

Meaning-making in the legend of Batu Ampar: A literary reception perspective

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Abstract

This study examines meaning-making in the legend of Batu Ampar/Dampu Awang in Palembang through the lens of literary reception theory. It employs a descriptive qualitative approach based on library research. Data were collected from books, journals, scholarly articles, and previous studies related to the Dampu Awang legend, meaning-making, and Hans Robert Jauss's literary reception theory. The findings indicate that the Legend of Batu Ampar is understood not only as a folktale conveying a moral lesson about children's disobedience to their parents but also as an expression of local beliefs about the origins of the stones along the banks of the Musi River. From the perspective of literary reception, interpretations of the character Dampu Awang change in accordance with shifts in readers' horizons of expectations. Modern readers increasingly interpret Dampu Awang in more rational and human-centered ways by considering the character's social and psychological circumstances. Therefore, meaning in oral literature is dynamic, shaped by readers' interpretations, social experiences, and changing historical contexts.

Keywords: *meaning-making, literary reception, Batu Ampar legend, Dampu Awang, oral literature*

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INTRODUCTION

Folktales are part of a community's culture that is passed down from generation to generation and continues to develop in social life. This is in line with Hutomo's statement (1991, in Endraswara, 2018), which states that folktale is literature that includes literary expressions of citizens and culture that are disseminated and passed down from generation to generation orally or by word of mouth. The existence of folktale not only functions as entertainment, but also as a medium for conveying values, norms, outlooks on life, and a community's cultural identity. In traditional societies, it has a close relationship with the collective experiences and belief systems of its supporters. Therefore, folktales are a form of cultural heritage that is important to study and preserve. One form of folktale that still survives to this day is legend.

Legends are traditional narratives that communities regard as accounts of events that occurred in the past. They commonly recount the origins of particular places, notable figures, or events believed to hold historical significance. Local communities may consider these narratives credible because physical evidence is thought to support the events they describe. Nevertheless, the definition and interpretation of legends remain subjects of debate among scholars. A legend is not history but only a story that contains historical elements and is believed to have been passed down from generation to generation so that local people think that it really happened (Husaini & Amelia, 2022). Legends develop through oral tradition, so their spread depends on the community passing the stories down from generation to generation. As legends evolve, they are understood not only as stories of the past but also as representations of a community's social and cultural experiences. These orally transmitted stories then shape how a community views the value of a place, the value of life, and the relationship between humans and their surroundings.

In Indonesia, legends are spread across various regions, each with its own distinct cultural characteristics. Each region possesses folktales that serve as a local identity and reflect the socio-cultural conditions of its people. One area rich in folktales is Palembang, South Sumatra Province. Palembang is known for its diverse folktales and legends, both related to the history of kingdoms, the origins of places, and the stories of particular figures. These stories are not only passed down for entertainment but also serve as a means of passing on cultural values to the next generation. The folktale that often develops in South Sumatra is often related to rivers, due to South Sumatra's geographical location, which is crossed by the Musi River and its descendants. It's therefore not surprising that most folktales, such as legends, in this region discuss the Ulu and Ilir kingdoms, island legends, and myths about river guardians. This aligns with Ernalida's statement that the banks of the Musi River and its tributaries are rich in cultural heritage, including legends, myths, and so on (Syarofie, 2009).

One of the legends that has developed in the Palembang community is the Batu Ampar legend, which is located in the Ilir area of Palembang, South Sumatra. This legend is known by the community as a story related to local history and beliefs. The Batu Ampar legend contains various cultural elements that are interesting to study, such as moral values, community beliefs, social relationships, and the outlook on life that developed in Palembang society. The story also shows how people build an understanding of an event or place through narratives that are passed down from generation to generation. During its spread, the Batu Ampar legend has experienced various forms of acceptance and interpretation by the community. Differences in social background, education, age, and experience of readers or listeners have led to the emergence of diverse legend interpretations.

