

The social function of the bujang kurap legend in the Lubuklinggau community: A folklore study

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the social functions of the Bujang Kurap legend as part of the folklore heritage of the Lubuklinggau community. It focuses on exploring how this folktale contributes to maintaining social norms and preserving local cultural identity. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach within a literary ethnography framework. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with community leaders and cultural practitioners in Lubuklinggau, and document analysis of relevant literature. The data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal four main social functions of the Bujang Kurap legend: providing an outlet for the community's collective aspirations, legitimizing cultural institutions through the recognition of historical sites, serving as a medium for character education among younger generations, and reinforcing social norms to encourage adherence to shared values. The study concludes that the legend is not merely a narrative of the past but also a living cultural resource that helps maintain social cohesion and cultural integrity in the Lubuklinggau community amid ongoing modernization.

Keywords: *social functions, Bujang Kurap legend, folklore*

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INTRODUCTION

Folklore is a part of a collective culture that is spread and passed down from generation to generation in oral form or examples accompanied by gestures or reminder tools (Mukminin & Angelita, 2023, p. 2). Folklore, especially legends, holds significant value within communities because it is often used as a medium of entertainment and can also serve as a learning tool for many. In its most fundamental essence, folklore is not simply a collection of static narratives of the past, but rather a living entity within society. As part of collective culture, this oral literature serves as a medium for transmitting noble values and local wisdom. Through folklore, many people can understand their historical roots, affirm their social existence, and establish a moral direction for the future. In Indonesia, the richness of folklore is reflected in the thousands of legends, myths, and fairy tales spread throughout the archipelago, where each story carries a unique regional sociocultural character while still voicing universal human aspirations.

The cultural transformation from traditional to modern times has brought significant changes to the way society interacts with its oral heritage. The development of Indonesian literature today has evolved from a purely oral culture to modern written works, even expanding into more complex digital formats (Rizqiya, 2024, p. 106-107). However, amidst the onslaught of information technology, the position of legend as a form of folklore still has a strategic position in the structure of social life. A legend is a folk tale that its supporters consider to be an event that actually happened in the past, often associated with historical figures or the origins of a particular place which has physical evidence on the ground (Dewi et al., 2022, p. 1997). In South Sumatra, particularly in the city of Lubuklinggau, the legend of Bujang Kurap is one of the most iconic narratives and holds a profound meaning for the local community.

Historically, Lubuklinggau is not merely a geographical entity on the map of South Sumatra, but rather a region that played a strategic role in the timeline of the nation's struggle. History records that Lubuklinggau was once the defense center of the South Sumatra Sub-Territory during the physical revolution, where prominent figures such as Colonel Maludin Simbolon carried out heroic military leadership (Susetyo & Ravico, 2021, p. 3-4). This historical background, imbued with the spirit of struggle, courage, and integrity, has created a cultural ecosystem that highly values heroic characters, both those recorded in formal history and those lived in collective memory through legend. The legend of Bujang Kurap, with all its complex narrative, reflects the characteristics of the Lubuklinggau people, who value self-respect, inner strength, and moral justice above all else.

The main character in this legend, Bujang Kurap, is portrayed as a man suffering from a skin condition known as ringworm, which is considered repulsive by many people. Despite this physical affliction, he possesses extraordinary spiritual powers and supernatural abilities. This depiction is not merely literary decoration, but rather a profound social critique of the human tendency to judge others solely based on physical appearance. The rejection and ridicule this character receives from society reflects the dynamics of marginalization that often occur in social structures, where those considered "different" or "disabled" are often excluded without seeing their positive side. This story provides a lesson for contemporary society about the dangers of discrimination and the importance of respecting the dignity of every human being as a noble creature.

From a folkloristic perspective, the existence of the Bujang Kurap legend in Lubuklinggau can be analyzed through four main social functions formulated by William R. Bascom. The first function is as a projection system of the community's collective imagination. The people of Lubuklinggau use the Bujang Kurap story to project their aspirations for justice that may be difficult to achieve in everyday reality full of limitations. Bujang Kurap is a symbol of victory for the weak and humiliated, an emotional value for the lower classes who long for the upholding of truth. This projection also includes a longing for a leader who possesses local wisdom and genuine concern for the fate of the people, as demonstrated by Bujang Kurap in his interactions with the social environment.

