pursued without moral and spiritual awareness risks becoming an exploitative tool devoid of divine value, which is why classical and contemporary Muslim thinkers alike, from al-Ghazali to al-Attas, link the learning process to *tazkiya al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and *adab*.⁷¹

Knowledge Beacon Diagram

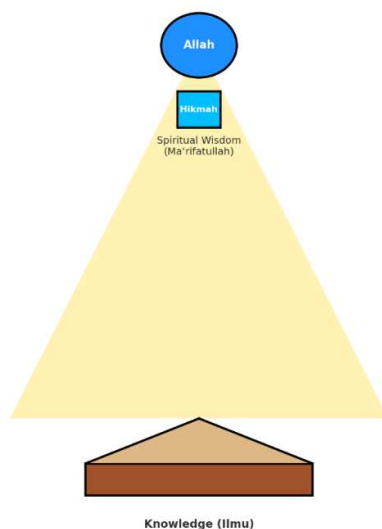


Figure 7. Conceptual diagram of knowledge oriented toward God, showing the pathway from Allah through *ḥikma* (wisdom) and *ma'rifatullāh* (gnosis) to *ilm* (knowledge), illustrating the Book element of the UIN Saizu emblem. *Source: Authors' own illustration* (2021).

The word "Allah" accompanying the blue gem signals that the orientation of knowledge must be centered on *muraqaba*, awareness of God's supervision, the highest form of spiritual metacognition.⁷² The gem itself symbolizes the clarity and wisdom that emerge from knowledge oriented toward God, blue traditionally signifying depth of soul, consonant with knowledge as a light (*nūr*) that guides

⁶⁹ Refinal et al., "Epistemology of Knowledge: Bridging Western and Islamic Thought," *Solo International Collaboration and Publication of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 01 (2024): 95–110, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sicopus.v3i01.250>.

⁷⁰ Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, *Intellectual and Spiritual Debates in Islam: A Comprehensive Guide to Islamic Discourse's Intellectual Origins* (Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 2023), 30.

⁷¹ Joud Shafiq, "An Islamic Perspective on the Epistemological Significance Of a Scientifically Induced Spiritual Experience" (Hamad Bin Khalifa University, 2017), 30.

⁷² Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 133.

both logic and conscience.⁷³ Read together, the book and gem indicate that Islamic universities are sites of spiritual transformation, where reading (*iqra'*), thinking, and acting are held within a framework of monotheism.⁷⁴

The Blue Gem (*Ma'rifatullah*)

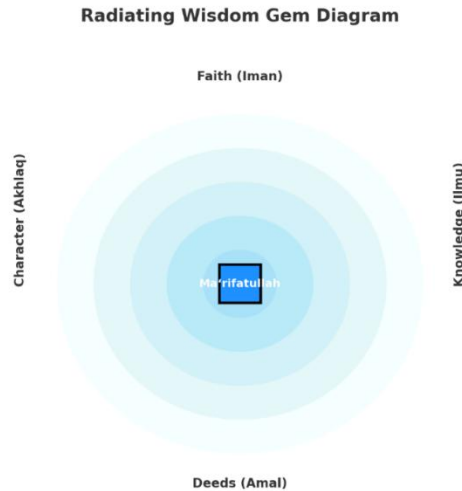


Figure 8. Conceptual diagram of *ma'rifatullah* radiating outward into *īmān* (faith), *akhlaq* (character), *‘ilm* (knowledge), and *‘amal* (deeds), illustrating the Blue Gem element of the UIN Saizu emblem. *Source: Authors' own illustration* (2021).

The blue gem represents wisdom and *ma'rifatullah*, the highest knowledge of God attained through heart purification and sustained intellectual cultivation. In the Sufi tradition, *ma'rifa* is not the product of rational thought alone but the fruit of knowledge (*‘ilm*), knowledge gained through direct experience (*dhawq*), and contemplation (*tafakkur*), purified by monotheism; spiritually, blue signifies depth, tranquility, and clarity of heart, an inner state understood as a reflection of divine light (*nūr ilāhī*).⁷⁵ The gem thus symbolizes a consciousness that has moved from *sharī'a* to essence, from knowledge to lived experience: al-Ghazali, in the *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, locates wisdom in a heart purified through *tazkiya al-*

⁷³ Refinal et al., "Epistemology of Knowledge," 104.

⁷⁴ Akhlaq, *Intellectual and Spiritual Debates in Islam*, 34; Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 19.

