



Exploring Character Education Values in the Ziarah Kubro Tradition as a Local Wisdom Heritage in Palembang

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Abstract

Globalization and digitalization have significantly impacted youth, influencing their moral, social, and cultural behaviors. Local traditions, however, remain a vital medium for transmitting values that foster character development. This study explores the character education values embedded in the Ziarah Kubro tradition, a cultural and religious practice in Palembang, Indonesia, and examines its relevance for contemporary youth. Using a qualitative descriptive design, five youth participants aged 18–25 were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, incorporating triangulation to ensure validity. Findings indicate that the tradition fosters religiosity, empathy, social respect, solidarity, cooperative behavior, and cultural identity among youth. Moreover, despite the prevalence of digital media, Ziarah Kubro remains relevant, bridging historical knowledge, spiritual growth, and social engagement. The study demonstrates that local cultural practices can effectively serve as a foundation for character education while adapting to contemporary digital contexts. These insights provide both theoretical contributions to the understanding of culturally grounded character education and practical guidance for educators and community leaders in preserving local heritage.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization and digitalization have brought unprecedented transformations to societies worldwide, significantly influencing the values, behaviors, and social interactions of younger generations (Aksenta et al., 2023; Zulkifli et al., 2025). While technological advances offer extensive opportunities for knowledge acquisition and connectivity, they also pose challenges to the preservation of local cultural heritage and the reinforcement of moral and social values. In Indonesia, these challenges manifest in declining social awareness, reduced community cooperation, and diminishing appreciation for indigenous cultural practices (Aldyan, 2024; Karso, 2025). Such trends suggest a potential erosion of cultural identity and character development among youth, which raises concerns for policymakers and educators aiming to nurture holistic, morally grounded individuals (Astawa, 2022; Gosić, 2025). Consequently, there is a growing need to identify mechanisms that sustain character education within modern societal contexts.

Empirical observations indicate that traditional cultural practices remain significant avenues for transmitting moral, social, and spiritual values to younger generations. In Palembang, South Sumatra, the tradition of Ziarah Kubro—a ritual pilgrimage to the graves of Islamic scholars—persists as a living cultural practice among the Arab-Indonesian community and the wider public (Fatonah, 2021; Fhadillah et al., 2022). Despite its religious and historical significance, the educational potential of Ziarah Kubro as a medium for cultivating character has received limited scholarly attention. Local reports highlight active youth participation, yet there is insufficient understanding of how these experiences shape empathy, social responsibility, solidarity, and spiritual awareness (Sutama, 2026; Mariyono et al., 2024). This empirical gap underscores the urgency of systematically exploring the character-forming aspects of this tradition.

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The urgency of this study is further amplified by the increasing influence of digital media on youth lifestyles. As online platforms mediate cultural exposure, traditional practices risk becoming less salient unless actively integrated into contemporary education frameworks (Ianc et al., 2025; Panchal & Mago, 2024). Preserving cultural traditions like Ziarah Kubro is not merely an act of heritage conservation but a strategic avenue for embedding moral and social values in daily practice. By exploring these traditions through the lens of character education, educators and policymakers can design culturally anchored interventions that maintain relevance in a digital era (Rideng et al., 2020; Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Rationalizing the importance of this study, character education is widely acknowledged as essential for holistic human development, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Lickona, 2012; Roqai et al., 2025). Beyond formal educational institutions, character formation occurs through family, community engagement, and participation in culturally meaningful activities (Mukri et al., 2024; Nababan, Perangin-angin, et al., 2025). Local traditions offer contextualized settings where moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action can be internalized experientially (Jensen, 2011; Asror & Asrohah, 2026). Consequently, examining Ziarah Kubro provides insights into how cultural practices mediate character development in a specific socio-religious context, offering practical implications for education policy and community programming.