The second function is as a tool for validating cultural institutions and social structures. This legend provides historical legitimacy and sacredness to geographical sites in Lubuklinggau, such as Lake Rayo, the Pagar Remayu site, and the Ulak Lebar area. Through this legend, these places are not simply viewed as ordinary landscapes, but as living monuments that attest to the truth of the values inherited from their ancestors. This validation is crucial for building a strong cultural identity, where the community feels firmly rooted in the land they walk on.

The third function, perhaps the most dominant in the current context, is as an educational tool (*pedagogical device*). The legend of Bujang Kurap is a highly effective means of transmitting character education values because it is conveyed through a narrative that touches on the imaginative and emotional aspects. Values such as humility, honesty, determination, and the prohibition against arrogance are central messages in every retelling of the Bujang Kurap story.

The fourth function is as a tool for monitoring and regulating norms so that every member of society adheres to them. In social life in Lubuklinggau, the legend of Bujang Kurap acts as a powerful social control. Through the threat of disaster or curse experienced by the residents of Pagar Remayu due to their arrogance, the community is reminded to always behave politely, respect guests, and avoid suspicion. This control function ensures community stability amidst the current of modernization that tends to bring values of individualism that conflict with the spirit of mutual cooperation and traditional togetherness. The social integration built through collective adherence to the norms of this legend creates the harmony necessary for the continuity of community life.

In addition to these four classic functions, the Bujang Kurap legend also contains a dimension of ecological wisdom (*ecoliteracy*) that is highly relevant to current global environmental issues. The emergence of water to form Lake Rayo in the legend teaches the community about the extraordinary power of nature and the importance of maintaining ecosystem balance. From a literary ecology perspective, folktales often convey conservation messages disguised as prohibitions or taboos related to historical sites.

This research focuses on how the social function of the Bujang Kurap legend manifests in the daily behavior of the Lubuklinggau community and how the narrative is interpreted amidst the currents of modernization. The primary focus is not solely on the structural aspects of the text but rather on analyzing its pragmatic and sociological functions. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this research seeks to uncover the social realities behind the symbols in the legend. Understanding these functions in depth will provide a foundation for formulating more inclusive and sustainable regional cultural policies.

Broadly speaking, the study of the Bujang Kurap legend is inseparable from efforts to strengthen the national character, which is inherent in local wisdom, particularly in South Sumatra. This legend is not merely about the past, but also about how we view ourselves today and how we aspire to shape a more just and civilized future. Through this research, it is hoped that a new understanding will be created that can bridge sacred oral traditions with modern and dynamic social realities.

METHOD

This research applies a descriptive qualitative method systematically designed to objectively describe various concepts related to the form, meaning, and function of oral literature within the sociocultural context of its supporting community. The qualitative approach was chosen due to the living and dynamic nature of the research object, where the Bujang Kurap legend is not just a text, but a narrative that is continuously reproduced and interpreted by the people of Lubuklinggau in various social situations. Through this descriptive method, the researcher attempts to provide a rich picture of how the social functions of folklore operate amidst the reality of modernity without any manipulation of the research variables in the field. More specifically, this research uses a literary ethnography approach to explore the close relationship between oral texts and the social behavior of the community. Literary ethnography allows researchers not only to analyze the narrative structure but also to understand how the narrative functions as a guide to life, a tool for moral education, and an instrument of social control in the daily lives of residents. The focus of the research is directed entirely at extracting emic data, namely the original perspectives of the Lubuklinggau people regarding the values contained in the Bujang Kurap legend and their relevance to the challenges of today's era.

The research location is entirely centered within the administrative area of Lubuklinggau City, South Sumatra, with a particular focus on historical sites directly related to the legend's narrative. This location selection was deliberate because the presence of physical evidence in the form of historical sites provides a very strong dimension of legitimacy for the continuity of the Bujang Kurap legend to this day. Research subjects or key informants were determined using a snowball sampling technique, starting with local traditional figures, observers of Lubuklinggau culture, and senior citizens who are considered to have in-depth knowledge of the variations in the legend's narrative within the community. The main criteria for informants are individuals who have high credibility within their community and are able to explain the symbolic meaning behind each important event in the legend in depth. In this qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument, going directly into the field to observe, experience, and collect data directly from the source.

