

Language in Tourism: Linguistic Landscape Analysis of Candi Jiwa Museum Collections

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Abstract

Heritage studies often struggle to move beyond descriptive cataloguing toward interpretive frameworks that reveal how artifacts encode cultural meaning. This study applies semantic field theory—originally developed for linguistics—to the collections of the Candi Jiwa Museum in West Java, Indonesia. Through qualitative analysis of artifacts and contextual materials, nine semantic domains were identified, including funerary ritual, architectural symbolism, environmental adaptation, domestic–sacred convergence, and symbolic economy. These findings demonstrate that artifacts function not as inert remnants but as interconnected semiotic systems that sustain continuity, cosmology, and identity values. The study advances two key contributions. Theoretically, it extends semantic field analysis into material culture, showing how objects can be decoded as networks of meaning without reducing their contextual richness. Practically, it repositions museums as pedagogical mediators that engage youth through interpretive dialogue rather than passive display. The results challenge conventional heritage discourse that privileges the authenticity of objects, arguing instead for preservation of semiotic systems as the true foundation of cultural sustainability.

Keywords: semantic field theory, material culture, museum pedagogy, cultural heritage interpretation, youth engagement

INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage should function as a living resource that continuously shapes identity, values, and collective memory. Yet, heritage often survives as fragmented relics with diminishing relevance to contemporary life (Nam & Thanh, 2024; S. Wang & Boonsrianun, 2023). This erosion is most visible among younger generations, whose cultural attachments weaken due to globalization and digital consumption. Without deliberate intergenerational transmission, heritage risks becoming a decorative residue rather than a dynamic arena of cultural negotiation.

Recent scholarship demonstrates that targeted interventions can counter this trend. Youth engagement has been revitalized through workshops, cultural festivals, and digital activism that reconnect individuals with their traditions (Ågren & Aarsand, 2024; Cayas et al., 2024). Innovative practices such as digital storytelling, immersive exhibits, and heritage-based games extend participation by translating cultural codes into formats relatable to contemporary youth (García et al., 2023, 2024; Mo et al., 2024). At the institutional level, museums have been repositioned as pedagogical spaces capable of democratizing access and stimulating critical reflection (González-Herrera et al., 2023; Meyer & Clark-Gareca, 2023). Digital platforms and participatory methods demonstrate how artifacts can generate identity work when embedded in interactive frameworks (Huang, 2023; Wunsch-Nagy, 2024).

However, these innovations largely emphasize access and engagement rather than interpretation. While technology can attract audiences, it does not inherently unlock artifacts' symbolic and cultural meanings. The absence of systematic interpretive methodologies remains a critical gap in heritage education. Existing approaches rarely explain how objects operate as meaning-bearing signs within cultural systems, leaving their deeper semiotic value underexplored.

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This study addresses that gap by applying semantic field analysis to the collections of the Candi Jiwa Museum. Rather than treating artefacts as static remains, this framework positions them as interconnected symbolic domains that can be pedagogically mobilized. The theoretical contribution demonstrates how semantic mapping extends linguistic analysis into heritage interpretation, offering a structured method for transforming archaeological objects into resources for cultural literacy and identity formation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Lens: Semantic Field Theory

Semantic field theory provides a systematic lens for understanding how meanings are constructed and organized into networks. Applied to heritage studies, this perspective enables artifacts to be interpreted not solely as physical remnants but as carriers of symbolic, utilitarian, and cultural values. Researchers can uncover how material culture functions as a semiotic system that encodes collective memory and identity by mapping objects into semantic domains. In museums, artifacts thus extend beyond mere display; they become cultural narratives and pedagogical tools that stimulate critical dialogue about heritage and identity. Applying semantic field theory in this context allows for exploring complex interrelationships among objects, their settings, and the meanings ascribed by audiences (González-Herrera et al., 2023). By analyzing how objects are semantically categorized within cultural narratives, museums can enhance visitor comprehension while creating opportunities for engagement that foster cultural literacy (J. Chen, 2024).

The relevance of semantic field theory is further reinforced by its compatibility with contemporary exhibit design. Digital platforms and interactive technologies allow enriched semantic exploration of artifacts, transforming static displays into dynamic experiences (Huang, 2023; Sun, 2023). Research shows that multimedia applications—from augmented reality to interactive screens—enhance cultural interpretation and promote deeper audience involvement (J. Wang & Dolah, 2024; Yang & Guo, 2023). Such practices underscore the core premise of semantic analysis: that meaning is contingent on context and mediated through modes of presentation (İşlek, 2023). Finally, understanding artifacts through the semantic field lens also emphasizes the inclusive role of museums. By integrating participatory frameworks and plural narratives, museums can validate diverse cultural interpretations, broadening their educational scope (Wei, 2024). This inclusive practice positions museums as active agents in cultural transmission, where semantic frameworks decode meanings and foster pluralistic identity formation within communities (Ermatita et al., 2023).

