

## The Form of Culture in East Kalimantan Folklore Larangan Mersapik: Literary Anthropological Study

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### Abstract

This study examines the cultural values contained in the folktale *Larangan Mersapik* through a literary anthropology approach. The main problem of this research is how cultural forms are represented in the story and how they reflect the community's belief system and social life. This study aims to identify and analyze the cultural elements and cultural manifestations reflected in the folktale as a representation of local wisdom. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a literary anthropology approach. Data was obtained through documentation techniques by examining narrative units in the folktale that represent cultural values, social norms, belief systems, and traditional knowledge. The analysis is based on Koentjaraningrat's concept of cultural forms, which includes ideal culture (values, ideas, and norms), social activities (patterned social actions), and physical culture (artifacts). The results show that the folktale *Larangan Mersapik* reflects three interconnected forms of culture. The ideal form is reflected in the belief that *Mersapik* is a spiritual entity related to ancestral spirits and environmental balance. The activity form appears in collective social actions such as customary deliberations and ritual ceremonies conducted to restore social harmony. Meanwhile, the physical form is represented through ritual objects and traditional tools that function not only as practical objects but also as symbolic media connecting humans with the spiritual world. These findings indicate that the folktale serves as a cultural medium that preserves traditional knowledge, moral values, and ecological awareness within the community.

**Keywords:** Cultural Values; Folklore; Literary Anthropology.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Folklore is the cultural heritage of a group that is spread and passed down through tradition, in both oral and non-oral forms. The term "folklore" comes from the English "folklore", which consists of two words, namely "folk" and "lore". "Folk" refers to a group of individuals who have distinctive physical, social, and cultural characteristics, while "lore" refers to the customs or traditions of the folk that are transmitted orally or through generations. Folklore is a field of science that studies and discusses culture. In Indonesia, every region, ethnicity, tribe, group, nation, and religion has developed its own folklore. Therefore, Indonesia has a lot of folklore, such as folk tales, legends, music,

oral history, proverbs, jokes, superstitions, and others. Characteristics of folklore include its spread and inheritance, which is usually done orally, namely through stories passed from generation to generation (Yuliana et al., 2024).

One form of folklore is folk tales. Folk tales are part of an oral tradition passed down from generation to generation within society. Through folk tales, people convey not only entertaining stories but also moral values, social norms, and local wisdom that guide people's lives. Folk tales are also often used as a medium for character education for the younger generation because they contain moral messages implicit in the storyline and characters (Dewi & Agung, 2023). Traditional folklore is an inseparable part of a society's culture. Since ancient times, folklore has been an important means of conveying local values, traditions, and wisdom from generation to generation (Bhattacharya & Karmakar, 2021). Traditional folklore not only functions as entertainment but also has a deep meaning that reflects the life and values of the society that produces it (Sumitri, 2023).

Folklore is a heritage conveyed orally as stories. These stories can be myths, legends, or fairy tales. Because of the way they are conveyed, folk tales can be understood as belonging to a particular community or as collective narratives passed on orally from one generation to the next. Characters and events in folk tales are considered real, occurred in the past, or may be completely fictional (Umri, 2021). One example of folklore rich in local cultural values and beliefs is *Larangan Mersapik*, which originates from West Kutai, East Kalimantan, and is known among the Tunjung Benuaq Dayak community. West Kutai Regency is one of the administrative regions in East Kalimantan Province, formed through the expansion of Kutai Regency on October 4, 1999, with its government center in Sendawar. This area is known as the "City of Culture", which reflects the strong traditional and cultural values of the local community, especially the Dayak Tunjung and Dayak Benuaq tribes as the dominant ethnic groups. Geographically, West Kutai has a large area dominated by tropical forests, rivers, and inland areas that still maintain a close relationship between humans and nature. Many people's lives depend on natural resources such as rivers and forests, both as a source of livelihood and as part of traditional belief systems. West Kutai is also known for its cultural richness, one of which is the *Beliatn* healing ritual tradition, which shows the continuity of the religious system and local wisdom of the Dayak community (Cahyat et al., 2005).

The Benuaq Dayak people are an ethnic group known to have strong oral traditions, especially those related to relationships between humans, nature, and the spiritual world (Selleto, 2002; Salander, 2016, as cited in Aulia et al., 2025). In addition, Dayak oral traditions, including myths, legends, and stories of spiritual journeys, reflect the cultural values that live in society and describe their closeness to their ancestors and the natural surroundings (Putri, 2022, as cited in Aulia et al., 2025).