Prior studies have explored local cultural practices as tools for promoting social cohesion, moral education, and historical consciousness (Sakti et al., 2024a; Sakti et al., 2024b; Aricindy & Wijaya, 2023). Research on Ziarah Kubro and similar traditions has predominantly focused on historical, religious, and tourism perspectives (Fatonah, 2021; Fhadillah et al., 2022; Rajasyah, 2023). These studies consistently emphasize the ritual's role in community identity, spirituality, and heritage preservation but offer limited empirical evidence regarding its function in youth character development. Furthermore, prior investigations often rely on descriptive accounts without triangulating multiple data sources or examining experiential aspects from the participants' perspectives (Junaidi et al., 2024; Umar et al., 2025). Such gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive, systematic exploration of the educational values embedded in these practices.

While literature has advanced understanding of cultural transmission and moral education, the integration of character education frameworks with lived cultural practices remains underexplored (Asror et al., 2024; Sasso Eisenberg, 2019; Mitra & Pal, 2022). Existing research rarely analyzes how rituals facilitate internalization of values such as empathy, social responsibility, collaboration, and spiritual awareness among youth (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Yadi & Mastofa, 2025). Additionally, the interplay between tradition and digital influences has not been critically examined in previous studies, leaving a gap in understanding how cultural practices can adapt to maintain relevance in contemporary youth experiences (King et al., 2020; Mazurkevych et al., 2024). This gap provides a strong rationale for the present study, emphasizing both theoretical enrichment and practical applications.

In response to these gaps, this study aims to explore the character education values inherent in the Ziarah Kubro tradition as a cultural heritage practice in Palembang. Specifically, it investigates how participation in this tradition fosters religiosity, empathy, social respect, solidarity, and cooperative behavior among youth. The study contributes theoretically by linking experiential cultural practices to contemporary character education models, and practically by informing educators, policymakers, and community leaders on strategies to preserve local traditions while reinforcing youth moral and social development. By doing so, this research addresses both knowledge advancement and actionable interventions in the field of culturally grounded character education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore character education values embedded in the Ziarah Kubro tradition in Palembang, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was selected to enable an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the moral, social, and spiritual values transmitted through this cultural practice (Creswell, 2016). A descriptive design was chosen because it allows for the systematic documentation and thematic categorization of observable phenomena, emphasizing the lived

experiences of youth participants while maintaining the cultural and contextual integrity of the research setting. The design aligns with the study's purpose of capturing both the tangible and intangible aspects of character formation within the socio-religious context of Ziarah Kubro.

Research Site and Period

The research was conducted in Kampung Arab, Palembang, where the Ziarah Kubro tradition is actively practiced and preserved. This community was selected due to its historical and cultural significance as the center of the ritual and its high level of youth participation. Data collection took place over three months, from June to August 2025, coinciding with the ten days preceding the month of Ramadan, when the tradition is most prominently performed. This period allowed researchers to observe the full sequence of ritual practices and participant interactions, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the character education processes inherent in the tradition.

Population and Participants

The target population comprised youth aged 18–25 who had participated in the Ziarah Kubro tradition at least once in the past three years. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, emphasizing informants who could provide rich, experiential insights relevant to the research focus. A total of five participants were recruited, representing both genders and varying levels of involvement in the ritual. The sample size was determined based on data saturation, achieved when additional interviews no longer yielded novel information pertinent to the study's research questions. Inclusion criteria included direct participation in the ritual, willingness to share personal experiences, and fluency in Indonesian. Participants with minimal engagement or those unable to participate in interviews were excluded to maintain the quality and relevance of the data.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using multiple qualitative instruments, including semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interview guides were developed based on character education frameworks (Lickona, 2012) and local cultural norms, covering themes such as religiosity, empathy, social respect, solidarity, cooperation, and community engagement. Observational checklists were used to record participant behaviors, interactions, and collective rituals during the Ziarah Kubro event. Document analysis included photographs, community archives, and written accounts of past ceremonies, serving to triangulate and validate findings from interviews and observations.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Instrument validity was ensured through expert judgment and pilot testing. The interview guide and observation checklist were reviewed by two cultural experts and two educational psychologists to assess content relevance, clarity, and alignment with research objectives. Triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents) was applied to enhance credibility, while member checking was conducted with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpreted narratives. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail documenting research decisions, coding procedures, and analytical processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity was maintained throughout to minimize researcher bias, and confirmability was established by cross-verifying data interpretations among co-researchers.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process followed a sequential procedure. First, ethical approval and informed consent were obtained from participants. Interviews were conducted individually, either face-to-face or online, lasting 45–60 minutes, and audio-recorded with permission. Observations were carried out during the full duration of the ritual, with field notes capturing social interactions, ceremonial practices, and youth engagement. Documentary sources were systematically collected and cataloged. After initial data collection, interviews were transcribed verbatim and compared with field notes and documents to ensure completeness and accuracy.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed an interactive model comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Transcripts and field notes were coded inductively to identify emerging themes reflecting the character education dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Codes were then grouped into categories corresponding to