To support the data collection process, researchers were equipped with various supporting instruments, including structured interview guidelines, digital recorders, and field notes, which were used to record every detail during the interaction. Data collection techniques were carried out in an integrated manner through three main methods: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the study of relevant literature documents. Researchers conducted direct observations of physical sites and community activities that reflect the application of legendary values in their practical lives. In-depth interviews focused on exploring the subjective meanings of informants regarding how Bujang Kurap's moral messages are implemented in child-rearing patterns and how they view the social sanctions contained in the narrative. All collected data were then analyzed using an interactive model that includes stages of reduction, presentation, and drawing substantive conclusions to identify patterns of social-functional relationships that are significant for the sustainability of local culture.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The legend of Bujang Kurap in the dynamics of Lubuklinggau community life is a cultural entity that carries a very complex, profound social function and covers various aspects of life. Based on the field data analysis and theoretical studies, this legend primarily plays a vital role as a collective fantasy projection system that reflects the community's deepest aspirations for social justice. The depiction of the Bujang Kurap figure, who is physically considered disgusting because of his skin disease (ringworm) but possesses extraordinary supernatural powers, is the personification of a sharp social criticism of the practice of discrimination based on outward appearance. The existence of this legend allows for building perceptions in society to maintain hope for the existence of real truth that can transcend the bitter reality of everyday life, while also being a mirror for a worldview that upholds spiritual values over material ones. This projection does not stop at the aspect of morality, but also refers to collective hopes for the emergence of a leader who truly sides with the common people, as reflected in Bujang Kurap's concern for the social conditions around him.

Furthermore, the Bujang Kurap legend also serves a vital function as a means of validating cultural institutions and structures, strongly legitimizing the geographic and historical identity of the Lubuklinggau City region. Various physical sites, such as Lake Rayo, the Pagar Remayu site, ancient tombs, and the Ulak Lebar area, are not merely viewed as ordinary natural sites, but as tangible physical evidence that sanctifies the legend's presence within the community.

Figure 1. Ancient Tomb of Bujang Kurap



This legend explains the mythological origins of the place, which serves to strengthen the residents' emotional ties to their homeland and gives deeper meaning to the region's existence as part of history. This ratification can also be said to touch on aspects of traditional leadership in Lubuklinggau, where the figure of Bujang Kurap provides an ideal example for local leaders who must possess the values of inner wisdom, as well as a real concern for environmental sustainability and social welfare. In this case, it provides the basis for recognizing the city of Lubuklinggau as a strategic region in the history of the national independence struggle, given its symbolic connection to past military structures such as SUBKOSS (*Sub Komandemen Sumatera Selatan*), which was once centered in this area. The strengthening of cultural identity serves as a key means of protecting the community against the rapid forces of globalization. Through folklore, the community preserves its oral history and passes it down from generation to generation, ensuring that it remains part of the cultural heritage of future generations.

Simultaneously, the function of education is also a key pillar in transmitting the values of this legend from one generation to the next as part of national character formation. The legend of Bujang Kurap is closely linked to moral values taught implicitly and explicitly to the younger generation from an early age, such as the importance of maintaining humility, sincerity in helping others without ever expecting material rewards, and the strict prohibition against being arrogant and demeaning others simply because of physical differences. Through the tragic tale of an arrogant village that sank and

became Lake Rayo because its inhabitants mocked the physical condition of the main character, the people of Lubuklinggau have continuously instilled an awareness of the consequences of violating social ethics and displaying arrogance toward other living beings. This folklore-based character education pattern is considered far more effective than formal teaching methods because the moral messages conveyed are integrated with the emotions, traditions, and cultural identities of individuals from a very early age (Maulani et al., 2025, p. 399-400). This folklore plays an active role as an agent of behavioral change, encouraging society to have more sympathy and empathy for the suffering of fellow human beings and to always respect every individual regardless of temporary differences in physical, economic, or social status.

Values such as the courage to defend the truth even under pressure and the determination to face the ridicule of others are an integral part of the formation of ideal character that is expected to emerge in the young generation in Lubuklinggau so that they are not easily swayed by the negative influences of foreign culture. The similarity between this moral motif and those found in other well-known legends across the Indonesian archipelago, such as Malin Kundang, which emphasizes the consequences of disobedience, highlights the role of the Bujang Kurap legend as a universal educational medium that encourages society to uphold the noble values of Indonesian culture. Education through this legend also involves teaching about social responsibility: Bujang Kurap does not use his power for self-interest, but as a response to the injustice that befell him and the environment around him, a very strong example for the development of ethical leadership for future generations. The transcription and documentation of this folklore can be an important teaching material in the world of education to ensure that students in Indonesia can understand their own cultural roots before interacting with increasingly advanced and global science.