The Benuaq Dayak are one of the Dayak sub-tribes belonging to the Barito River or grouped with the Dayak Ngaju, Ot Danum, Siang, Murung, Luangan, Ma'anyan, Bentian, and Tonyooi. Benuaq, in its etymology, comes from the word *Benuo*, which means "native". The Benuaq Dayak are geographically spread across the province of East Kalimantan, with the majority found in West Kutai Regency and several sub-districts, namely Bongan District, Muara Lawa, Damai, Nyuatan, parts of Bentian, Mook Manar Bulatn, and Barong Tongkok sub-districts (Fitriani et al., 2022).

This story tells of the prohibition against catching and consuming water creatures called *Mersapik*, which are believed to be messengers of ancestors and guardians of natural balance. Violation of this prohibition is considered to bring disaster to individuals and community groups. This story reflects the strong relationship between traditions, beliefs, and ecological awareness of traditional communities in maintaining the balance of life (Werzinsky et al., 2022).

The term anthropology comes from Greek, consisting of *anthropos*, meaning human, and *logos/logy*, meaning science, according to Ariyono Suyono (1985). From an etymological perspective, anthropology is a science that studies humans. Alfred Kroeber, an anthropologist from the United States, stated that the scope of anthropology is very broad because it encompasses humans as physical creatures, humans in prehistoric times, and humans as cultural creatures who inherit complex systems of habits, attitudes, and behavior. Anthropology is also seen as a science that studies humans from a biological perspective, regarding production methods, traditions, and values in their social interactions. So humans can be analyzed from two perspectives: as biological and cultural

creatures (Septiani & Mufid, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, this research adopts a literary anthropology approach based on the cultural concept proposed by Koentjaraningrat. According to Koentjaraningrat, culture is the totality of systems of thought, behavior, and human creations that arise in social interactions through the learning process. From this perspective, literary works are understood as a reflection of culture that represents the social life of society (Setiawati et al., 2023). Analysis of culture is carried out using seven universal cultural elements, namely religious belief and ritual systems, community organizational structure, knowledge systems, language, art, ways of earning a living, and technology and tools (Juherni et al., 2021).

Through this approach, literary works can be analyzed based on three forms of culture, namely ideas or notions which include values and norms in the story, activities or actions seen in the characters' behavior in accordance with tradition, as well as cultural artifacts in the form of physical objects or symbols that appear in the narrative (Alfan, 2024). Literary anthropology views literary works not only as works of art but also as a mirror of the cultural life of society, which describes the attitudes, interactions, and systems of meaning within them (Damayanti et al., 2024).

The selection of the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore as the research subject was based on several reasons. First, this story contains traditional prohibitions that remain tied to the cultural practices of local communities, showing how society regulates social behavior through such stories. Second, this story illustrates the relationships among humans, nature, and spiritual forces, which are characteristic of Dayak culture. Third, this folklore has not been studied much academically, especially through a literary anthropology approach, thus creating space for research that can reveal the cultural values contained in the story.

Several previous studies have examined folklore using a literary anthropology approach to understand the relationship between literary works and society's culture. Such as research conducted by Rahman (2022) entitled "Representation of Madurese Community Harmony in Madurese Folklore (Literary Anthropology Study)". This study highlights the concept of harmony in people's lives as reflected in folklore, including harmony among people with themselves, each other, and nature. This research shows that folklore serves as a medium for transmitting the life values, social norms, and worldviews of the Madurese people, thereby forming a collective cultural identity.

Furthermore, research conducted by Maharani et al. (2021) entitled "Literary Anthropological Study in the Collection of South Sumatran Folklore 'Sembesat Sembesit'". This story focuses on identifying cultural forms, elements, and values within a collection of South Sumatran folklore. This research found that folklore encompasses a range of ideas, social activities, and human works that reflect the seven elements of universal culture, according to Koentjaraningrat. The focus of this research is on mapping cultural elements as a whole within folklore collections as representations of regional culture.

Another research was conducted by Juherni et al. (2021) entitled "Culture of the Besemah Community in Folklore Stories of the Three Gods Who Founded the Besemah Universe by Dian Susilastri (Literary Anthropology Study)". This research examines the story's structure, as well as the form and cultural elements of the Besemah community, as reflected in folklore. The research results show that religious systems, knowledge systems, social organizations, technology, livelihoods, and language are part of the cultural identity of the Besemah community. This research focuses more on the relationship between story structure and the manifestation of local culture within the supporting community.

