

# The Legend of Tangkuban Prau (Indonesian folktale) as a Reflection of Customary Law Values: A Study of Literature and Law

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## Article history

Received: 18 September 2024

Revised: 14 October 2024

Accepted: 15 December 2024

## Keywords

Indonesian Folklore

Law Values

Moral Values

## Abstract

This study explores the Indonesian legend of Tangkuban Prau as a reflection of customary law (hukum adat) values through a literary and legal lens. The research aims to uncover how the narrative encapsulates and reinforces societal norms, focusing on themes of familial respect, ethical boundaries, and social harmony in West Javanese culture. Using qualitative methods, the study analyzes the legend's narrative structure, character dynamics, and symbolic motifs, revealing its role as both a cultural artifact and a medium for moral education. The findings demonstrate that the tale conveys the principles of hukum adat through its depiction of moral dilemmas, cosmic justice, and the consequences of violating societal norms. Moreover, the story's timeless appeal highlights its potential for cultural preservation and intergenerational education. This research underscores the relevance of folklore in bridging tradition and modernity, contributing to the broader discourse on the intersection of literature and law in cultural studies.

## 1. Introduction

The intersection between literature and law offers a compelling lens to explore the interplay between culture, ethics, and societal regulations. Literature, especially folklore, has historically functioned as a repository of communal wisdom and values, encapsulating entertainment and the moral and legal codes that shape a society (Syakur et al., 2023). Folklore often embeds customary law principles, serving as a medium through which communities communicate their norms and regulations across generations. This study seeks to delve into this dynamic by analyzing the legend of Tangkuban Prau, a well-known Indonesian folktale, through the dual perspectives of literature and law.

The legend of Tangkuban Prau, rooted in the cultural heritage of West Java, tells the story of Dayang Sumbi and her son, Sangkuriang. This tale, imbued with moral and customary values, narrates the tragic consequences of violating societal norms, particularly those governing familial relationships and ethical boundaries. As the narrative unfolds, it vividly portrays the cultural and legal principles underpinning traditional Indonesian society. The tale's dramatic conclusion, marked by punishment and transformation, serves as a potent reminder of the repercussions of transgressing these deeply ingrained laws (Andalas et al., 2022).

Customary law, or hukum adat, is a cornerstone of Indonesian tradition, encompassing unwritten rules that govern social interactions, hierarchies, and ethical conduct (Batubara et al., 2023). These laws, shaped by local customs and beliefs, play a crucial role in maintaining harmony within communities. The legend of Tangkuban Prau encapsulates these principles, illustrating how violations of adat norms, such as improper relationships or disobedience to parental authority, lead to social and moral consequences. By analyzing this story, we gain insights into how folklore serves as an educational tool for reinforcing customary law (Marbun et al., 2024).

The narrative structure of Tangkuban Prau is particularly intriguing, blending dramatic tension with moral instruction. The story begins with Dayang Sumbi's wish for companionship, which inadvertently leads to the birth of her son, Sangkuriang, under extraordinary circumstances (Liubana et al., 2021). As Sangkuriang grows older, his actions both intentional and unintentional challenge the boundaries of familial and social norms (Fadhli, 2020). His proposal to marry his mother, rooted in ignorance of their relationship, represents a critical breach of adat values, prompting the dramatic climax of the tale.

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doi:

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Through the lens of literature, the legend showcases universal themes such as love, defiance, and consequences, while also reflecting the specific cultural and legal context of West Java. The symbolic elements within the narrative, such as the mountain that forms as a result of Sangkuriang's failed attempt to fulfill Dayang Sumbi's conditions, underscore the interplay between human actions and natural or divine intervention a recurring motif in folklore that often emphasizes the enforcement of justice (Ningsih et al., 2024).

From a legal perspective, the tale serves as an allegory for the enforcement of customary law. Sangkuriang's actions, though rooted in ignorance, still attract punishment, reflecting the principle that ignorance of the law does not absolve one from its consequences. This mirrors the adat belief in the importance of communal harmony and the inevitability of retribution for those who disrupt it (Sudrajad, 2024). The story, therefore, not only entertains but also educates its audience about the importance of adhering to cultural norms and laws.

In contemporary society, the relevance of folklore like Tangkuban Prau cannot be understated. As Indonesia continues to modernize, the principles of customary law embedded in these tales offer valuable insights into the cultural foundations of the nation (Ratri et al., 2021). They remind modern audiences of the enduring importance of familial respect, ethical boundaries, and societal harmony values that remain integral to Indonesian identity despite changing times.