religiosity, empathy, social respect, solidarity, and cooperative behavior. Matrix displays were developed to examine patterns, relationships, and cross-case comparisons among participants. Themes were verified through triangulation across data sources, and interpretations were refined collaboratively by the research team to ensure rigor and credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character Education Values in the Ziarah Kubro Tradition in Palembang

Character formation is a process of instilling values that are manifested in actions, gradually developing into moral virtues. Character comprises three main components: moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 2012). Developing character is a crucial aspect of personal growth, enabling individuals to possess moral values, attitudes, and behaviors aligned with social norms. Character education does not only focus on cognitive development but also emphasizes a balance between intellectual, emotional, social, and moral growth, thereby fostering practical wisdom for facing life challenges (Gosić, 2025; Roqai et al., 2025). Character building occurs not only through formal schooling but also within families, communities, and cultural traditions embedded in everyday life. Integrating character education into both academic and non-academic activities has been shown to cultivate responsibility, cooperation, social care, and integrity among students (Mukri et al., 2024; Nababan, Safitri, et al., 2025). Continuous character development is necessary to create a generation that is responsible, caring, and able to maintain national identity amid globalization and modernization (Nababan, Perangin-angin, et al., 2025).

Cultural diversity is an inseparable reality of Indonesian society (Astawa, 2022). Indonesia is known for its rich cultural heritage, which can be utilized as a means for character education. Various local traditions, passed down from generation to generation, embody noble values that reflect the community's worldview. Local traditions and cultural practices play a significant role in preserving cultural identity, strengthening social cohesion, and transmitting values and norms across generations (Junaidi & Sundawa, 2025; Nababan, Perangin-angin, et al., 2025). These values are derived from long-standing social experiences, beliefs, and habits, making them relevant for shaping the character of young people. Beyond serving as cultural heritage, local traditions also facilitate social integration, reinforcing intergroup relationships through shared cultural practices and collective activities (Sutama, 2026). Therefore, preserving local culture is not only important for maintaining ancestral heritage but also serves as an educational medium for instilling positive values within society. Cultural preservation becomes increasingly crucial in the face of globalization, which can erode local cultural identity if values are not continuously transmitted to younger generations (Mariyono et al., 2024; Mazurkevych et al., 2024).

One local tradition that embodies character values is the Ziarah Kubro in Palembang. This tradition is not merely a religious and cultural activity but also encompasses religiosity, respect for ancestors, togetherness, social solidarity, and communal cooperation. As part of local wisdom, such traditions function as social learning spaces, enabling community members to internalize moral values through direct social experience. Youth participation in these activities demonstrates that character values can be acquired through real-life social interactions. Active involvement in cultural traditions and rituals strengthens cultural identity, enhances a sense of community belonging, and fosters respect and care for others (Sutama, 2026). Consequently, Ziarah Kubro has the potential to serve as a culturally grounded medium for character education that remains relevant to contemporary societal needs. The following sections present a discussion of the character education values inherent in the Ziarah Kubro tradition in Palembang.