Tension in Applying Linguistic Methods to Artifacts

A central challenge in heritage interpretation is the intrinsic difference between language and artifacts. Unlike linguistic units, artefacts do not possess inherent grammatical structures that dictate meaning; their significance emerges through contextual interpretation shaped by ritual, symbolism, and social interaction. This distinction generates a methodological tension: while semantic field theory promises systematic categorisation, its transfer to material culture risks oversimplifying complex symbolic contexts (Firmansyah et al., 2023). Scholars argue that semantic frameworks can provide valuable insights if adapted to the layered realities of artefacts. When carefully calibrated, semantic field analysis delineates how objects operate within broader domains encompassing tangible and intangible factors such as ritual practices and social functions (Flewitt et al., 2023; İşlek, 2023). Avoiding rigid classification requires a methodology that respects the plurality of meanings embedded in cultural objects while facilitating analytical clarity (Dabamona & Dabamona, 2023).

Acknowledging experiential dimensions further complicates this methodological landscape. Studies show that children and youth engage more deeply when museum encounters involve sensory and emotional interaction rather than passive observation (Flewitt et al., 2023; Ivanov, 2023). These findings highlight the necessity for interpretive frameworks that extend beyond visual or textual analysis to incorporate embodied experiences. As such, immersive and digital technologies are increasingly proposed to enrich semantic narratives and enhance educational outcomes (Noviana et al., 2024; Winto et al., 2023). Integrating these considerations into museum practice repositions artifacts from static displays to active participants in cultural narratives. Through iterative and participatory approaches, museums can bridge the gap between formal scholarly interpretation and lived visitor experience (Phan et al., 2024). This methodological adaptation not only resolves the tension between linguistic models and material culture but also strengthens the role of museums as dynamic spaces for cultural literacy and identity formation.

Heritage Engagement and the Youth Challenge

Youth disengagement from traditional culture has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges in heritage studies. When cultural practices fail to resonate with contemporary lifestyles, they risk

marginalisation and the erosion of intergenerational continuity. Engaging younger audiences is therefore not a peripheral task but a strategic imperative for sustaining heritage as a living and meaningful resource (Ågren & Aarsand, 2024; Nam & Thanh, 2024). Recent studies highlight a range of strategies to counter this trend. Educational initiatives, creative workshops, and digital storytelling provide effective entry points, enabling young people to reinterpret cultural practices within their contexts (W. Chen & Woramitmaitree, 2024; García et al., 2023). For example, programs integrating traditional arts into school-based learning frameworks have enhanced cultural engagement and educational outcomes (Ariffin et al., 2023).

The role of civil society organisations is also critical. Grassroots initiatives mobilise community resources and create immersive experiences that captivate young audiences, reinforcing their connection to heritage. Evidence from diverse contexts shows that hundreds of local organisations sustain cultural values through innovative, youth-centred projects (Dhamo & Canaj, 2024; Fibiona et al., 2024). Such collaborations underscore the importance of shared responsibility between communities and institutions in sustaining cultural continuity (Nam & Thanh, 2024). Technology further expands the possibilities of youth engagement. Digital storytelling, gamified learning, and interactive platforms offer dynamic pathways for reconnecting with heritage. These approaches rekindle cultural interest and cultivate a sense of ownership and agency among younger generations (García et al., 2024; Madhukullya et al., 2024; Steriopoulos et al., 2023). By framing heritage within familiar digital formats, such interventions align cultural practices with contemporary forms of expression and participation.

Finally, hands-on involvement in traditional crafts and performance arts creates opportunities for cultural preservation and youth empowerment. Craft-based workshops transmit skills and local wisdom while providing economic benefits that strengthen community ties (Ariffin et al., 2023; Rosyid & Rosyid, 2024). These initiatives generate a dual impact: sustaining heritage practices and embedding them in the lived experiences of young people. These findings emphasise that youth engagement is not achieved through preservation alone but through active participation, reinterpretation, and innovation. By linking heritage with educational, technological, and economic opportunities, stakeholders can transform cultural practices into living resources that continue to shape identity and community resilience.

Museums as Pedagogical Intermediaries

Museums hold a strategic position in heritage transmission. They are not only custodians of collections but also interpretive platforms that translate artefacts into narratives of identity, memory, and cultural literacy. Conventional practices, however, often emphasise cataloguing and preservation, resulting in displays that are static and detached from contemporary cultural debates. Without interpretive strategies, artefacts risk being perceived as inert relics rather than living resources for meaning-making. Emerging scholarship demonstrates how participatory and dialogic approaches can reposition museums as active learning spaces. By employing innovative educational models such as Visual Thinking Strategies, interactive workshops, and narrative-based exhibits, museums can stimulate critical engagement and foster cultural literacy among diverse audiences (González-Herrera et al., 2023; Meyer & Clark-Gareca, 2023). These approaches enable visitors to construct knowledge collaboratively rather than passively consume information, reinforcing museums' role as pedagogical spaces.

