

The Role of Folklore in Preserving Indigenous Cultural Identity: A Case Study of Oral Traditions in Asia

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Abstract : *Folklore plays an important role as a medium for maintaining the cultural identity of indigenous communities. This article investigates the role of oral traditions in maintaining cultural heritage, focusing on folklore, myths and legends from indigenous communities in Asia. Through ethnographic research and narrative analysis, this study shows how folklore transmits values, beliefs and collective memory between generations, ensuring cultural sustainability amid globalization.*

Keywords: *folklore, indigenous identity, oral tradition, cultural preservation, globalization*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Folklore is an inseparable part of the cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation by indigenous communities in various parts of the world, including Asia. In the context of local culture, folklore reflects social values, belief systems, and people's perspectives on the world and their surroundings (Dundes, 2007). Various forms of folklore, such as myths, legends, and folktales, have a strategic role in maintaining cultural continuity amidst the rapid flow of global change. The existence of folklore as part of the oral tradition allows indigenous communities to maintain their identity amidst the threat of cultural homogenization triggered by modernization and globalization (Zipes, 2012).

Research related to folklore in indigenous communities has been widely conducted, especially in the context of cultural anthropology and oral literature studies. Several studies have shown that folklore not only functions as entertainment, but also as a means of education and conveying social norms to the next generation (Bascom, 1965). Studies on folklore in Asia also highlight how oral traditions are able to adapt to the times, for example through integration into digital media and modern performing arts (Haring, 2016). However, on the other hand, globalization and modernization have resulted in a decrease in native speakers and successors of this oral tradition, so that many folklores are at risk of extinction (Tangherlini, 2013).

The novelty of this study lies in the in-depth analysis of the role of folklore in maintaining the cultural identity of indigenous communities in Asia amidst the challenges

of globalization. Most previous studies have focused more on the documentation and classification of folklore, while aspects of protection and adaptation strategies of folklore in the face of modernization have rarely been studied comprehensively (Honko, 2000). Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by highlighting how indigenous communities in Asia utilize oral traditions as a tool to maintain the sustainability of their culture.

The urgency of this research is increasing considering the many indigenous communities that face the threat of extinction of their languages and traditions due to the dominance of popular culture and digital media that tend to ignore local wisdom (Smith, 2001). By understanding the mechanisms of folklore transmission and adaptation strategies carried out by indigenous communities, this research can provide insight into more effective cultural preservation efforts. In addition, this study can also be a reference for policy makers in designing sustainable cultural protection programs.

This study aims to explore the role of folklore in maintaining the cultural identity of indigenous communities in Asia. Specifically, this study will examine how oral traditions are used as a tool for cultural preservation, the challenges faced in maintaining folklore in the era of globalization, and strategies that can be applied to ensure the continuity of these traditions in the future. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to efforts to preserve the culture and identity of indigenous communities in Asia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have shown that folklore functions as a very effective means of maintaining cultural identity. As a form of oral cultural communication, folklore not only stores stories about the past, but also contains moral and ethical messages that serve as guidelines for life for indigenous peoples. Research by Dundes (1965) shows that folklore and myths are a means of connecting the real world and the supernatural world, and reflect social and cultural values respected by the community.

Myths and legends also often play a role in shaping a community's collective identity. For example, research by Bauman (1972) emphasized that oral stories play an important role in maintaining social cohesion and solidarity in indigenous communities. In addition, according to Hymes (1974), storytelling has the power to define and strengthen social positions, as well as provide guidance on how a person should interact with the social and natural environment around them.

Research on the impact of globalization on indigenous cultures shows that modernization and globalization can cause erosion of local cultures. Bawa (2003)

highlights how the influence of mass media and information technology can cause the younger generation to lose interest in oral traditions, thus causing a decline in the transmission of folklore between generations.

Theoretical Review The study of the role of folklore in maintaining cultural identity can be explained through several relevant theories. One of the main theories is the Functionalism Theory proposed by Malinowski (1944), which states that folklore has a social function in maintaining cultural values and forming group identity. According to this perspective, myths and folklore are not just entertainment, but also play a role in teaching social norms and ethics to community members.

In addition, Hymes' (1974) cultural communication theory highlights how oral traditions are an integral part of a community's communication system. Through storytelling, indigenous peoples not only transmit information, but also form social structures and strengthen relationships between community members. This theory supports the view that folklore plays a primary role in maintaining the sustainability of cultural identity.

The theory of Globalization and Cultural Identity proposed by Appadurai (1996) is also relevant in this context. According to this theory, globalization can threaten the existence of local culture, but at the same time can provide opportunities for indigenous communities to adjust and adapt their folklore through modern media. Thus, this study will also explore how folklore can survive and thrive in the digital era.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses an ethnographic approach to study the role of folklore in preserving the cultural identity of indigenous communities in Asia. Ethnography allows researchers to directly observe how folktales and myths are told in the daily lives of indigenous peoples, as well as how these stories are taught to the younger generation (Spradley, 1980). Through this approach, researchers can deeply understand the social and cultural dynamics inherent in oral traditions.