Religious Values as the Foundation of Character

The Ziarah Kubro tradition functions as a medium for internalizing religious values that shape the character of young people through religious activities such as recitation of Yasin, tahlil, dhikr, sholawat, and religious lectures. Based on interview results, informants perceived these activities as a means to strengthen their closeness to Allah SWT while enhancing their spiritual awareness in daily life. The collective nature of these religious practices not only fosters understanding of religious principles (moral knowing), but also develops emotional and spiritual awareness (moral feeling), which in turn encourages the practice of religious behaviors in real life (moral action) (Junaidi et al., 2024; Lickona, 2012).



Figure 1. The Process of Prayer Recitation and Religious Lecture

These findings align with the study by Asror & Asrohah (2026) on the Gusjigang philosophy, which explains that religiously based cultural traditions can shape character through repeated engagement in religious practices. In this perspective, recurring religious activities lay the foundation for moral awareness and the internalization of religious values (Junaidi, Tanszil, & Komalasari, 2025; Junaidi, Tanszil, & Ni Kadek Suwardani, 2025). Therefore, the spiritual experiences gained by youth during participation in Ziarah Kubro are not merely ceremonial; they constitute a natural character education process through direct engagement in religious activities.

Moreover, the reflective moments that emerge during Ziarah Kubro highlight the strengthening of individual moral dimensions. Informants expressed that the pilgrimage serves as a reminder of mortality and the afterlife, motivating participants to improve their behavior and increase righteous deeds. This observation supports the cultural-developmental moral psychology theory, which posits that moral development is influenced by the cultural and spiritual values embedded in society (Jensen, 2011). Local religious traditions provide a space for individuals to understand the relationship between divine values, moral responsibility, and social behavior in daily life.

The study's findings further reinforce those of Sakti et al. (2024), which indicate that direct involvement in cultural and religious activities can foster religiosity, responsibility, and moral awareness among participants. In the context of Ziarah Kubro, this process is evident through the exemplary behavior of the ulama and religious figures who are the focal points of the pilgrimage. Youth not only learn about the historical struggles of these scholars but also emulate the values of sincerity, piety, and devotion they embody. Consequently, the Ziarah Kubro tradition can be understood as an effective form of local wisdom-based character education that develops *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action* in an integrated manner.

Empathy and Social Respect

The Ziarah Kubro tradition embodies values of empathy and social respect, demonstrated through honoring ulama, habaib, wali, and sultans who significantly contributed to the spread of Islam in Palembang. Participants viewed the tradition as a means of remembering the services of these predecessors while offering prayers for them. This practice reflects both historical and moral awareness, emphasizing that the current generation's life is the result of past generations' efforts.

These findings align with Sari et al. (2023), who argued that respecting ancestors is a form of character value transmitted through local traditions. Honoring past figures not only preserves collective memory but also serves as a moral learning medium for young people. Through this process, participants learn to appreciate the sacrifices, contributions, and services of others in society.

Furthermore, the growth of *mahabbah*, or love for the ulama, as expressed by participants, indicates the development of moral feeling within the religious tradition (Jamaludin et al., 2023). According to Umar et al. (2025), local traditions rich in Islamic values can cultivate respect, moral responsibility, and care for others. These values are formed through direct experience and emotional engagement in culturally inherited activities.

Beyond honoring religious figures, empathy is also evident in community members' voluntary provision of food and beverages to pilgrims. This social service reflects attitudes of care, sharing, and

mutual assistance without expecting any reward. This finding supports Susarno et al. (2025), who stated that cultural activities involving social interaction can enhance empathy, social responsibility, and concern for others. Therefore, the Ziarah Kubro tradition functions not only as a religious ritual but also as an effective social learning medium that fosters empathy and social respect among community members.

Solidarity and Togetherness

The Ziarah Kubro tradition serves as a social space that strengthens solidarity and togetherness among the Palembang community. This activity is attended by various social, ethnic, and regional groups, yet all participants are able to interact harmoniously. Informants reported that during the event, there was no difference in treatment based on religious school of thought, social status, or place of origin. All participants united with a common purpose: to honor the contributions of the Islamic scholars and to reinforce Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*).