Technology further expands this potential. Digital platforms, immersive storytelling, and gamified learning environments transform exhibitions into interactive experiences that resonate with younger audiences (Huang, 2023; Sun, 2023; Wünsch-Nagy, 2024; Yang & Guo, 2023). For instance, Virtual and augmented reality applications situate artefacts within dynamic narratives that connect historical meaning with contemporary social relevance (Sun, 2023; J. Wang & Dolah, 2024). By integrating such technologies, museums extend accessibility, democratize interpretation, and ensure that cultural narratives remain dialogic and evolving. Importantly, museums also serve as inclusive institutions that validate multiple cultural perspectives. Through participatory practices and community co-curation, they can foster pluralistic narratives that speak to diverse visitor demographics (Ermatita et al., 2023; Wei, 2024). This inclusivity redefines museums not simply as stewards of the past but as active agents of cultural mediation, enabling heritage to be continuously renegotiated within contemporary contexts. These shifts highlight a crucial transformation: from museums as static repositories of antiquities to museums as dynamic classrooms that empower audiences to engage critically with cultural heritage. Such a paradigm positions museums as key actors in sustaining cultural literacy, fostering identity formation, and promoting heritage as a living, participatory resource.

METHODS

This study employed an exploratory qualitative design to examine the semantic domains embedded in the collections of the Candi Jiwa Museum. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables uncovering symbolic and cultural meanings that cannot be captured through purely quantitative descriptions. Semantic field analysis, grounded in (Chaer, 2015) framework, was applied as the primary analytical lens. This method was deemed appropriate because it systematically identifies networks of meaning, allowing artefacts to be interpreted as interconnected symbolic signs rather than isolated objects. Three complementary strategies were employed to ensure depth and triangulation: 1) Participatory observation — enabled researchers to capture contextual meanings of artefacts through direct engagement with museum environments; 2) Photographic documentation — provided visual records that supported semantic categorisation and interpretive analysis; and 3) Literature review — offered historical and theoretical grounding, situating artefacts within broader cultural and pedagogical discourses. The integration of these methods strengthened validity by combining experiential, visual, and textual sources.

Data were analysed using semantic field analysis to classify objects into domains reflecting denotative features and connotative cultural significance. The process involved identifying lexical and symbolic associations, grouping them into semantic categories, and interpreting their cultural implications. This approach ensured that analysis extended beyond surface description toward the uncovering of deeper symbolic and pedagogical values. Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation and peer debriefing. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the process to minimise researcher bias and critically assess interpretive decisions. These strategies assured that findings reflect both empirical observation and theoretical rigour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Funerary and Ritual Objects

Human skeletons, buli-buli, and celupak belong to the funerary semantic domain. At the denotative level, these artefacts record the burial practices of early Tarumanegara communities. Yet their connotative value extends beyond physical remains: they articulate a worldview where death is conceptualised not as rupture, but as transition to another realm. The human skeleton embodies ancestral continuity and memory, while the buli-buli and celupak signify ritual mediation—tools through which the living honour and maintain bonds with the departed. This domain reveals a cultural logic where mortality is reframed as relational continuity. Unlike modern biomedical perspectives that reduce skeletons to biological residue, these artefacts encode social meaning: the dead remain present within collective identity. Such semantic interpretation challenges reductionist readings of archaeological material and reframes them as semiotic resources for understanding cosmology and kinship.



Figure 1. Human Skeletons, Ritual Equipment, Several Types of Buli-Buli, and Celupak

Source: Research data, 2025

Regarding pedagogy, funerary artefacts offer powerful entry points for engaging contemporary youth. Many young audiences perceive ancient remains as either distant curiosities or morbid spectacles. Semantic mapping recontextualises them as evidence of enduring values—remembrance, respect, and intergenerational solidarity. Exhibits built on this interpretive frame can foster critical reflection on how different societies negotiate mortality, inviting students to connect ancestral practices with their cultural values. Furthermore, funerary domains invite cross-disciplinary discussion: anthropology frames burial as a social ritual; linguistics decodes symbolism through semantic categories; and museum pedagogy employs these interpretations to activate

dialogue. By integrating these perspectives, funerary artefacts transform from inert objects into living narratives about how cultures structure memory and identity.

Table 1. Semantic Domain: Funerary and Ritual Objects

Artifact	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
Skeleton remains	The human body in a burial	Ancestral continuity, lineage, collective memory	Teaching values of remembrance and cultural identity
Buli-buli vessel	Liquid container	Offering to spirits, mediation with the afterlife	Exploring ritual symbolism and intergenerational spirituality
Celupak	Ritual container	Boundary between worlds, sacred mediation	Discussing cosmology and community ritual practices

Source: Research data, 2025

This semantic domain highlights the inseparability of materiality and symbolism. Skeletons, buli-buli, and celupak cannot be reduced to archaeological specimens; meaning-bearing signs embody worldviews. Their inclusion in museum narratives redefines funerary practices not as exotic rituals of the past but as lessons on how societies construct continuity and belonging. When reinterpreted through semantic field analysis, funerary artefacts serve as dialogic bridges between past and present, objects and ideas, and museums and their audiences.