Research in literary anthropology on folklore generally examines cultural forms and values in oral literature. However, to date, no research has examined the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore using a literary anthropology approach. This research gap opens space for studies on the relationship among the three forms of Koentjaraningrat culture and the function of customary prohibitions as a social mechanism. This research focuses on the cultural function and meaning of customary prohibitions as a system of social control (Nakawake & Sato, 2019). The novelty of the research lies in its study of traditional prohibitions as both a means of moral education and a symbol of the balance of relations among humans, nature, and ancestors in the Dayak Tunjung Benuaq community. It is hoped that this research can enrich studies in literary anthropology regarding the function of folklore as a medium for transmitting

cultural values and shaping social character. The urgency of conducting research on the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore lies in its role as a means of social control and preserving environmental balance through cultural narratives. The ban on *Mersapik* is not just a myth but reflects the cultural system of community groups for maintaining nature conservation and instilling respect for traditions and ancestors. For this reason, it is very important to conduct this research to reveal how folklore contributes to the formation of cultural awareness, the preservation of the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, and the maintenance of the cultural identity of local communities from a literary anthropology perspective.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with content analysis. The qualitative method was chosen because this research aims to understand and interpret the meanings of cultural values, belief systems, and social practices embedded in folklore texts, rather than to measure data numerically. A content analysis approach is used to examine the text in depth as a representation of society's culture. The data source for this research is the text units in the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore (2024), which represent the cultural values of the Dayak Tunjung Benuaq community in West Kutai. Research data was obtained from quotations relevant to the study's focus, taken from the book *East Kalimantan Folk Tales* by Avisa Prana Tungga. The data collected includes narratives, dialogues, and events that contain elements of culture, religious systems, and social practices.

The data analysis technique uses a content analysis method which aims to identify, classify, and interpret cultural elements in the text. The analysis was carried out based on the framework of literary anthropology and the concept of culture according to Koentjaraningrat, which includes three forms of culture, namely ideas, activities, and artifacts, as well as seven elements of universal culture (Baiduri, 2020). The data analysis process in this research follows the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2013), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. At the data reduction stage, researchers select and focus on textual segments that reflect cultural values, religious systems, social organizations, and local knowledge. The selected data is then categorized according to the concept of the three forms of culture and elements of universal culture. The next stage is presenting the data, namely compiling the results of the analysis into a systematic descriptive account, including textual quotations as empirical evidence. This presentation aims to show the relationship between the structure of folklore and the cultural system of the supporting community. The final stage is drawing conclusions by interpreting cultural meaning and linking research findings to a literary anthropology perspective. In this stage, the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore is understood as a representation of social values, belief systems, and the community's local wisdom in maintaining a balanced relationship between humans and nature.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Findings

Based on the content analysis of the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore, nine data units were identified and classified according to Koentjaraningrat's concept of cultural forms. The findings indicate the presence of three cultural forms: ideal, activity, and physical. These forms are represented by three dominant universal cultural elements: the religious system, the social organization system, and the knowledge system. The classification of the research data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of Research Data

No	Forms of Culture	Elements of Universal Culture	Data
1	Ideal Form (Ideas, Values, and Norms)	Religious System	Data 01, Data 02, Data 03
2	Activity form (Patterned Social Actions)	Social Organization System	Data 04, Data 05
3	Physical Form (Artifact)	Knowledge System	Data 06, Data 07, Data 08, Data 09

The classified data was subsequently analyzed using the perspective of literary anthropology and Koentjaraningrat's cultural theory to identify the relationship between cultural forms and the cultural elements represented in the folklore.

### 3.2. Discussion

The classified data was analyzed using Koentjaraningrat's cultural theory and a literary-anthropological perspective to reveal the representation of cultural forms and universal cultural elements in the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore.

#### A. Ideal Form (Ideas, Values, and Norms)

The manifestation of culture in the form of ideas or notions in the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore is clearly visible through the system of values, norms, and traditional beliefs that live in the collective consciousness of society. According to Koentjaraningrat, culture at the idea level is a system of ideas, values, and rules that are abstract and guide people's behavior in social life. Culture not only takes the form of concrete actions but also exists as a value concept that is inherited through the learning process and social traditions. This is in line with the definition of culture as "the entire system of ideas, actions, and results of human work in social life," which is passed down from generation to generation. In the story of the *Larangan Mersapik*, the manifestation of these ideas and religious elements is reflected in the community's belief in traditional taboos, which prohibit the catching and consumption of *Mersapik*. This value can be seen in the following quotes:

Data 01

"Ada satu aturan adat yang tidak boleh dilanggar: larangan menangkap dan memakan Mersapik."  
(Tungga, 2025, p. 31).

Data 02

"Makhluk ini dipercaya bukan sekadar hewan sungai, melainkan utusan para leluhur dan penjaga keseimbangan alam." (Tungga, 2025, pp. 31–32).