In modern literary studies, readers play a crucial role in determining the meaning of a literary work. The meaning of a literary work lies not only in the text but also emerges through the interaction between the text and the reader. This view aligns with literary reception theory, which positions readers as active subjects in the process of interpreting literary works. Readers are considered to provide reactions or meaning to literary works, influenced by space, time, and socio-cultural groups. This means that the reading, understanding, and evaluation of literary works differ from person to person at any given time and place (Imran T, 1985). From the perspective of literary reception, a work can be understood differently by each reader because each reader has a different horizon of expectations, experiences, and cultural background. Thus, literary works are dynamic because their meaning can change according to the response and reception of their readers.

The literary reception approach is relevant in this research because the Batu Ampar legend exists not only as a narrative text but also as part of the social experience of the community. The community, as readers or listeners, plays a role in shaping the meaning of the legend. Some may view the Batu Ampar legend as a local historical story, while others see it as a form of belief or a particular cultural symbol. These differences in reception indicate that the legend's meaning continues to evolve according to the social and cultural context of the community interpreting it (Yulianti et al., 2025).

Research into the construction of the meaning of the Batu Ampar legend is important because it can provide insight into how society understands and interprets folklore amidst modern developments. Currently, the existence of folktale is beginning to shift due to technological developments and changes in societal communication patterns. The younger generation tends to be more familiar with modern popular culture than their own regional folklore. This condition causes the existence of local legends to slowly begin to be forgotten if they are not documented and studied academically. In addition to being a form of cultural preservation, this research also has relevance in the field of literary and cultural studies. Examining the public reception of legends can demonstrate the relationship between literary works and the social conditions of the communities that support them (Kasman, nd). This research is expected to demonstrate that folktales serve not only as entertainment but also play a role in shaping cultural identity and people's perspectives on life. By understanding the construction of meaning that emerges in the Batu Ampar legend, this research can contribute to the development of folktale studies, particularly from the perspective of literary reception.

METHOD

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative with a library research approach. Qualitative research methods are research methods that aim to understand and explain the meaning of a phenomenon in its natural context (Niam et al., 2024). This research uses a library research approach in which, in obtaining research data, the researcher collects, analyzes, and organizes sources from articles, books, and previous researchers on the construction of meaning in the Batu Ampar 1 Ilir Palembang legend through a literary reception perspective. With this method, the researcher can describe in depth the various forms of reception, interpretation, and construction of meaning that appear in the legend.

Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation and literature studies. Researchers identified relevant data, then recorded, grouped, and selected information that aligns with the research focus (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). The collected data was then analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify the forms of meaning that emerge within the Batu Ampar legend. The analysis was conducted by interpreting the story's content, symbols, cultural values, and readers' or community's responses to the legend from a literary reception perspective.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Musi River basin is home to numerous stories nearly forgotten by the current generation, one of which is the Legend of Batu Ampar, often known as the Dampu Awang Legend. This story has been passed down through generations and has many versions. This is one version of the legend. According to this legend, the local people living in the Batu Ampar area, 1 Ilir sub-district, Palembang, South Sumatra, believe that the stones scattered along the banks of the Musi River were the belongings of their luxury ship. This certainly demonstrates that legends and old stories passed down from generation to generation shape how people view things they cannot explain logically.

The Kalpataru History and Learning journal, published by the History Education study program at PGRI Palembang University, explains that there are three versions of the Dampu Awang legend circulating in Indonesia. The first and second versions originate from Central Java, which tell of Dampu Awang as a wealthy Chinese merchant who was ultimately defeated by Sunan Bonang. Meanwhile, the third version, from South Sumatra, depicts Dampu Awang as a disobedient child (Sukino & Hidayat, 2023). The story is similar to the story of Malin Kundang which comes from West Sumatra.

It is said that in ancient times there lived a widow who had a son – Dampu Awang. They lived in poverty so that the mother had to work hard to raise her only child. After her son grew up, the mother then allowed her son to go away from home, this was also based on the strong determination that Dampu Awang had. While abroad, he finally married the son of a wealthy nobleman in China. When he finally returned to his hometown, his mother came to her son, but Dampu Awang did not want to acknowledge his mother's existence because he was ashamed of having a poor mother. It then hurt the mother's heart and made her cry. According to Mang Dayat, one of the history and literature activists of South Sumatra, what distinguishes this story from the story of Malin Kundang is that Malin Kundang was cursed by his mother to become a stone, while Dampu Awang was cursed by the Almighty so he turned into a free-flying bird. The stones that were scattered were the wreckage of ships and also basic necessities that turned into stone (Hadinata, 2026).