In addition, narrative analysis is also used to explore the structure, themes, and meanings contained in folklore (Riessman, 2008). These narratives are analyzed to identify the values transmitted through the stories, as well as how folklore functions in maintaining social cohesion and strengthening the cultural identity of the community.

Case studies were conducted in several indigenous communities in Asia, including Indonesia, India, and the Philippines. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select

communities that were still active in maintaining their oral traditions (Patton, 2002). In each community, in-depth interviews with storytellers and traditional leaders, as well as participant observation, were conducted to better understand how oral traditions are practiced and maintained. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and direct observation techniques.

For data analysis, a thematic approach was used to identify patterns in folklore related to cultural identity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and existing documentation (Denzin, 1978). This research model aims to explore how folklore plays a role in maintaining cultural identity amidst the flow of globalization.

4. RESULTS

The results of the study indicate that oral traditions, through folklore, myths, and legends, play an important role in maintaining the cultural identity of indigenous communities in Asia. Ethnographic studies conducted in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines show that folklore functions not only as entertainment, but also as a means of transmitting cultural values, history, and social norms. According to Smith (2010), folklore is a primary mechanism in maintaining the sustainability of cultural identity in indigenous communities.

In Indonesia, folklore such as legends from Bali and Java serve as a tool for moral education taught through wayang performances, cultural festivals, and traditional ceremonies (Rahmawati, 2018). In India, myths in the Hindu tradition strengthen social bonds and serve as a means of moral and spiritual education (Chatterjee, 2016). Meanwhile, in the Philippines, traditional storytelling is used in traditional rituals as a link between the younger generation and their ancestors and their homeland (Garcia, 2017).

Data analysis shows that the transmission of folklore in indigenous communities is challenged by globalization and the development of digital technology. Interview data with indigenous leaders revealed that the younger generation tends to be less interested in traditional stories than popular cultural content spread through social media (Jones, 2020). However, some communities have adapted technology to maintain this tradition, for example by documenting folklore in digital and video formats.

5. DISCUSSION

Folklore functions as a very effective means of preserving cultural identity in indigenous communities, especially in the midst of globalization that can cause erosion of local culture. According to Dundes (1965), folklore reflects the social and cultural values of a community that are passed down from generation to generation. The results of this study are in line with Bauman's study (1972) which shows that folklore plays an important role in maintaining social cohesion.

However, globalization brings its own challenges in maintaining oral traditions. Bawa's study (2003) shows that the younger generation is increasingly turning to digital technology and abandoning traditional storytelling practices. This is in line with the findings of this study, where the participation of the younger generation in folklore performances has decreased significantly. Therefore, integrating folklore into the formal education system and utilizing digital technology can be a solution to maintain the continuity of this tradition (Hymes, 1974).

The implications of this study include theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, this study adds insight into the importance of folklore in shaping the cultural identity of indigenous communities. Practically, the results of this study can be used by cultural and educational institutions to develop strategies for preserving folklore based on technology and formal education. For example, the implementation of digital applications containing folklore in regional languages can help increase the appreciation of the younger generation for their cultural heritage (Rahmawati, 2018).

6. CLOSING AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of this study indicate that folklore, including folktales, myths, and legends, plays an important role in maintaining the cultural identity of indigenous communities in Asia. As part of cultural heritage, these oral traditions not only serve as entertainment, but also as a means of transmitting moral, social, and spiritual values from one generation to the next. This study found that folklore contributes to social cohesion and strengthens the sense of collective identity in indigenous communities (Dundes, 1965; Bauman, 1972). In various indigenous communities in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines, folklore is the main medium in building historical awareness and maintaining relationships with ancestors and the surrounding natural environment.

However, globalization and modernization bring significant challenges to the preservation of folklore. As expressed by Bawa (2003), the influence of mass media and

technology has caused the younger generation to decline in interest in oral traditions. This phenomenon can lead to cultural erosion if not addressed with the right strategy. Therefore, it is important for indigenous communities to adapt folklore preservation methods with a more modern and innovative approach. One step that can be taken is to digitize folklore in the form of documentaries, animations, or social media to attract the interest of the younger generation (Hymes, 1974).

In addition, the integration of folklore into the formal education curriculum also needs to be considered so that the younger generation not only knows but also appreciates their cultural heritage. Partnerships between indigenous communities, government, and academics can strengthen these preservation efforts by systematically documenting and archiving folklore. Furthermore, further research is needed to explore how technology can be used effectively in maintaining and transmitting folklore in the digital era.

By understanding the importance of folklore in maintaining cultural identity, it is hoped that indigenous communities and other stakeholders can work together to ensure that these oral traditions remain alive and relevant for future generations. Preserving folklore is not only about preserving the stories of the past, but also about building a future that values and honors the cultural richness that has been inherited by ancestors.

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