Data 03

"Ketua adat mengingatkan bahwa melanggar aturan adat bukanlah masalah sederhana. Ini bukan sekadar rasa bersalah kepada masyarakat, tetapi juga bentuk ketidaktaatan kepada leluhur dan alam semesta." (Tungga, 2025, p. 34).

According to Koentjaraningrat, values and norms are part of an ideal culture that lives in people's minds and is passed down from generation to generation. The belief that *Mersapik* is a messenger from the ancestors reflects a system of symbolic meaning that helps maintain natural balance. This prohibition is also part of a universal cultural element within a religious system. The religious system in this story can be seen through the community's belief that *Mersapik* are not ordinary creatures, but rather spiritual entities related to ancestors and the balance of nature. This is in line with the opinion of Simarmata (2024), confirming that the existence of this prohibition shows the enactment of collective norms or value systems that regulate individual behavior to be in harmony with the traditions and norms that apply in society. This research opinion is also in line with previous research regarding beliefs emphasized by Siregar and Herman (2025) that this belief shows the community's view of life which views nature as a sacred space inhabited by invisible forces; thus, man's relationship with nature is not exploitative, but spiritual and moral.

According to Koentjaraningrat's perspective, religious systems serve to give meaning to natural phenomena and to regulate human behavior through sacred values. In the *Larangan Mersapik* story, traditional prohibitions are obeyed not only because of social pressure but also because of religious awareness that violating the will of the ancestors means violating the guardians of nature.

The belief that *Mersapik* is a messenger from ancestors shows the existence of a symbolic meaning system that functions to maintain cosmic balance between humans, nature, and the spiritual world. This is in line with

previous research on belief in spirits, as emphasized by Muhamad et al. (2023), who argue that, anthropologically, belief in ancestral spirits in this story reflects an animistic religious system that remains strong in traditional society. Nature is understood as a living entity that has spirit and power. Therefore, prohibitions or taboos become sacred mechanisms to protect the social and ecological order. In line with previous research in cultural anthropology, as emphasized by Aman et al. (2022), such research confirms that myths and taboos in folklore often function as mechanisms of social control and traditional environmental conservation. Customary law and traditional beliefs form cultural ideas that guide collective community behavior. Collective beliefs strengthen social solidarity through shared values considered sacred.

Apart from regulating human relations with nature, a religious system, in its ideal form, also functions to strengthen social solidarity. The collective belief in the sacredness of *Mersapik* forms a unity of values that is considered sacred and non-negotiable. These sacred values form the basis of social cohesion because all members of society share the same beliefs. Therefore, the ideal form in this story not only contains traditional rules, but also reflects a complex cultural value system, including respect for ancestors, ecological awareness, and collective moral responsibility (Munsiyid & Sudarto, 2024).

### **B. Activity Form (Patterned Social Actions)**

The manifestation of culture in the form of activities in the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore is evident in the community's social actions, which are patterned and carried out collectively in accordance with customary rules. According to Koentjaraningrat, the form of activity is a social system that manifests in human behavior when cultural norms are observed in everyday life. Cultural activities do not stand alone, but rather are real manifestations of ideas or values that society previously believed in. Therefore, the actions of the people in this story reflect how traditional norms are realized in concrete social practices.

This can be seen when the community realizes that there is a violation of customs which causes a social disaster in the form of a disease that befalls the entire village.

Data 04

*Ketua adat segera memanggil seluruh penduduk untuk berkumpul di balai kampung.* (Tungga, 2025, p. 33).

Data 05

*Selain itu, Balanai harus berpuasa memakan ikan selama tujuh hari dan tinggal di balai adat, terpisah dari penduduk, sebagai bentuk pertobatan.* (Tungga, 2025, p. 34).

In line with previous research related to social systems, Dauh et al. (2020) emphasized that social systems are related to social structure, leadership organization, role division, and conflict resolution mechanisms that are mutually recognized by community members. In the *Larangan Mersapik* story, this was seen when the community realized that there was a violation of customs which had a social impact in the form of disease that befell the entire village. The response that emerged was not individual action, but rather collective action organized through customary structures.

According to Fadruallah and Syam (2024), the presence of traditional leaders as community leaders indicates a structured social organization. Traditional leaders have moral and social legitimacy to make decisions because their positions are recognized within the cultural order of society. According to Koentjaraningrat, social organization is a system of relationships between individuals that is regulated through mutually agreed-upon norms, status, and social roles. The traditional leader in this story acts as a guardian of social balance and a mediator between society and the spiritual order. Gathering activities in traditional halls show that traditional society prioritizes collective interests over individual ones. Traditional deliberation is a conflict-resolution mechanism that reflects the values of togetherness and social solidarity. Problem solving is not done personally or unilaterally, but through a process of discussion and joint consideration. This shows that the social system in the story is based on the principles of collectivity and consensus (Asifah & Alauddin, 2025).