Preservation and Continuity

The restoration bricks recovered from the Candi Jiwa site illustrate a semantic domain of preservation and continuity. At a denotative level, these bricks are simple construction materials used to repair or replace deteriorated structures. Yet semantically, they encode far deeper meanings: they symbolise resilience, renewal, and the community's determination to maintain sacred architecture across generations. Restoration bricks carry a dual signification, unlike original bricks that embody the authenticity of ancient construction. On one hand, they represent absence—the acknowledgement that parts of the original structure have been lost. On the other hand, they embody presence, signalling a conscious cultural act to restore, sustain, and transmit sacred spaces to future generations. This duality situates preservation as not merely technical conservation but a cultural continuity ritual.



Figure 2. Substitute Bricks Used in Restoration

Source: Research data, 2025

Theoretically, the restoration brick exemplifies how semantic field analysis uncovers layers of meaning within ordinary materials. What might appear as mundane "building blocks" become signs that link memory, identity, and community resilience. The act of replacement transforms material absence into symbolic presence, demonstrating how cultures negotiate permanence through acts of repair. Pedagogically, this domain offers critical lessons for heritage education. Youth often associate heritage with "the original" and may dismiss restored elements as less authentic. By foregrounding the semantic meaning of Restoration—renewal, resilience, intergenerational responsibility—museums can challenge this assumption. Exhibits can use restoration bricks to provoke discussions about sustainability, cultural stewardship, and preservation ethics. Such narratives align with contemporary educational agendas emphasizing heritage literacy and environmental consciousness.

Table 2. Semantic Domain: Preservation and Continuity

Artifact	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
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Restoration brick	Material for rebuilding	Cultural resilience, renewal, continuity	Teaching sustainability, heritage stewardship, and memory work
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Source: Research data, 2025

The restoration brick is a paradoxical object—simultaneously "modern" and "ancient." It bridges the past and present by embodying a community's refusal to let heritage disintegrate. In semantic terms, it is a sign of resilience, inscribing the principle that heritage is not static but actively sustained. By framing restoration bricks as symbols rather than mere materials, museums can reorient visitor perceptions: from passive observation of ruins to active reflection on cultural responsibility.

Architectural Framework and Ornamentation

The architectural remains of Candi Jiwa—comprising andesite stones, patterned bricks, stair fragments, and decorative motifs—form a semantic domain that fuses structural function with cosmological symbolism. At the denotative level, these artifacts provide evidence of the engineering practices and material choices of early Tarumanegara builders. Yet, semantically, they embody a worldview in which architecture was not a neutral structure but a coded expression of metaphysical order. The patterned bricks reveal more than just the construction technique; their motifs encode abstract concepts. Circular designs symbolize unity and cyclical continuity, while key-like patterns suggest thresholds between sacred and profane spaces. Stair fragments, emphasizing elevation, embody stratification—physically enabling access to higher planes while semantically signaling hierarchical cosmologies. Andesite blocks, by contrast, symbolize permanence and sacred stability, grounding the temple as a cosmic axis.



Figure 3. Andesite Stones, Floor Layers, and Footprint-Imprinted Bricks from Candi Jiwa
Source: Research data, 2025



Figure 4. Round Flat-Motif Bricks (List) and Key-Motif Bricks
Source: Research data, 2025



Figure 5. List-Motif Bricks, Reinforcing Plaster and Temple Ornaments, and Staircase Components
Source: Research data, 2025



Figure 6. Replicas of a Human Head, Sheep Head Statue, Lion Head Statue, and Bird Head Statue
Source: Research data, 2025

This semantic field highlights architecture as a language of power and belief. Structures were physical enclosures and pedagogical spaces where values of harmony, protection, and hierarchy were inscribed into form. Unlike modern architecture, which often prioritizes utility, these remains demonstrate how premodern builders encoded cosmology directly into material form, collapsing the distinction between the structural and the symbolic. Pedagogically, this domain provides opportunities for reinterpreting heritage architecture for contemporary youth. Many students perceive bricks and stones as inert fragments, detached from meaning. By mapping their semantic fields, museums can reframe these materials as cultural texts communicating identity and cosmology. Exhibits can encourage visitors to decode architectural motifs, transforming passive viewing

into active interpretation. In doing so, the museum becomes not only a site of conservation but a classroom for critical engagement with symbolic systems of the past.

Table 3. Semantic Domain: Architectural Framework and Ornamentation

Artifact	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
Andesite stone block	Structural foundation	Permanence, sacred stability	Teaching resilience and sacred symbolism in architecture
Patterned brick	Decorative component	Unity, protection, cosmological order	Inviting visitors to decode symbolic codes in design
Stair fragment	Access structure	Hierarchy, elevation, cosmological stratification	Teaching spatial hierarchy and ritual progression
Circular motif	Ornament	Cyclical continuity, unity	Discussing cosmological symbolism of cycles
Key-shaped motif	Ornament	Thresholds, liminality	Exploring sacred vs profane boundaries

Source: Research data, 2025

This domain demonstrates how material architecture was simultaneously a ritual and symbolic act. By walking up temple stairs, devotees moved physically upward and enacted a spiritual journey. By passing patterned bricks, they were encountering decoration and affirming cosmological codes. Semantic field analysis thus reframes architecture as a text—a medium of meaning-making. For museums, this insight challenges curators to move beyond displaying ruins as "remnants" instead presenting them as semiotic systems that narrate identity, order, and sacred cosmology.