This study also highlights the interdisciplinary potential of analyzing folklore. By bridging literary analysis with legal studies, it offers a comprehensive understanding of how traditional stories like Tangkuban Prau function as both cultural artifacts and legal texts. The narrative, characters, and resolutions within the tale are examined not only for their literary merit but also for their ability to encapsulate the principles of customary law.

This research seeks to address several key questions: What specific values of customary law are reflected in the legend of Tangkuban Prau? How does the narrative structure and character dynamics communicate these values? And, most importantly, how can these lessons from folklore inform contemporary understandings of law and culture? By addressing these questions, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that explores the intersection of literature and law.

In conclusion, the legend of Tangkuban Prau serves as a rich case study for examining the interplay between literature and customary law. It not only reflects the moral and legal principles of West Javanese society but also provides a timeless reminder of the consequences of violating societal norms. By exploring this narrative through an interdisciplinary lens, this study aims to shed light on the cultural significance of folklore and its role in preserving and transmitting the values of customary law across generations.

## 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the legend of Tangkuban Prau as a reflection of customary law values through the perspectives of literature and law. The qualitative approach is suitable for this research as it enables an in-depth exploration of the narrative, themes, and cultural significance embedded within the folklore (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as cited by (Sudrajad, 2023). The methodology consists of three key stages: data collection, data analysis, and interpretation.

The primary data for this study is the text of the legend of Tangkuban Prau, obtained from written sources, such as anthologies of Indonesian folklore, and oral accounts where available. Secondary data includes scholarly articles, books, and research papers related to the themes of folklore, literature, and customary law, with a focus on West Javanese traditions. To ensure the reliability and comprehensiveness of the data, a variety of sources are used, including historical documentation and academic interpretations of the tale. The analysis is conducted through two primary frameworks: literary analysis and legal-cultural analysis.

The narrative structure, character development, symbolism, and thematic elements of the legend are examined to uncover its underlying messages and moral lessons. This stage focuses on identifying how the story conveys values related to justice, family relationships, and societal norms. Techniques such as textual analysis and thematic coding are applied to dissect the narrative's literary components. Then analyzing the legend through the lens of hukum adat (customary law), with an emphasis on identifying specific legal

principles and societal values reflected in the narrative. The analysis explores the alignment between the story's events and the unwritten norms governing traditional West Javanese society. Relevant concepts such as familial obligations, moral boundaries, and the enforcement of social harmony are highlighted.

The findings from the literary and legal-cultural analyses are integrated to construct a comprehensive understanding of how the legend of Tangkuban Prau serves as a reflection of customary law. Interpretative methods are used to draw connections between the story's elements and broader cultural and legal contexts, allowing the research to reveal the significance of folklore as a medium for the transmission of legal and moral values. To ensure the validity of the research, triangulation is applied by comparing data from various sources, including different versions of the legend and interpretations from experts in literature and law. Peer debriefing is also conducted to refine the analysis and enhance the credibility of the findings.

This research focuses exclusively on the legend of Tangkuban Prau and its representation of customary law values in West Javanese culture. While the findings provide insights into the intersection of literature and law, they may not fully generalize to other regions or cultural contexts. However, the methodology can be adapted for similar studies on folklore and customary law in different traditions. This study ensures ethical standards by properly acknowledging all sources of data and respecting the cultural heritage of the communities involved. If oral accounts are used, permission will be obtained from the storytellers, and their contributions will be credited appropriately. By combining literary and legal perspectives, this methodology aims to provide a nuanced analysis of the Tangkuban Prau legend, demonstrating its dual role as a cultural artifact and a medium for preserving customary law values.

### **3. Result and Discussion**

The analysis of the legend of Tangkuban Prau reveals its intricate role as a cultural artifact that reflects and reinforces the values of customary law (*hukum adat*) in West Javanese society. Through its narrative structure, character development, and thematic content, the story encapsulates fundamental principles of social harmony, familial obligations, and moral accountability. This section discusses the findings in detail, highlighting how the tale conveys these values and their relevance within the broader framework of customary law and cultural identity.

The legend portrays the relationship between Dayang Sumbi and Sangkuriang, a dynamic fraught with emotional complexity and moral challenges. Dayang Sumbi's decision to raise her son alone, after the unusual circumstances of his birth, sets the stage for the unfolding conflict. Her initial granting of blessings to Sangkuriang for his achievements, and later rejection of his marriage proposal upon discovering his identity as her son, underscores the moral dilemmas that arise when familial roles are inadvertently blurred. This tension between personal emotions and societal norms lies at the heart of the story.