Furthermore, the implementation of traditional ceremonies, fasting, and the exile of figures who violate norms show a structured pattern of social action. According to Maskur (2023), this activity is not only understood as a spiritual ritual, but as a social mechanism to restore community harmony. Furthermore, within the Koentjaraningrat framework, cultural activities are a social system that appears in the patterned behavior of society. Rituals in this story serve as a means of reconciliation not only between humans and nature but also among members of society affected by these violations.

Elements of the social system are increasingly visible through the legitimacy of customary decisions. In addition, in traditional societies, the authority of traditional leaders does not derive from formal power but from collective trust and the ability to maintain social balance. Therefore, according to Yusuf and Effendi (2021), every traditional decision is seen as a representation of the collective will, which must be respected by all members of the community. This social structure shows a clear division of roles, in which traditional leaders act as regulators of norms, while the community acts as the implementer of joint decisions. Thus, the activities in the *Larangan Mersapik* story do not only describe religious actions, but also a social system that functions to maintain group stability and solidarity.

### C. Physical Form (Artifact)

The manifestation of culture in physical form and artifacts in the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore is evident in various cultural objects used in daily life and in the performance of traditional rituals. According to Koentjaraningrat, artifacts are the most concrete form of culture because they can be seen, touched, and documented. Artifacts not only have a practical function, but also contain symbolic meaning that represents the value system and knowledge of the supporting community. Therefore, the physical form in this story cannot be separated from the underlying knowledge system. This can be seen in the use of objects used for livelihood and offerings in redemption ceremonies.

Data 06

*Masyarakat menggantungkan kehidupan mereka pada sungai dan hutan di sekitarnya, dengan aturan adat yang dipegang teguh secara turun-temurun.* (Tungga, 2025, p. 31).

Data 07

*Ada satu aturan adat yang tidak boleh dilanggar: larangan menangkap dan memakan Mersapik.* (Tungga, 2025, p. 31).

Data 08

*Balanai mengayuh sampan kecilnya lebih jauh dari biasanya. Setelah berjam-jam menebar jala dan melempar kail tanpa hasil, ia merasa frustrasi. Di tengah rasa putus asa, pandangannya tertuju pada sosok yang bergerak lincah di air jernih: seekor Mersapik.* (Tungga, 2025, p. 32).

Data 09

*Upacara itu memerlukan berbagai persembahan, termasuk sirih, kapur, ayam putih, dan kain tenun.* (Tungga, 2025, p. 34).

In line with previous research related to knowledge systems, Bago et al. (2025) emphasized that the knowledge system includes people's understanding of nature, the environment, flora, fauna, as well as ways of survival that are obtained through collective experience and passed down from generation to generation. In the *Larangan Mersapik* story, the community's knowledge system is evident in the close relationship between human life and the river environment, which serves as a source of livelihood. This is in line with Azwan and Andriyani (2023)'s view, as evidenced by the use of canoes, nets, and other fishing gear, which reflect traditional technological systems. Koentjaraningrat explained that traditional technology is part of a living equipment system that shows humans' ability to adapt to their geographical environment. River communities develop fishing gear that suits local natural conditions. These artifacts are not just economic tools, but rather the result of ecological knowledge built through long interactions with nature.

Apart from fishing tools, physical forms are also seen in ritual objects used in redemption ceremonies. Betel, white chickens, woven cloth, and other offerings are cultural artifacts that have symbolic meaning. Various cultures in the archipelago interpret betel as a symbol of respect and brotherhood. The white chicken symbolizes purity, while the woven cloth represents local cultural identity. These artifacts are not just ceremonial equipment, but symbols of communication between humans and the spiritual world (Lodra, 2017).

According to Al-ansoriy et al. (2025), the symbolic meaning of these objects cannot be understood without the cultural knowledge system behind them. People know the function and meaning of each object based on inherited traditions. In this context, the knowledge system works as an interpretive basis that gives meaning to artifacts. Cultural anthropology studies show that ritual objects often serve as symbolic media representing human relationships with local cosmologies and belief systems. Artifacts become a bridge between ideal forms (values and beliefs) and activity forms (rituals and traditional deliberations) (Pasaribu et al., 2025).