Environmental and Material Contexts

Plant fossils, stratified soil layers, and iron crusts recovered at the Candi Jiwa site form a semantic domain that situates human activity within ecological processes. At the denotative level, these remains record the natural environment in which the Tarumanegara community lived. Yet semantically, they reveal how humans engaged with nature not as a passive background but as an active partner in cultural and ritual life. Plant fossils symbolize continuity between human settlement and local ecology. They suggest dietary practices, resource management, and ritual associations with vegetation. Stratified soil layers represent more than geological deposits: they mark temporal depth, settlement continuity, and environmental adaptation cycles. Iron crusts indicate technological experimentation, linking natural resources to craftsmanship and early metallurgical practices.



Figure 7. Plant Fossils, Several Soil Layer Samples from the Batujaya Site, and Iron Crust Samples from Batujaya

Source: Research data, 2025

This semantic domain underscores the principle that environment was never separate from culture—a medium through which identity, ritual, and technology were articulated. For instance, soil as a material was often ritualized, carrying fertility, origin, and grounding connotations. Integrating iron crusts into tool production reflects a community inscribed symbolic value into technological innovation, treating metals as resources and agents of cultural meaning. Pedagogically, this domain offers rich opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. Museums can use environmental artefacts to bridge heritage and sustainability, showing that past societies developed adaptive strategies to balance ecological resources with cultural

practices. For younger audiences, who often see environmental issues as contemporary challenges, these artefacts can illustrate that sustainability has deep historical precedents. This reframing situates ecological awareness as not just modern activism but as part of a longstanding cultural heritage.

Table 4. Semantic Domain: Environmental and Material Contexts

Artifact	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
Plant fossil	Botanical remain	Link between human culture and local ecology	Teaching eco-cultural adaptation and resource use
Soil layer	Stratigraphic record	Temporal continuity, settlement cycles	Understanding heritage within environmental processes
Iron crust	Metallurgical input	Innovation, transformation of nature	Teaching symbolic-technological adaptation

Source: Research data, 2025

This domain challenges the dichotomy between "nature" and "culture." The Tarumanegara community embedded ecological materials within their symbolic system: soil as memory, plants as sustenance and ritual, and iron as technology and identity. Semantic field analysis reveals that environmental artefacts are not ancillary data but key semiotic elements of heritage. For museums, curating these materials provides a chance to expand heritage education beyond human artefacts to human–environment relations. This resonates with contemporary climate change and sustainability debates, positioning ancient practices as dialogic partners for modern ecological consciousness.

Everyday Vessels and Ritual Containers

Ceramic bowls, pitchers, and other household vessels at the Candi Jiwa site illustrate a semantic domain where daily life and ritual practice converge. Denotatively, these artefacts were tools for storing, pouring, and serving food or liquids. Yet semantically, they represent cultural values of hospitality, reciprocity, and ceremonial offering. Their hybrid use—simultaneously domestic and sacred—shows how no clear boundary existed between the ordinary and the spiritual in Tarumanegara society. The bowl signifies more than sustenance: it encodes the principle of communal sharing, reinforcing solidarity and social bonds. The long-necked pitcher, commonly associated with ritual libations, conveys ideas of transition and mediation—liquids flowing between vessels mirroring communication between human and divine realms. Even the smallest ceramic fragments bear traces of symbolic layering, where use-wear and context (domestic hearths vs. ritual spaces) shift meaning from mundane function to sacred participation.



Figure 8. Batujaya Pottery, Long-Necked Pitchers, Pitcher Bodies, Pitcher Teapots, as well as Several Types of Bowls and Footed Bowls

Source: Research data, 2025

This semantic domain highlights the fluidity of categories, unlike modern distinctions between "profane" and "sacred." Tarumanegara practices embedded spirituality within everyday objects. This blurring of domains complicates any attempt to classify artefacts strictly by function, reinforcing the value of semantic field analysis for revealing layered meanings. Pedagogically, everyday vessels offer accessible points of engagement for young audiences. Bowls and pitchers are familiar forms, yet their reinterpretation as carriers of ritual significance sparks curiosity and critical thinking. Exhibits can encourage visitors to compare their daily objects with ancient vessels, reflecting on how material culture always carries symbolic weight. Such an approach

transforms what may appear as "ordinary pottery" into dialogic artefacts that connect past practices to present experiences of hospitality, sharing, and spirituality.

Table 5. Semantic Domain: Everyday Vessels and Ritual Containers

Artifact	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
Ceramic bowl	Eating vessel	Hospitality, communal sharing	Teaching the cultural value of reciprocity and social bonding
Long-necked pitcher	Pouring container	Ritual offering, transition, mediation	Exploring symbolism of flow and sacred communication
Ceramic fragments	Vessel remains	Hybrid meaning: domestic ↔ ritual	Encouraging reflection on blurred boundaries in material use

Source: Research data, 2025

This domain demonstrates how seemingly mundane objects embody cultural logics that transcend utility. Pottery was not only for sustenance but also for sustaining cosmology. Semantic field analysis reframes these vessels as semiotic bridges between daily subsistence and ritualized identity. For museums, presenting these artefacts as "double-coded" objects challenges visitors to think critically: what ordinary objects carry hidden symbolic weight in their lives? This interpretive framing deepens heritage literacy and situates youth as active participants in decoding meaning.