⁷⁵ Habib Habib and Moh Habib, "Semiotic-Sufistic Interpretation of Imam Al-Ghazali: Case Study of 'Verses of Light' in the Holy Qur'an," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 7, no. 2 (2023): 41–66, <https://doi.org/10.22515/islimus.v7i2.7529>.

nafs and *mujāhada*, a process that leads toward *ma'rifatullāh*, awareness of God's presence in every aspect of life.⁷⁶

Nasr, in *Knowledge and the Sacred*, argues that the highest form of knowledge in Islam is neither purely rational nor empirical but sacred knowledge that draws the human being toward the true source of its own essence;⁷⁷ the blue gem, read this way, symbolizes knowledge as light (*nūr*), part of a Sufi epistemology grounded in *kashf* (unveiling) and *ilhām* (divine inspiration). The symbol also resonates with metacognitive awareness in Islamic education: the capacity not only to think but to be aware of one's own thinking within the horizon of worship (*lillāh*). True knowledge must shape mind, soul, and character together, not competence alone.⁷⁸

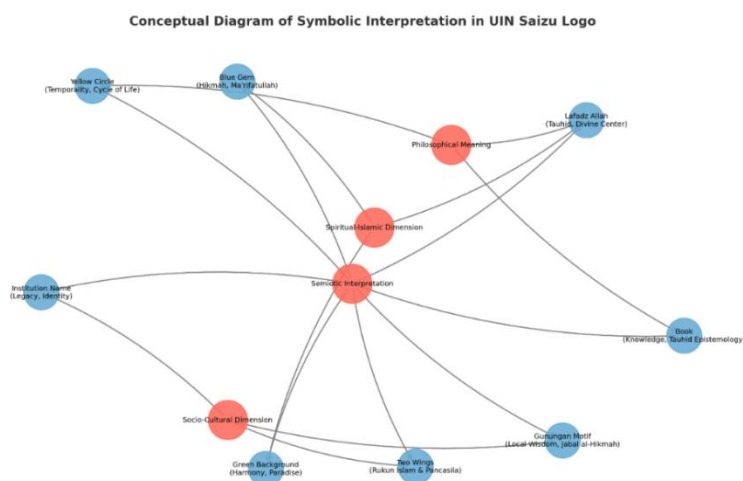


Figure 9. Conceptual overview diagram synthesizing the semiotic interpretation of all elements of the UIN Saizu emblem discussed in this section. *Source: Authors' own illustration (2021).*

⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din [Revival of the Religious Sciences]*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005), 13; Najla Sabira Faujiah and Ranti Saputri, "Sufism and the Qur'an: A Spiritual Interpretation," *International Journal of Islamic Studies and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2025): 22–36, <https://jurnal.asrypersadaquality.com/index.php/ijiss/article/view/657>.

⁷⁷ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 133.

⁷⁸ Faujiah and Saputri, "Sufism and the Qur'an"; Harmaini Harmaini et al., "The Spiral Andromeda Paradigm: An Interpretation on Science Integration of UIN Suska Riau," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 32, no. 1 (2024): 110–29, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v32i1.28627>.

Conclusion

This study shows that the emblem of UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto encapsulates a multilayered integration of Islamic spirituality, local cultural wisdom, and national ideology, in which each visual element functions simultaneously as an institutional identifier and a vehicle for Sufi values such as *Tawhid*, *tazkiya al-nafs*, and *ma'rifatullāh*. Interpreted through Peircean semiotics and contemporary visual-grammar theory, the emblem emerges as a form of visual dhikr that bridges religious devotion, civic responsibility, and socio-cultural harmony. Theoretically, the study extends Sufi scholarship beyond its customary objects — texts, rituals, and architecture — into the semiotics of institutional branding, showing that Sufi cosmological concepts such as the *billāh-lillāh-fillāh* triad, *tawāzun*, and *ma'rifatullāh* operate as a living grammar within a contemporary visual sign, and offering a replicable analytical model, combining Peircean semiotics with Sufi hermeneutics, that future studies of Sufism and material or visual culture can apply to other institutions and artifacts. In practice, the findings suggest that institutional branding in Islamic higher education can serve not only as a tool for identity construction but also as a medium for transmitting sacred values and fostering community cohesion among university leaders, designers, and stakeholders.

As with any single-case qualitative study, these findings are context-bound and grounded in the perspectives of the four informants central to the emblem's design and endorsement, rather than a claim to represent the wider academic community. Subsequent research is therefore encouraged to adopt a comparative perspective across Islamic institutions and to complement this interpretive account with empirical studies of audience perception among students, alumni, and the wider Muslim community, both to test the framework offered here and to inform design strategies that are faithful to cultural authenticity and spiritual resonance.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, without any financial, personal, or institutional relationship that could inappropriately influence its outcomes or interpretation.

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Author Contributions

S.: conceptualization, methodology, investigation (interviews), and writing original draft; A.K.: theoretical framework and formal analysis, and writing – review & editing; I.N.: data curation and validation; Z.M.M.: visualization, supervision, and project administration. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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