Figure 2. Unity during the Kubro Pilgrimage

These findings align with the study by Aricindy and Wijaya (2023) on the Marsiadapari tradition, which demonstrated that community-based traditions can foster values of togetherness, voluntary participation, and social solidarity. Cultural practices carried out collectively create interactive spaces where participants develop a sense of belonging to the group and strengthen shared social identity. In the context of Ziarah Kubro, this togetherness is reflected through the active participation of all attendees in the series of religious activities collectively.

Moreover, social interactions during the pilgrimage expand the participants' social networks. Informants noted that the event brings together people from different regions, and even from abroad, providing opportunities to build new social relationships. This shows that the Ziarah Kubro tradition not only strengthens internal social bonds within the Palembang community but also fosters broader solidarity among Muslims. These findings support Mitra and Pal (2022), who argued that culturally grounded social norms can enhance social cohesion and build trust across community groups.

From a character education perspective, the sense of togetherness formed during the event reflects the development of cooperation, tolerance, and social responsibility. Sakti et al. (2024a) emphasize that participation in local cultural activities can improve individuals' ability to work collaboratively and respect diversity. Therefore, the Ziarah Kubro tradition functions as an effective social learning medium, instilling values of solidarity, unity, and Islamic brotherhood in the younger generation.

Social Care and Cooperation

The Ziarah Kubro tradition embodies strong values of social care and cooperation through the involvement of various community elements in both the preparation and implementation of the event. Community members, organizing committees, local government, security personnel, healthcare workers, and social organizations work together to ensure that the entire series of activities runs smoothly. This collective engagement reflects a shared awareness of the importance of preserving and maintaining a tradition that represents the identity of the Palembang community.

These findings are consistent with Aricindy and Wijaya (2023), who reported that community-based traditions foster togetherness, voluntary participation, and social responsibility, strengthening

relationships among community members. Traditions involving collective participation serve as effective platforms for character learning, as individuals learn to collaborate to achieve shared goals. In the context of Ziarah Kubro, these values are evident through task distribution, coordination among committee members, and community involvement in providing various necessities for participants.

Moreover, community members who provide food and drinks free of charge for pilgrims demonstrate high social care. This practice of sharing indicates that participants act not only as organizers but also as social facilitators, helping meet the needs of others. These observations support Sulkipani et al. (2025), who argue that local wisdom serves as a medium for internalizing values such as mutual cooperation, care, and social responsibility in society.

The involvement of multiple stakeholders in supporting Ziarah Kubro also highlights the presence of strong social capital. According to Mitra and Pal (2022), cooperation based on cultural norms and social trust contributes to improved social cohesion. In this study, the established collaboration not only ensures the successful implementation of the tradition but also produces economic benefits for the surrounding community through increased trading activities during the event. Therefore, the Ziarah Kubro tradition functions as a means of strengthening social care and cooperation while serving as an instrument for community empowerment grounded in local wisdom.



Figure 3. Traders during the Kubro Pilgrimage

Relevance of the Ziarah Kubro Tradition for Youth in the Digital Era

The Ziarah Kubro tradition continues to hold significant relevance for young people, even amid the waves of digitalization and globalization. This tradition is understood not merely as a religious activity but also as a medium for strengthening cultural identity, learning local history, and developing character. The findings indicate that local traditions do not lose their meaning in the modern era; rather, they transform into a platform that helps youth maintain connections with their cultural roots and the values passed down by previous generations.

These findings align with studies by Rideng et al. (2020) and Kurniawan et al. (2025), which emphasize that local traditions play a crucial role in preserving cultural identity and social cohesion under global pressures. Traditions handed down across generations serve as markers of collective identity that distinguish one community from another. In the context of Ziarah Kubro, youth participation not only strengthens their understanding of Islamic history in Palembang but also fosters a sense of belonging to the local cultural heritage, which forms part of the city's identity.