The legend of Batu Ampar/Dampu Awang conveys a moral message about the consequences of a child's disobedience toward their parents. Dampu Awang is portrayed as someone whose behavior changes after attaining success, leading him to feel ashamed of acknowledging his mother's poverty. His actions reflect a disregard for the respect and gratitude owed to the parent who raised him and made sacrifices for his well-being. Within the narrative, his disobedience is followed by a curse from the Almighty, emphasizing the consequences of disrespecting one's parents. Through this legend, the community conveys the belief that dishonoring parents is morally unacceptable and may lead to adverse consequences for the individual.

Beyond teaching moral values, the legend also reflects local beliefs about the origins of geographical features and natural phenomena. The scattered stones are believed to be the remains of a

ship and its valuable goods that turned to stone because of a curse. This belief shows how traditional communities use stories passed down through generations to explain the features of their surroundings. Therefore, legends are not only told for entertainment but also reflect cultural beliefs and strengthen the connection between communities, their environment, and local history (Baruadi & Eraku, 2026).

The Legends of Malin Kundang and Dampu Awang were passed down by ancestors to teach children moral values. Through stories that children enjoyed, ancestors shared advice and encouraged them to understand the lessons in their own way. This shows the role of traditional literature in shaping children's character and guiding their behavior in daily life. One important lesson in these legends is that children should always remember and appreciate their parents' sacrifices, especially those of their mothers.

However, over time, the perspectives of readers and literary connoisseurs on this legend will undoubtedly change. In the literary reception theory popularized by Hans Robert Jauss, he stated that all forms of ancient literature, both oral and written, still have a significant connection to the present. This means that works like the Legend of Batu Ampar/Dampu Awang remain closely related and hold significant value for today's readers (Rokib, 2023). Therefore, it's natural for a literary work to experience changes in meaning due to literary reception theory. This is due to the development of the times, which has led to a more developed perspective, as more information can be found online.

In the Jauss' literary reception theory, there is the concept of the horizon of expectations, which explains that readers have a set of initial understandings before and when enjoying a literary work. This horizon of expectations includes an understanding of the work's form, language, themes, moral values, genre, and other elements that readers have become familiar with through their reading experiences and social lives. Jauss explains that the horizon of expectations is formed by three main factors. This concept is based on three factors: first, the general norms of reading, second, the reader's insight and experience, and finally, the conflict between the imaginary world and the real world (Ivanalie & Sudikan, 2025). Through this concept, the meaning of literary works is not fixed because it is always influenced by changes in the reader's perspective over time.

The concept of the horizon of expectations is reflected in how society interprets the legend of Batu Ampar/Dampu Awang across different periods. In traditional communities, Dampu Awang was seen as a disobedient son who abandoned his mother after becoming wealthy. This view reflected the moral values of the time, which emphasized respect and gratitude toward parents, especially mothers. Therefore, the legend served as a moral lesson for younger generations, while the curse represented the consequences of disobedience.

However, modern readers tend to interpret the legend more critically by considering their own knowledge and experiences. Some may argue that Dampu Awang's actions were influenced by social and psychological circumstances rather than intentional disobedience. For example, after years of separation, he might have struggled to recognize his mother's face, especially when family photographs were uncommon, and his family was poor. This interpretation illustrates how modern readers may view the character's actions from a more rational and humane perspective (Widodo & Sudikan, 2021).

On the other hand, Dampu Awang's status as a wealthy merchant also creates new interpretations within the horizon of modern readers' expectations. As someone of wealth and high standing, Dampu Awang can be understood as someone who must be wary of strangers who might want to take advantage of him. When an old woman dressed in simple clothes suddenly appears and kneels before him, modern readers see the possibility that Dampu Awang is surprised and unable to immediately believe the confession. In real life, someone with a high social position would certainly consider various possibilities before accepting recognition from others. Therefore, Dampu Awang's actions are no longer fully understood as a form of absolute arrogance or disobedience, but also as a psychological reaction influenced by certain social situations.