In addition to its educational function, the Bujang Kurap legend acts as a mechanism for monitoring and enforcing social norms (*social control*) that continuously and dynamically maintains community stability. In Lubuklinggau everyday social life, people often refer to this story as a collective moral standard for evaluating every individual or group's actions in their environment to ensure they remain in line with local values. Any violation of the norms of politeness, justice, or respect for guests reflected in the legend fragments is always associated with the risk of major natural disasters or terrible supernatural sanctions, which psychologically functions as a preventative social control so that people do not dare violate long-standing customs. This supervisory function ensures that social stability in Lubuklinggau is maintained through collective adherence to "unwritten laws" rooted in time-tested local wisdom. It also creates a very strong collective awareness of the boundaries of permissible behavior in public spaces, so that social integration can be very close among various levels of a heterogeneous and dynamic society. This control mechanism has proven effective in minimizing horizontal conflict, as each individual is reminded that the "invisible eyes" of history and nature constantly monitor their behavior, just as nature "reacted" to the inhabitants of Pagar Remayu in the past. More broadly, this normative oversight also prevents overexploitation of local natural resources, as certain territories are considered "property" of legendary figures whose honor must be protected.

A deeper analysis also reveals that this legend plays an important role in promoting social cohesion amid the growing influence of foreign cultures, which can sometimes overshadow indigenous values. The people of Lubuklinggau feel they have a unique distinguishing identity through the legend of Bujang Kurap, which reconnects them with the collective memory of their ancestors and strengthens a sense of brotherhood based on a shared and highly credible local history. This legend becomes a very effective emotional bond to minimize the potential for social fragmentation because of the existence of a shared value system that is collectively respected beyond differences in political views or individual economic levels. In addition, the wisdom contained in the legend also includes ecological aspects that are very relevant to current global environmental issues; the legend about Bujang Kurap's supernatural powers, which are closely related to the mastery of water and earth elements, symbolically teaches the community to always maintain the sustainability of nature, especially in water resource areas such as Lake Rayo, to avoid disasters or the "wrath" of nature, which is often symbolized in the legend as a form of social cleansing for human moral degradation.

The literary ecology approach reveals that the traditional Lubuklinggau community incorporates environmental protection values into its folklore. Within this tradition, environmental destruction and neglect are regarded as violations of the sacred values upheld by cultural heroes. This connection creates opportunities to align folklore preservation with sustainable environmental conservation efforts in South Sumatra. Such ecological awareness is important to incorporate into regional development policies to ensure that development in Lubuklinggau remains grounded in local wisdom and promotes harmony among humans, the Creator, and nature. Thus, the legend of Bujang Kurap serves not only as a guide for interpersonal relationships but also as a reminder of the importance of maintaining harmony between communities and their surrounding ecosystems, offering a holistic perspective on sustainable living for future generations.

With the rapid advancement of information and communication technology, the social functions of the Bujang Kurap legend have evolved through various digital revitalization and preservation efforts. These efforts include creating engaging digital comics, developing interactive learning modules using QR (Quick Response) codes in schools, and producing narrative videos for social media platforms such as YouTube. Such initiatives help keep the legend's moral messages relevant and engaging for Generation Alpha, whose daily lives are increasingly shaped by digital technology. Preserving traditional literature through digital media is not merely a response to technological trends but also an important effort to safeguard cultural heritage amid the dominance of global content that may conflict with local values. Sustainable digital preservation enables the legend's educational and normative functions to extend beyond traditional classrooms and continue to serve as a reference for behavior in wider society, including digital spaces.

This development demonstrates the adaptability and resilience of Lubuklinggau's cultural heritage in the modern era. The Bujang Kurap legend has been transformed from folklore into written works and digital content while retaining its core moral and cultural values. Digitalization also creates opportunities for developing narrative-based cultural tourism, allowing visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of Lake Rayo while exploring the legend's wisdom through digital storytelling and visual media. Overall, the social functions of the Bujang Kurap legend—from expressing aspirations for justice and legitimizing cultural institutions to providing moral education and reinforcing social norms—work together to foster a community with strong character, a clear sense of cultural identity, social solidarity, and a commitment to environmental sustainability. In this way, the legend continues to serve as a meaningful cultural resource for promoting a harmonious relationship among people, cultural heritage, and the natural environment.