Koentjaraningrat stated that the knowledge system encompasses all of society's understanding of nature and ways of survival, which are inherited through the social learning process. In the *Larangan Mersapik* story, this knowledge system is concretely manifested in traditional technological artifacts and ritual symbols. Therefore, it can be emphasized that the elements of the knowledge system in this story are manifested predominantly as physical culture (artifacts), as living equipment, ritual objects, and material symbols that reflect the collective experience of society.

Furthermore, the ban on catching *Mersapik* itself can be understood as a form of local ecological knowledge. The community understands that the river must be maintained in balance so that it remains a source of life. *Mersapik* symbolically represents the river's preservation; thus, this prohibition is a cultural strategy for regulating the use of natural resources. This knowledge system is not conveyed through written theory, but rather through folklore narratives, which function as a medium for cultural education.

The findings of this study support the research of Rahman (2022), Maharani et al. (2021), and Juherni et al. (2021), which states that folklore functions as a medium for preserving and transmitting knowledge and cultural values. Similar to these studies, the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore reflects the cultural knowledge of the supporting community through various cultural symbols and traditions. However, this research specifically reveals that the *Mersapik* fishing restriction is a representation of local ecological knowledge which guides the community in preserving rivers and regulating the use of natural resources. These findings strengthen the role of folklore not only as cultural heritage, but also as a medium for preserving ecological knowledge in society.

### 3.3. Discussion

The classified data was analyzed using Koentjaraningrat's cultural theory and a literary-anthropological perspective to reveal the representation of cultural forms and universal cultural elements in the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore.

#### A. Ideal Form (Ideas, Values, and Norms)

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In the story of the *Larangan Mersapik*, the manifestation of these ideas and religious elements is reflected in the community's belief in traditional taboos, which prohibit the catching and consumption of *Mersapik*. This value can be seen in the following quotes:

Data 01

“Ada satu aturan adat yang tidak boleh dilanggar: larangan menangkap dan memakan Mersapik”.  
(Tungga, 2025, p. 31).

Data 02

“Makhluk ini dipercaya bukan sekadar hewan sungai, melainkan utusan para leluhur dan penjaga keseimbangan alam.” (Tungga, 2025, pp. 31–32).

Data 03

“Ketua adat mengingatkan bahwa melanggar aturan adat bukanlah masalah sederhana. Ini bukan sekadar rasa bersalah kepada masyarakat, tetapi juga bentuk ketidaktaatan kepada leluhur dan alam semesta.” (Tungga, 2025, p. 34).

According to Koentjaraningrat, values and norms are part of an ideal culture that lives in people’s minds and is passed down from generation to generation. The belief that *Mersapik* is a messenger from the ancestors reflects a system of symbolic meaning that helps maintain natural balance. This prohibition is also part of a universal cultural element within a religious system. The religious system in this story can be seen through the community’s belief that *Mersapik* are not ordinary creatures, but rather spiritual entities related to ancestors and the balance of nature. This is in line with the opinion of Simarmata (2024), confirming that the existence of this prohibition shows the enactment of collective norms or value systems that regulate individual behavior to be in harmony with the traditions and norms that apply in society. This research opinion is also in line with previous research regarding beliefs emphasized by Siregar and Herman (2025) that this belief shows the community’s view of life which views nature as a sacred space inhabited by invisible forces; thus, man’s relationship with nature is not exploitative, but spiritual and moral.

According to Koentjaraningrat’s perspective, religious systems serve to give meaning to natural phenomena and to regulate human behavior through sacred values. In the *Larangan Mersapik* story, traditional prohibitions are obeyed not only because of social pressure but also because of religious awareness that violating the will of the ancestors means violating the guardians of nature.

The belief that *Mersapik* is a messenger from ancestors shows the existence of a symbolic meaning system that functions to maintain cosmic balance between humans, nature, and the spiritual world. This is in line with previous research on belief in spirits, as emphasized by Muhamad et al. (2023), who argue that, anthropologically, belief in ancestral spirits in this story reflects an animistic religious system that remains strong in traditional society. Nature is understood as a living entity that has spirit and power. Therefore, prohibitions or taboos become sacred mechanisms to protect the social and ecological order. In line with previous research in cultural anthropology, as emphasized by Aman et al. (2022), such research confirms that myths and taboos in folklore often function as mechanisms of social control and traditional environmental conservation. Customary law and traditional beliefs form cultural ideas that guide collective community behavior. Collective beliefs strengthen social solidarity through shared values considered sacred.