Storage and Symbolic Closure

Containers, bottles, and cepuk lids discovered at the Candi Jiwa site form a semantic domain centered on storage and closure. On the denotative level, these objects served to hold food, liquids, or other materials. Yet semantically, they encode values of protection, boundary-making, and ritual safeguarding. Storage here is practical and symbolic: the act of enclosing matter mirrors the act of enclosing meaning, identity, and sacred presence. Bottles, for instance, represent more than utilitarian receptacles. Their presence in ritual contexts indicates that storage was infused with sacred functions—preserving substances and their associated ritual power. Cepuk lids, meanwhile, symbolize closure and containment, marking transitions between states of accessibility and inaccessibility. In this sense, closure becomes a cultural metaphor for boundary-making, distinguishing sacred from profane, preserved from perishable, and protected from vulnerable.



Figure 8. Bottle Fragments, Containers, and Cepuk Lids

Source: Research data, 2025

This semantic field highlights how everyday practices such as storing and sealing were transformed into symbolic acts. Unlike modern storage that is often treated as neutral and practical, these artifacts suggest that ancient societies sacralized containment, turning vessels and lids into metaphors of protection, secrecy, and continuity. Pedagogically, this domain can be a powerful entry point for museum education. Young audiences may initially perceive broken bottles or container fragments as unremarkable waste. Through semantic interpretation, however, they can be reintroduced as signs of how societies ritualized daily life. Exhibits could, for instance, invite visitors to consider the symbolic value of modern practices like locking, sealing, or safekeeping—connecting their experiences with ancient cultural logics of protection and closure.

Table 6. Semantic Domain: Storage and Symbolic Closure

Artifact	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
Bottle fragment	Storage vessel	Protection of sacred or valuable materials	Teaching symbolic function of storage and preservation
Container base	Holding object	Continuity of ritual substances	Showing how utility and ritual purposes intersect
Cepuk lid	Closure device	Boundary-making, sacred sealing	Exploring cultural meanings of closure and protection

Source: Research data, 2025

This domain demonstrates how even the smallest artifacts—fragments of bottles, containers, or lids—carry symbolic weight. Their semantic role transcends physical function, reflecting broader cultural principles of safeguarding identity, marking boundaries, and mediating transitions. For heritage interpretation, these artifacts challenge the assumption that only monumental objects carry meaning. Instead, they illustrate that in Candi Jiwa culture, meaning permeated even the smallest practices of sealing and storing. For museums, highlighting these dimensions transforms storage objects from overlooked fragments into dialogic tools for engaging visitors in reflection about security, identity, and continuity across time.

Repetition and Permanence

Repeated architectural motifs and structural components at Candi Jiwa—such as patterned bricks and stair fragments—constitute a semantic domain of repetition and permanence. At the denotative level, these artifacts indicate construction techniques that relied on modularity and uniformity. Yet semantically, their recurrence communicates cultural values of resilience, stability, and continuity across generations. Repetition in architecture was not arbitrary but intentional. The patterned bricks embody recurring symbols reinforcing cosmological order, like a visual mantra reaffirming cultural identity through iteration. Stair fragments, replicated across structures, symbolize more than physical access; their repetition signifies ritualized ascension, an embodied reenactment of hierarchical and cosmological principles. Through these patterns, permanence is achieved in material durability and symbolic reiteration.



Figure 9. List-Motif Bricks and Staircase Components

Source: Research data, 2025

This semantic field highlights an important tension: permanence is never absolute but constructed through repetition. While materials may erode, symbolic codes endure because they are reiterated across forms, generations, and practices. This demonstrates how ancient builders sought to overcome the fragility of matter by embedding meaning in patterned recurrence. Pedagogically, the domain of repetition and permanence offers fertile ground for engaging visitors—especially youth—with questions about continuity and change. By comparing ancient repetitions with modern practices (e.g., recurring architectural motifs, rituals, or digital patterns), museum exhibits can invite critical reflection on how societies inscribe permanence into transient realities. Rather than perceiving repetition as mere redundancy, learners can explore it as a cultural strategy for stabilizing meaning across time.

Table 7. Semantic Domain: Repetition and Permanence

Artifact	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
Patterned brick	Repeated ornament	Continuity, resilience, symbolic order	Teaching how repetition creates cultural permanence

Stair fragment	Replicated structure	Hierarchy, ritualized ascension	Exploring ritualized repetition and cosmological order
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Source: Research data, 2025

This domain underscores that permanence in cultural systems is not a property of material but of meaning. Bricks and stairs may crumble, but the patterns they carried—and the symbolic codes they reiterated—remain legible across centuries. Semantic field analysis thus reframes architectural fragments as vehicles of cultural resilience. For museums, presenting these artifacts within the framework of repetition allows visitors to grasp how societies use iteration as a semiotic tool for constructing stability and identity. This approach also opens space for provocative reflection: in a digital age dominated by repetition (memes, reposts, viral trends), how do contemporary societies replicate the ancient logic of permanence through reiteration?