These changes in meaning demonstrate that the Batu Ampar/Dampu Awang legend is dynamic, as it continues to undergo reinterpretation in line with societal developments. Modern readers not only accept the legend's moral message normatively, but also attempt to understand the context and realistic possibilities underlying the characters' actions. This proves that the meaning of a literary work does not

reside entirely within the text, but rather is formed through the relationship between the text, the reader, and the surrounding socio-cultural context. Thus, the literary reception of the Batu Ampar legend demonstrates how changes in the reader's horizon of expectations can give rise to new constructions of meaning for folktales passed down from generation to generation (Rizki et al., nd).

The changing reception of the Batu Ampar/Dampu Awang legend reflects how modern society views folktales differently. In the past, legends were generally accepted without question and passed down through generations (Suryana, 2026). Traditional communities viewed folklore as part of their cultural beliefs and moral values. As a result, characters were often divided into good and bad. In the Dampu Awang legend, Dampu Awang represents disobedience, while his mother symbolizes sacrifice, sincerity, and parental love. This clear contrast helps audiences, especially children, understand the story's moral lessons.

However, modern readers tend to have a more critical and analytical mindset when understanding a story. Advances in education, information technology, and access to diverse perspectives mean that today's society no longer accepts folktales one-sidedly (Trisnasasti, 2021). Modern readers are beginning to see that each character in the story has a social and psychological background that can influence their actions. Therefore, the character of Dampu Awang is no longer understood simply as an antagonist, but also as a human being who may experience inner conflict, shock, and social pressure due to his change in life status after migrating. This shift in perspective shows that literary reception always evolves in line with changes in society's mindset (Resepsi et al., 2026).

Besides being influenced by the evolving insights of readers, changes in the construction of meaning in the Batu Ampar legend are also related to changes in the social conditions of modern society. In ancient times, people lived in a cultural environment that highly valued obedience to parents and collective norms. Any form of disobedience to parents was seen as a serious moral violation. Therefore, legends such as Dampu Awang were used as a means of social education so that children grew up to be individuals who respected family and community customs. Folktales served as an effective learning medium because they were easy to understand and were passed down orally from one generation to the next.

Meanwhile, modern society lives in a more complex and individualistic social environment. Perspectives on family relationships have also begun to change. Today's society is more accustomed to understanding issues through a psychological and realistic perspective rather than simply black-and-white moral judgments. In this context, modern readers have begun to question other possibilities in the story of Dampu Awang (Sarwa, n.d.). For example, did Dampu Awang truly disown his mother out of shame, or was it because he was unable to recognize her after so long apart? Questions like these demonstrate that modern readers are no longer merely passive recipients of folktales, but also active interpreters who construct new meanings based on their own experiences and logic.

This shift in reception also demonstrates the influence of developments in popular culture and digital media on how people understand folktales. Today, people are accustomed to viewing events from multiple perspectives through films, social media, novels, and other forms of media. Many modern works present antagonists with specific psychological backgrounds, making readers more accustomed to understanding the reasons behind a character's actions. This indirectly influences how readers view Dampu Awang. A character once understood as a symbol of absolute wickedness is now understood as a character with possible motives and reasons behind his actions.

In the context of literary reception, these changes demonstrate that folktales have the ability to survive and thrive because they are always open to new interpretations. If the meaning of a legend were fixed and could not be reinterpreted, the story would likely lose its relevance in modern society (Shovia., 2024). However, because the community was able to construct new meanings for the Batu Ampar legend, the story remains interesting and relevant to this day. This proves that the survival of folktales depends heavily on the community's ability to reinterpret stories according to the time context.

Furthermore, the changing interpretation of the Batu Ampar legend also demonstrates the relationship between folktale and the development of science. Modern societies, living amidst the development of technology and science, tend to prioritize logic in understanding events. Therefore,

supernatural elements in legends are beginning to be understood symbolically rather than literally. The stones believed to originate from the wreckage of the Dampu Awang ship, for example, are no longer always understood as absolute reality, but rather as cultural symbols representing the beliefs and identities of the local community. In this case, the legend is understood not based on whether the story is scientifically true, but rather on the cultural values and social meanings it contains (Education et al., nd).