Apart from regulating human relations with nature, a religious system, in its ideal form, also functions to strengthen social solidarity. The collective belief in the sacredness of *Mersapik* forms a unity of values that is considered sacred and non-negotiable. These sacred values form the basis of social cohesion because all members of society share the same beliefs. Therefore, the ideal form in this story not only contains traditional rules, but also reflects a complex cultural value system, including respect for ancestors, ecological awareness, and collective moral responsibility (Munsiyid & Sudarto, 2024).

## **B. Activity Form (Patterned Social Actions)**

The manifestation of culture in the form of activities in the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore is evident in the community’s social actions, which are patterned and carried out collectively in accordance with customary rules. According to Koentjaraningrat, the form of activity is a social system that manifests in human behavior when

cultural norms are observed in everyday life. Cultural activities do not stand alone, but rather are real manifestations of ideas or values that society previously believed in. Therefore, the actions of the people in this story reflect how traditional norms are realized in concrete social practices.

This can be seen when the community realizes that there is a violation of customs which causes a social disaster in the form of a disease that befalls the entire village.

Data 04

“Ketua adat segera memanggil seluruh penduduk untuk berkumpul di balai kampung.” (Tungga, 2025, p. 33).

Data 05

Selain itu, Balanai harus berpuasa memakan ikan selama tujuh hari dan tinggal di balai adat, terpisah dari penduduk, sebagai bentuk pertobatan.” (Tungga, 2025, p. 34).

In line with previous research related to social systems, Dauh et al. (2020) emphasized that social systems are related to social structure, leadership organization, role division, and conflict resolution mechanisms that are mutually recognized by community members. In the *Larangan Mersapik* story, this was seen when the community realized that there was a violation of customs which had a social impact in the form of disease that befell the entire village. The response that emerged was not individual action, but rather collective action organized through customary structures.

According to Fadrullah and Syam (2024), the presence of traditional leaders as community leaders indicates a structured social organization. Traditional leaders have moral and social legitimacy to make decisions because their positions are recognized within the cultural order of society. According to Koentjaraningrat, social organization is a system of relationships between individuals that is regulated through mutually agreed-upon norms, status, and social roles. The traditional leader in this story acts as a guardian of social balance and a mediator between society and the spiritual order.

Gathering activities in traditional halls show that traditional society prioritizes collective interests over individual ones. Traditional deliberation is a conflict-resolution mechanism that reflects the values of togetherness and social solidarity. Problem solving is not done personally or unilaterally, but through a process of discussion and joint consideration. This shows that the social system in the story is based on the principles of collectivity and consensus (Asifah & Alauddin, 2025).

Furthermore, the implementation of traditional ceremonies, fasting, and the exile of figures who violate norms show a structured pattern of social action. According to Maskur (2023), this activity is not only understood as a spiritual ritual, but as a social mechanism to restore community harmony. Furthermore, within the Koentjaraningrat framework, cultural activities are a social system that appears in the patterned behavior of society. Rituals in this story serve as a means of reconciliation not only between humans and nature but also among members of society affected by these violations.

Elements of the social system are increasingly visible through the legitimacy of customary decisions. In addition, in traditional societies, the authority of traditional leaders does not derive from formal power but from collective trust and the ability to maintain social balance. Therefore, according to Yusuf and Effendi (2021), every traditional decision is seen as a representation of the collective will, which must be respected by all members of the community. This social structure shows a clear division of roles, in which traditional leaders act as regulators of norms, while the community acts as the implementer of joint decisions. Thus, the activities in the *Larangan Mersapik* story do not only describe religious actions, but also a social system that functions to maintain group stability and solidarity.

### C. Physical Form (Artifact)

The manifestation of culture in physical form and artifacts in the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore is evident in various cultural objects used in daily life and in the performance of traditional rituals. According to Koentjaraningrat,

artifacts are the most concrete form of culture because they can be seen, touched, and documented. Artifacts not only have a practical function, but also contain symbolic meaning that represents the value system and knowledge of the supporting community. Therefore, the physical form in this story cannot be separated from the underlying knowledge system. This can be seen in the use of objects used for livelihood and offerings in redemption ceremonies.

Data 06

*“Masyarakat menggantungkan kehidupan mereka pada sungai dan hutan di sekitarnya, dengan aturan adat yang dipegang teguh secara turun-temurun.”* (Tungga, 2025, p. 31).

Data 07

*“Ada satu aturan adat yang tidak boleh dilanggar: larangan menangkap dan memakan Mersapik.”* (Tungga, 2025, p. 31).

Data 08

*“Balanoi mengayuh sampan kecilnya lebih jauh dari biasanya. Setelah berjam-jam menebar jala dan melempar kail tanpa hasil, ia merasa frustrasi. Di tengah rasa putus asa, pandangannya tertuju pada sosok yang bergerak lincah di air jernih: seekor Mersapik.”* (Tungga, 2025, p. 32).