Symbolic Economy and Tools

Coins, pendants, and sharpening stones discovered at the Candi Jiwa site form a semantic domain of economy and symbolism. Denotatively, these objects belong to the realm of trade, ornamentation, and craft. Yet semantically, they reveal that material exchange was inseparable from cultural identity and symbolic expression. Coins reflect more than monetary function. Their presence signifies regional networks of exchange, political authority, and integration into broader trade systems. Each coin is simultaneously a medium of transaction and a marker of sovereignty—signifying power and belonging within wider economic spheres. Pendants, in turn, are not mere adornments; they encode protective symbolism, social status, and personal identity. They exemplify how material objects mediate the individual's relationship to community and cosmology. Sharpening stones, though utilitarian, symbolize subsistence, skill, and the cultural valorization of craftsmanship. Their wear patterns embody embodied knowledge passed across generations, turning tools into carriers of heritage.

This semantic field underscores how economy was never purely transactional but always cultural. Objects of trade and utility carried symbolic weight, embedding identity and ritual significance within daily practice. Unlike modern distinctions between "economic" and "symbolic," Tarumanegara material culture demonstrates that value was holistic, combining utility, power, and meaning. Pedagogically, these artifacts offer a lens for youth to question assumptions about value. Museums can reframe coins, pendants, and tools not as static relics but as prompts to reflect on how societies define worth—whether through money, identity markers, or craftsmanship. Exhibits can even invite visitors to compare modern objects of value (currency, jewelry, digital possessions) with ancient counterparts, demonstrating continuities and shifts in how humans assign meaning to exchange.

Table 8. Semantic Domain: Symbolic Economy and Tools

Artifact	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
Coin	Currency	Trade networks, political authority	Teaching economy as symbolic as well as transactional
Pendant	Personal ornament	Status, protection, identity	Exploring material culture as marker of belonging
Sharpening stone	Crafting tool	Subsistence, skill, embodied knowledge	Discussing craftsmanship as heritage transmission

Source: Research data, 2025



Figure 10. Sharpening Stones, Batujaya-Origin Coins, and Pendants

Source: Research data, 2025

This domain demonstrates that the material basis of the economy was always intertwined with symbolic codes. Coins validated sovereignty, pendants reinforced social belonging, and sharpening stones embodied continuity of skill. Through semantic field analysis, these items emerge as more than functional remains; they are semiotic signs of how cultures negotiated exchange, identity, and heritage. For museums, this provides a way to transform economic artifacts into pedagogical tools for teaching about value systems. By drawing analogies with today's economies—where digital currencies, branded ornaments, and artisanal skills also function as symbolic capital—curators can provoke reflection on the enduring entanglement of economy and identity.

Museum as Cultural Mediation

Photographs documenting researchers with museum staff and community members constitute a semantic domain of institutional mediation. Denotatively, these images record collaborative activities—fieldwork, cataloguing, or curatorial tasks. Semantically, however, they symbolize the relational nature of heritage stewardship, where museums mediate between artifacts, scholarship, and the public. Unlike artifacts from ancient practices, these photographs highlight the contemporary layer of heritage work. They embody the living dimension of museums: negotiation, collaboration, and co-production of knowledge. Researchers represent the academic pursuit of interpretation, while staff signify custodianship rooted in local responsibility. Together, they form a narrative of shared stewardship, showing that heritage survives not only through preservation of objects but also through the networks of people committed to sustaining meaning.

This semantic domain emphasizes the museum as more than a repository of antiquities. It is an interpretive platform where meaning is continuously renegotiated between past and present, local and global, expert and layperson. The presence of researchers and staff in visual records reveals that heritage is relational: it is produced through dialogue, not merely displayed. Pedagogically, this domain has significant potential. Young visitors often assume museums are neutral spaces where knowledge is given, not made. By foregrounding photographs of curatorial collaboration, museums can demystify the process of interpretation and highlight their role as cultural mediators. This transparency encourages youth to see themselves as potential participants in heritage work, whether as researchers, community partners, or critical audiences. Exhibits can thus shift the perception of museums from custodial institutions to dialogic spaces where knowledge and identity are co-constructed.

Table 9. Semantic Domain: Museum as Cultural Mediation

Artefact/Photo	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Value	Pedagogical Potential
Researcher photo	Documentation	Scholarly inquiry, heritage interpretation	Teaching how knowledge is produced and negotiated
Staff interaction	Institutional record	Custodianship, community stewardship	Highlighting shared responsibility in heritage work
Collaborative scene	Field engagement	Co-production of knowledge	Encouraging youth participation in heritage mediation

Source: Research data, 2025

This final domain reframes museums as active agents in cultural negotiation rather than passive custodians. Through the lens of semantic field analysis, photographs of collaboration acquire symbolic weight: they represent transparency, inclusivity, and the living dimension of heritage. Such framing can transform visitor experiences for heritage education by inviting critical reflection on how heritage is made. This resonates with broader debates in museum studies that call for participatory, community-based approaches. In this sense, the museum becomes an artefact—a sign of mediation—equally important as the ancient objects it houses.