Despite changing perspectives, some communities continue to believe in the Batu Ampar legend because of its emotional, spiritual, and cultural significance. For them, the legend is not merely a story but also part of their cultural identity and local heritage, closely connected to the Musi River and the lives of its surrounding communities. This shows that people's interpretations are shaped not only by modern reasoning but also by cultural beliefs passed down through generations.

The different interpretations of the Batu Ampar legend demonstrate that folktales can have multiple meanings. Some people view it as a moral lesson, others as a cultural symbol, while modern readers may relate it to psychological and social issues. These interpretations highlight the richness of folktale and its continued relevance in society.

The changing interpretation of Dampu Awang also reflects a shift in how people understand disobedience. Traditionally, disobedience was seen as a direct rejection of one's parents. Modern readers, however, recognize that human behavior can be influenced by social, psychological, and economic circumstances. This shift shows how changing social perspectives influence the meaning of literary works.

From a meaning-construction perspective, the changing reception of the Batu Ampar legend demonstrates that cultural meaning is socially constructed and continually evolves with changing times. Meaning does not emerge naturally from a story, but is constructed through the interaction between the text, society, and the social experiences of its readers. Therefore, the contemporary meaning of the Batu Ampar legend is no longer identical to that understood by earlier societies. Modern readers construct new interpretations based on their own life experiences, which differ from those of past societies. This demonstrates that folktale is dynamic and continually undergoes a process of reconstructing meaning from generation to generation.

The changing reception of the Batu Ampar legend shows how folktale can encourage reflection on family relationships, social identity, and humanitarian issues. Dampu Awang is no longer seen only as a disobedient son but also as a person affected by social changes, migration, wealth, and status. This allows the legend to remain relevant to modern society.

The legend's continued existence also shows how folktales adapt to changing times. As each generation develops new interpretations, the story remains part of both cultural heritage and modern life.

Therefore, changes in readers' horizons of expectations create new meanings for the Batu Ampar legend. Its focus has expanded from a moral lesson about disobedience to a broader understanding of the characters' social, psychological, and cultural circumstances. This demonstrates that folktales serve not only as entertainment and moral education but also as a way to reflect on the relationship between people, culture, history, and society.

CONCLUSION

The legend of Batu Ampar/Dampu Awang is a form of folktale among the people living along the Musi River that has survived and been passed down through generations. The legend serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for conveying moral values, cultural beliefs, and the local identity of the Palembang people. In the story, the character of Dampu Awang was initially understood as a representation of a disobedient child who forgets his mother after achieving success and wealth. This interpretation stems from the social norms of traditional society that uphold respect for parents, thus enabling the legend to be used as a medium for moral education for the younger generation.

However, through the perspective of literary reception, the meaning of the Batu Ampar legend has changed with the times and the changing horizons of readers' expectations. Modern readers no longer

fully accept the character of Dampu Awang as an absolute antagonist, but have begun to develop more rational and realistic interpretations of his actions. These changes are influenced by the development of insight, experience, critical thinking patterns, and the conflict between the world of fiction and the reality of modern life. In this context, some readers have begun to consider the possibility that Dampu Awang does not recognize his mother because she has been away for a long time, lacks visual documentation of the family, and is suspicious of strangers who suddenly claim to be his family.

These changes in meaning demonstrate that folktales are dynamic and open to various forms of interpretation in accordance with the socio-cultural developments of society. The meaning of legends lies not only in the narrative text but is also shaped through the relationship between the reader, social experience, and the context of the time. Thus, the Batu Ampar legend not only represents moral values regarding disobedience but also serves as a space for social reflection, demonstrating how modern society rebuilds its understanding of the characters and events in folklore.

Therefore, the literary reception of the Batu Ampar legend demonstrates that folklore remains relevant in modern society, capable of constructing new meanings for each generation. The legend is not only a cultural heritage of the Palembang people, but also evidence that folktales have the ability to survive, evolve, and adapt to the changing mindsets of its readers over time.

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