Data 09

*“Upacara itu memerlukan berbagai persembahan, termasuk sirih, kapur, ayam putih, dan kain tenun.”* (Tungga, 2025, p. 34).

In line with previous research related to knowledge systems, Bago et al. (2025) emphasized that the knowledge system includes people's understanding of nature, the environment, flora, fauna, as well as ways of survival that are obtained through collective experience and passed down from generation to generation. In the *Larangan Mersapik* story, the community's knowledge system is evident in the close relationship between human life and the river environment, which serves as a source of livelihood. This is in line with Azwan and Andriyani (2023)'s view, as evidenced by the use of canoes, nets, and other fishing gear, which reflect traditional technological systems. Koentjaraningrat explained that traditional technology is part of a living equipment system that shows humans' ability to adapt to their geographical environment. River communities develop fishing gear that suits local natural conditions. These artifacts are not just economic tools, but rather the result of ecological knowledge built through long interactions with nature.

Apart from fishing tools, physical forms are also seen in ritual objects used in redemption ceremonies. Betel, white chickens, woven cloth, and other offerings are cultural artifacts that have symbolic meaning. Various cultures in the archipelago interpret betel as a symbol of respect and brotherhood. The white chicken symbolizes purity, while the woven cloth represents local cultural identity. These artifacts are not just ceremonial equipment, but symbols of communication between humans and the spiritual world (Lodra, 2017).

According to Al-ansoriy et al. (2025), the symbolic meaning of these objects cannot be understood without the cultural knowledge system behind them. People know the function and meaning of each object based on inherited traditions. In this context, the knowledge system works as an interpretive basis that gives meaning to artifacts. Cultural anthropology studies show that ritual objects often serve as symbolic media representing human relationships with local cosmologies and belief systems. Artifacts become a bridge between ideal forms (values and beliefs) and activity forms (rituals and traditional deliberations) (Pasaribu et al., 2025).

Koentjaraningrat stated that the knowledge system encompasses all of society's understanding of nature and ways of survival, which are inherited through the social learning process. In the *Larangan Mersapik* story, this knowledge system is concretely manifested in traditional technological artifacts and ritual symbols. Therefore, it can be emphasized that the elements of the knowledge system in this story are manifested predominantly as physical culture (artifacts), as living equipment, ritual objects, and material symbols that reflect the collective experience of society.

Furthermore, the ban on catching *Mersapik* itself can be understood as a form of local ecological knowledge. The community understands that the river must be maintained in balance so that it remains a source of life. *Mersapik* symbolically represents the river's preservation; thus, this prohibition is a cultural strategy for regulating the use of natural resources. This knowledge system is not conveyed through written theory, but rather through folklore narratives, which function as a medium for cultural education.

The findings of this study support the research of Rahman (2022), Maharani et al. (2021), and Juherni et al. (2021), which states that folklore functions as a medium for preserving and transmitting knowledge and cultural values. Similar to these studies, the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore reflects the cultural knowledge of the supporting community through various cultural symbols and traditions. However, this research specifically reveals that the *Mersapik* fishing restriction is a representation of local ecological knowledge which guides the community in preserving rivers and regulating the use of natural resources. These findings strengthen the role of folklore not only as cultural heritage, but also as a medium for preserving ecological knowledge in society.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that the *Larangan Mersapik* folklore contains three forms of culture, as stated by Koentjaraningrat: ideas, activities, and artifacts. The manifestation of the idea is reflected in the community's values and belief system, which views *Mersapik* as a spiritual entity associated with ancestors and the balance of nature, giving rise to various customary norms and prohibitions that must be obeyed. The manifestation of activity is evident in social practices such as traditional deliberations, the observance of redemption rituals, and collective community action to maintain harmony among humans, nature, and the spiritual world. Meanwhile, the form of artifacts is evident in the use of various cultural objects in rituals, such as betel, white chickens, woven cloth, and other ceremonial equipment, which serve symbolic functions and represent local cultural knowledge and identity systems. These findings confirm that folklore functions not only as oral literature but also as a medium for transmitting cultural values, belief systems, and traditional knowledge within society.

It is recommended that further research expand the study by comparing folklore from other regions or use an interdisciplinary approach, such as ecocriticism or cultural studies, so as to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between literature, culture, and the environment. Apart from that, further research can also examine more deeply the relevance of local wisdom in the context of modern life, especially in efforts to preserve culture and strengthen character education for the younger generation.

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