Discussion

Semantic Field Theory Beyond Linguistics

Findings from the Candi Jiwa collections affirm the potential of semantic field theory to move beyond its linguistic origins. The analysis revealed how material culture encodes networks of meaning as systematic as lexical fields by categorizing artefacts into funerary practice, architecture, and symbolic economy. Funerary objects, for example, construct a semantic system of continuity and remembrance, while vessels illustrate the fluid boundary between profane and sacred. These patterns demonstrate that artefacts can be read as semiotic signs, expanding semantic field theory into the material domain. Yet this transfer is not without tension. Artefacts lack intrinsic grammar, and their meanings emerge only through context, ritual, and use. Applying a linguistic framework to material culture risks oversimplification, reducing layered symbolic practices into rigid

classifications. Our analysis attempted to resolve this tension by highlighting denotative and connotative layers, thereby situating artefacts within dynamic cultural systems rather than static categories. This methodological negotiation contributes to theoretical debates by showing that semantic analysis of heritage is possible only when adapted to the complexity of material culture.

Rethinking Youth Engagement

The semantic mapping also speaks directly to the challenge of youth disengagement. Everyday vessels, restoration bricks, and storage containers illustrate how mundane objects embody deep symbolic codes. For younger audiences, these objects can be reframed as "double-coded"—at once practical and metaphorical. This opens interpretive entry points that are more relatable than monumental relics. For instance, linking a pitcher's dual role as domestic tool and ritual vessel to students' household items invites reflection on how all material culture carries hidden meanings. However, current youth-oriented heritage programs often privilege access—through digital storytelling or gamification—without fully engaging the interpretive dimension. Our findings suggest that semantic field analysis provides a stronger pedagogical framework: instead of consuming heritage as a visual spectacle, youth can be invited to decode artefacts as signs, actively constructing meaning. This repositions heritage education from transmission to dialogue, aligning with constructivist approaches in museum learning.

Museums as Dialogic Arenas

The role of museums emerges strongly in the domain of cultural mediation. Photographs of collaboration between researchers and staff illustrate that museums are not neutral repositories but active sites of negotiation. By embedding semantic interpretation into exhibition design, museums can transform displays into dialogic arenas where visitors are encouraged to interpret, question, and construct meanings. This reframing challenges the orthodox view of museums as passive custodians. When restoration bricks are presented not as "non-originals" but as signs of resilience, or when repetitive architectural motifs are decoded as strategies for permanence, museums cease to be storehouses of antiquities and become classrooms of cultural literacy. The implication is radical: museums must shift from showing what heritage is to provoking debate on how heritage means.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the study extends semantic field theory by demonstrating its applicability to material culture without erasing contextual nuance. It proposes a hybrid model: artifacts as semiotic signs whose meanings are constructed through ritual, repetition, and relationality. This model bridges the gap between linguistics and heritage studies, contributing to a more integrated theory of meaning-making across domains. Practically, the findings advocate for a new pedagogical role for museums in youth engagement. Rather than focusing solely on access and technology, institutions should emphasise interpretive depth. Workshops, interactive exhibits, and digital platforms can be reoriented toward semantic exploration, enabling youth to practice "reading" artefacts as texts of culture. This approach equips museums to address youth disengagement not by entertainment alone but by cultivating interpretive agency.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how semantic field theory can be applied to interpreting museum artefacts, focusing on the Candi Jiwa Museum collections. The analysis identified nine semantic domains illuminating how material culture encodes values of continuity, cosmology, adaptation, reciprocity, protection, permanence, exchange, and mediation by treating artefacts as meaning-bearing signs rather than inert objects. The findings advance two main contributions. Theoretically, they extend semantic field analysis beyond its linguistic origins, demonstrating its viability as a framework for decoding material culture without erasing contextual complexity. Practically, they reposition museums as pedagogical arenas where artefacts are mobilised to engage younger audiences in meaning-making processes rather than passive viewing. This approach directly addresses the challenge of youth disengagement from heritage by shifting emphasis from spectacle to interpretation.

At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations. The focus on one museum site narrows generalizability, and the semantic mapping relied on available artefacts rather than comprehensive inventories. Interpretations remain contingent on contextual evidence and could be enriched by ethnographic engagement with local communities. Future research should pursue two directions. First, comparative studies across different museums and cultural settings are needed to test the adaptability of semantic field analysis.

Second, experimental museum programs could integrate semantic mapping into digital exhibits or participatory workshops to evaluate its impact on youth engagement. Taken together, the study reframes heritage not as static preservation of objects but as the preservation of semiotic systems. In doing so, it advances a critical perspective: what matters most is not merely the endurance of artefacts, but the vitality of the meanings they continue to generate.

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