Exposure to the history of Islamic scholars and the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate through Ziarah Kubro demonstrates that the tradition serves as a medium for intergenerational knowledge transmission. This supports findings by Wang et al. (2025), which state that youth engagement in cultural heritage preservation occurs through stages of perception, identity formation, and active participation. When young people understand the meaning of a tradition, they build a stronger cultural identity and are motivated to take part in its preservation. Therefore, direct experience during Ziarah Kubro is an effective way to strengthen historical awareness and cultural identity.

Beyond cultural identity formation, the Ziarah Kubro tradition functions as a spiritual anchor amid modern life, which often tends to be materialistic and fast-paced. The values embedded in this tradition remind individuals of the essence of life, mortality, and the importance of preparing for the afterlife. This resonates with King et al. (2020), who argue that youth involvement in religious and

spiritual activities provides moral, social, and transcendent resources that help them develop self-identity and find meaning in life. Collective religious rituals also reinforce social bonds while offering profound spiritual experiences (Sasso Eisenberg, 2019).

On the other hand, digital technology offers new opportunities for preserving the Ziarah Kubro tradition. Social media, documentary videos, cultural infographics, and creative history-based content can serve as tools to introduce this tradition to youth in more engaging and accessible ways. This demonstrates that tradition and technology are not necessarily in conflict but can operate synergistically to support cultural preservation.

This perspective is supported by Ianc et al. (2025), who highlight the potential of digital technology, social media, and artificial intelligence to enhance youth engagement with cultural heritage. Digital media enable local culture to be well-documented, easily accessible, and widely disseminated. Similarly, Panchal and Mago (2024) found that social media effectively maintains cultural identity while raising awareness among youth about the importance of preserving cultural heritage. In the context of Ziarah Kubro, utilizing digital platforms can serve as an innovative strategy to expand cultural education and increase youth participation in sustaining the tradition.

The study's findings also reinforce the model of character education based on local wisdom proposed by Asror et al. (2024), which asserts that cultural and religious values remain relevant in the digital era when they adapt to technological developments and contemporary youth needs. Local religious traditions function not only as cultural heritage but also as instruments for character education, instilling values such as religiosity, responsibility, social care, and cultural identity. In this regard, Ziarah Kubro exemplifies how local wisdom can adapt to changing times without losing its essential values.

Thus, the Ziarah Kubro tradition remains relevant for youth in the digital era as a medium for spiritual reinforcement, cultural identity formation, local historical preservation, and character education rooted in local wisdom. Amid globalization, which threatens to erode local cultural values, this tradition becomes a crucial instrument for maintaining the continuity of youth cultural and moral identity. Creative use of digital media also provides significant opportunities to ensure that the values inherent in Ziarah Kubro continue to live, be recognized, and be transmitted to future generations.

CONCLUSION

The Ziarah Kubro tradition in Palembang embodies significant character education values that remain relevant for contemporary youth. Religious practices within the ritual serve as a foundation for moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, fostering spiritual awareness and ethical behavior. Empathy and social respect are developed through honoring scholars, community leaders, and peers, encouraging prosocial attitudes. Participation in collective activities strengthens solidarity, togetherness, and cooperative behavior across diverse social and ethnic groups. Youth engagement in planning and supporting the ritual further enhances social responsibility and practical collaboration skills. The tradition also functions as a medium for transmitting cultural and historical knowledge, reinforcing identity and collective memory. Despite the influence of digitalization, Ziarah Kubro maintains its relevance by connecting youth to cultural roots and moral values. Digital tools and social media offer opportunities to broaden participation and preserve the tradition innovatively. The study demonstrates that experiential cultural practices can integrate with character education models to produce holistic personal development. Ziarah Kubro thus exemplifies the synergy between local wisdom, spiritual growth, and social learning. Overall, the tradition provides a sustainable and culturally grounded framework for youth character formation in the modern era.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

BA conceptualized and designed the study, conducted data collection, performed data analysis, and drafted the initial manuscript. **J** contributed to the development of the research design, assisted in interpreting the data, and revised the manuscript critically for intellectual content. **RS** supported data analysis and interpretation and provided critical feedback on the manuscript. **CD** supervised the

research, provided conceptual guidance, and reviewed and refined the final version of the manuscript.

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