The success of these social functions in the future will depend heavily on the harmonious and sustainable level of collaboration between traditional leaders, educational institutions, local governments, and creative media activists in repackaging this local wisdom to remain "alive," "sounding," and "effective" for every future generation without exception. The existence of this legend as part of a still active folklore proves that the values of South Sumatra's local wisdom remain a highly relevant and necessary moral compass in navigating social life amidst the complexities of today's modern and digital civilization. Furthermore, the legend of Bujang Kurap also serves as a symbol of resistance against mental oppression, reminding us that every individual has the potential to become a "hero" for their community through integrity and truth. Ultimately, this discussion confirms that the social function of folklore will never die as long as the community that supports it still dares to uphold the noble values that have been passed down by their ancestors through meaningful words and legendary events. The social solidarity maintained through this legend will become the main social capital for the city of Lubuklinggau in facing various development challenges in the future, making it a modern city but still having strong and steadfast cultural roots.

Integration of Digital Literacy and Local Wisdom in the Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes contextual, student-centered learning that aligns with local characteristics. A study by Simarmata (2023) showed that the implementation of digital media in rural schools requires contextual adaptation to remain relevant to students' everyday lives. Research by

Andriani et al. (2024) further emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and curriculum adaptation in digital learning for all students, including those with special needs. In the context of Indonesian language learning, digital literacy-based approaches that incorporate cultural values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and politeness in online communication can strengthen students' identity formation (Khusyairin et al., 2024). Thus, digital media function not only as instructional tools but also as a means of internalizing local cultural values in digital environments.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study confirms that the Bujang Kurap legend has a profound meaning as an instrument for maintaining moral integrity and social solidarity for the Lubuklinggau community in a fundamental and sustainable manner. Based on the analysis presented, it can be concluded that this legend is not merely a static narrative of the past or mere oral entertainment, but rather a dynamic social control mechanism that ensures that fundamental human values are upheld amidst the dynamics of rapid change. The existence of the Bujang Kurap figure, who has physical disabilities but possesses extraordinary spiritual powers, serves as an eternal reminder for society to always prioritize quality in behavior and sincerity above temporary physical appearance. This affirmation is crucial in the current sociocultural context, where the current of globalization often brings a shift in values toward individualism and materialism that can erode the roots of long-standing local wisdom.

This research successfully identified that the entire series of social functions of the Bujang Kurap legend, ranging from a projection system for aspirations for justice, a tool for legitimizing cultural institutions, a medium for moral education, to an instrument for monitoring norms, work synergistically to form a cohesive social order. As a projection system, this legend provides a space for the community to maintain hope for the establishment of moral justice beyond complex social realities. As a means of legitimization, the existence of physical sites such as Lake Rayo and Ulak Lebar provides strong historical legitimacy, which not only strengthens regional identity but also strengthens residents' sense of ownership of the land they occupy.

Furthermore, the character education function contained in this legend has proven to be a highly effective pillar in shaping the social behavior of the younger generation from an early age. Through emotionally engaging narratives, values such as humility, honesty, and respect for the dignity of fellow human beings can be more deeply ingrained. This is reinforced by the social control mechanisms inherent in narratives of punishment or disaster experienced by arrogant people, which preventatively regulate patterns of social interaction to maintain harmony with prevailing norms of decency and customary law. The ecological awareness that emerges from the retelling of Lake Rayo's origins also contributes significantly to environmental preservation, where the community feels a moral responsibility to preserve nature as a sacred heritage from their ancestors.

As a final recommendation, this study emphasizes the need for more intensive collaboration between local governments, educational institutions, traditional leaders, and creative communities in developing integrated cultural policies. The Bujang Kurap legend should be viewed as a valuable local cultural and moral asset in the process of developing a character-based region. The researcher hopes that future studies will explore the potential of this legend to support a narrative-based tourism creative economy that enhances local community welfare while preserving the heritage of Indonesian folklore as an integral part of the nation's cultural identity and a source of pride on the global stage.

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