A significant theme in the legend is the enforcement of ethical boundaries within familial relationships, a cornerstone of *hukum adat*. The story emphasizes the sanctity of kinship roles and the severe consequences of transgressing these boundaries. Sangkuriang's ignorance of his true identity does not exempt him from accountability; instead, the narrative highlights the inevitability of retribution for actions that violate cultural norms. The transformation of the landscape into the Tangkuban Prau mountain becomes a symbolic act of justice, illustrating how nature itself enforces the balance disrupted by human actions. This motif aligns with the *adat* belief in cosmic justice, where harmony must be restored, even through supernatural means.

The depiction of Dayang Sumbi as a strong, decisive figure reflects the role of women in upholding and transmitting *adat* values. Her rejection of Sangkuriang's proposal, despite the personal and emotional turmoil it causes, demonstrates her commitment to preserving the integrity of her community's norms. This portrayal reinforces the idea that adherence to *adat* principles often requires personal sacrifice, emphasizing the collective well-being over individual desires. Her actions serve as a moral compass within the narrative, guiding both the characters and the audience toward an understanding of customary law's significance.

Symbolism within the story further deepens its cultural and legal resonance. The failed construction of the lake and the subsequent flipping of the boat, which becomes the Tangkuban Prau mountain, signify the failure of Sangkuriang's defiance against natural and moral laws. The mountain, a permanent and imposing geographical feature, serves as a lasting reminder of the consequences of transgression. In this

way, the legend not only narrates a cautionary tale but also immortalizes adat values in the physical landscape, ensuring their perpetuation across generations.

The findings also reveal how the legend functions as a medium for intergenerational education. By embedding moral lessons within an engaging narrative, the story captures the imagination of its audience while subtly instilling the principles of hukum adat. This dual function of entertainment and education underscores the importance of folklore in preserving cultural identity and fostering a sense of communal responsibility. The tale serves as a conduit through which societal norms are communicated, understood, and internalized by younger generations, ensuring their continuity in an evolving cultural landscape.

The study also situates the legend within the broader discourse on the role of customary law in Indonesian society. As a representation of hukum adat, the tale reflects the dynamic relationship between individuals and their communities, emphasizing the need for balance and harmony. The narrative's resolution, where cosmic justice prevails, highlights the adat perspective that societal order is a collective responsibility, upheld through adherence to moral and legal principles. This perspective resonates with contemporary debates on the relevance of customary law in modern legal frameworks, demonstrating how traditional values can coexist with and complement formal legal systems.

Furthermore, the narrative's timeless appeal and adaptability suggest its potential as a resource for cultural preservation and education (Widhiyanti & Gunanto, 2020). By engaging with the legend through literary and legal lenses, this research highlights its multifaceted significance, offering insights into how folklore can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity (Eliyanah & Zahro, 2021). The enduring relevance of the story lies in its ability to adapt to changing societal contexts while maintaining its core message about the importance of social harmony and moral accountability.

The legend of Tangkuban Prau serves as a rich cultural text that embodies the principles of hukum adat in West Javanese society (Oscario et al., 2021). Its narrative elements, symbolic motifs, and moral lessons collectively reinforce the values of familial respect, ethical boundaries, and communal harmony. By preserving these values through storytelling, the legend not only educates but also ensures the continuity of cultural identity. This study reaffirms the significance of folklore as a medium for understanding and appreciating the interplay between literature and law, offering a framework for exploring similar narratives in other cultural contexts (Ningsih et al., 2024).

#### 4. Conclusion

The legend of Tangkuban Prau stands as a profound example of how folklore serves as a cultural medium for transmitting and preserving the values of customary law (hukum adat). Through its narrative, the story encapsulates the moral and legal principles that underpin traditional West Javanese society, emphasizing the importance of familial respect, ethical boundaries, and social harmony. The characters and their actions, particularly the tension between Dayang Sumbi and Sangkuriang, highlight the consequences of violating adat norms and the communal responsibility to uphold these values.

The symbolic transformation of the boat into the Tangkuban Prau mountain reflects the adat belief in cosmic justice, where the balance must be restored through natural or divine intervention. This not only reinforces the moral lessons of the story but also embeds them in the physical and cultural landscape, ensuring their perpetuation across generations. Furthermore, the tale demonstrates the dual function of folklore as both an engaging narrative and a tool for moral education, effectively bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

By examining the legend through the lenses of literature and law, this study highlights the interdisciplinary potential of folklore as a subject of scholarly inquiry. The findings underscore the relevance of hukum adat in contemporary society, illustrating how traditional values can coexist with modern legal systems while contributing to cultural identity and social cohesion. Ultimately, the legend of Tangkuban Prau reminds us of the enduring power of storytelling to communicate, preserve, and adapt the core principles of a community's heritage.

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