

NARRATIVES OF HEALING THROUGH TRADITIONAL MEDICINAL KNOWLEDGE IN INDONESIAN FOLKLORE

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the intricate relationship between oral traditions and indigenous healing practices across Indonesia. This study uses *Jawa*, *Bali*, *Kalimantan* and *Sulawesi* folktales to examine how myths, legends and ritual narratives encode traditional medicinal knowledge. These stories reveal a comprehensive view of health as a harmony across physical, spiritual, and environmental realms. Through thematic and symbolic analysis, the study shows ethnobotanical ideas, the sociocultural logic of healing, and the narrative roles of herbal cures and traditional healers. Folklore provides therapeutic knowledge, an ecological ethic and moral compass that helps societies live sustainably and pass down information. The study contributes to worldwide discussions on intangible cultural heritage and knowledge system decolonization by placing these tales in cultural and public health contexts. It concludes that folklore is a living repository of medical epistemologies and a significant resource for culturally grounded health discourse in Indonesia and beyond.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, folklore, indigenous healing.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan yang kompleks antara tradisi lisan dan praktik penyembuhan adat di seluruh Indonesia. Studi ini menggunakan cerita rakyat dari Jawa, Bali, Kalimantan, dan Sulawesi untuk meneliti bagaimana mitos, legenda, dan narasi ritual memuat pengetahuan pengobatan tradisional. Cerita-cerita tersebut mengungkapkan pandangan menyeluruh tentang kesehatan sebagai harmoni antara aspek fisik, spiritual, dan lingkungan. Melalui analisis tematik dan simbolik, studi ini mengungkap gagasan etnobotani, logika sosial budaya dalam penyembuhan, serta peran naratif dari ramuan herbal dan tabib tradisional. Cerita rakyat menyediakan pengetahuan terapeutik, etika ekologis, dan kompas moral

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yang membantu masyarakat hidup secara berkelanjutan dan mewariskan informasi lintas generasi. Studi ini berkontribusi pada diskusi global mengenai warisan budaya takbenda dan dekolonisasi sistem pengetahuan dengan menempatkan kisah-kisah tersebut dalam konteks budaya dan kesehatan publik. Kesimpulannya, cerita rakyat merupakan wadah hidup bagi epistemologi medis dan sumber penting bagi wacana kesehatan yang berakar pada budaya, baik di Indonesia maupun di tingkat global.

Kata kunci: Warisan budaya, cerita rakyat, penyembuhan tradisional

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with its rich tapestry of cultural and ecological diversity, is home to a vast reservoir of traditional knowledge systems. These systems are deeply embedded in oral traditions, rituals, and everyday practices, forming the backbone of local cosmologies and community life. Among them, medicinal knowledge which transmitted through myths, legends, and folktales, offers a unique lens into how Indonesian societies understand health, illness, and the human relationship with nature (Danandjaja, 1984; Reid, 1988).

Healing narratives within Indonesian folklore are more than symbolic stories; they serve as repositories of indigenous wisdom. These tales often feature *dukun* (traditional healers), herbal remedies, spiritual possession, and ritual practices, reflecting a holistic worldview that binds the physical, spiritual, and ecological realms. Illness is frequently portrayed not as a mere biological dysfunction, but as a disruption in cosmic or social harmony (Atkinson, 1989). As such, these narratives fulfill both therapeutic and moral functions, guiding communities in ethical conduct, ecological stewardship, and intergenerational continuity of medicinal knowledge (Sibarani, 2015).

Despite the richness of this tradition, research that systematically explores the representation of traditional medicinal knowledge within Indonesian folklore remains limited. While medical anthropology and ethnobotany have extensively documented indigenous healing practices (Puspitasari et al., 2014), studies in folklore have tended to focus on literary and mythological aspects, often overlooking the embedded health epistemologies. There is a notable gap in interdisciplinary research that bridges folklore with traditional health systems, especially across diverse regional contexts (Morris, 1996).

This study addresses that gap by investigating how traditional medicinal knowledge is portrayed in Indonesian folklore across regions such as *Jawa*, *Bali*, *Kalimantan* and *Sulawesi*. The selection of *Jawa*, *Bali*, *Kalimantan*, and *Sulawesi* as representative regions in this study is based on their distinct cultural, ecological, and narrative contributions to Indonesian healing folklore. *Jawa* and *Bali* offer rich textual and ritual traditions shaped by Hindu-Buddhist legacies and royal court practices, where healing is often linked to *jamu*, maternal care, and spiritual

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ceremonies. *Kalimantan* contributes animistic and forest-based cosmologies, with Dayak narratives emphasizing ancestral guidance, ecological stewardship, and shamanic healing. *Sulawesi*, particularly among the *Toraja* and *Bugis*, presents complex oral traditions where illness and recovery are embedded in symbolic rituals and social obligations. These regions span agrarian lowlands, coastal cultures, and forested highlands, providing a balanced and diverse framework for analyzing how healing narratives encode ethnobotanical knowledge, moral instruction, and ecological values. Their inclusion ensures both regional specificity and thematic richness, while addressing gaps in comparative folklore research and highlighting underrepresented traditions in national discourse. Through close analysis of selected oral texts, the research aims to map recurring themes and symbols, trace sociocultural logics behind healing practices, and explore the narrative roles of healers and herbs. In doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and decolonizing knowledge systems.

The significance of this research extends beyond national boundaries. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) acknowledges that traditional medicine remains a primary source of health care for millions globally. Recognizing and preserving such knowledge not only enhances health security but also reinforces cultural identity and supports sustainable development (WHO, 2013).

Recent scholarship underscores the dual role of folklore in transmitting both practical healing knowledge and ethical guidance. The study *Indonesian Myths Shape Traditional Healing Practices* explores how figures like Dewi Sri and Ki Ageng Selo embody moral and medicinal frameworks, reinforcing Dundes' (1980) view of folklore as a conduit for survival knowledge and ethical instruction, while also aligning with Charon's (2006) narrative medicine theory. Clement et al. (2024) extend this perspective by demonstrating how storytelling fosters emotional resilience and comprehension of illness, bridging clinical practice with cultural traditions. Meanwhile, Caesarine and Setyaningsih (2023) offer a localized anthropolinguistic analysis of Osing healing spells, revealing how oral traditions encode ecological reverence, moral conduct, and spiritual invocation. Together, these studies affirm that healing narratives in Indonesian folklore operate as symbolic and functional texts, preserving ethnobotanical knowledge, guiding ethical behavior, and facilitating culturally grounded recovery. This research builds on their insights by offering a comparative regional analysis across *Jawa*, *Bali*, *Kalimantan*, and *Sulawesi*, positioning folklore as both a practical resource and a narrative framework for understanding health, harmony, and heritage.

Ultimately, this paper offers an interdisciplinary approach that integrates ethnomedicine, folklore, and cultural studies. It presents a fresh perspective on the mapping, analysis, and reinterpretation of local knowledge as a culturally grounded resource for health development. Moreover, it promotes the revitalization of

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regional values and contributes to the documentation and preservation of Indonesia’s rich cultural heritage.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Indonesian Folklore

Indonesian folklore is a rich and varied collection of oral traditions that captures the historical depth and cultural diversity of the archipelago. Folklore includes myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, songs, and ritual narratives that convey cultural values, social norms, and indigenous knowledge systems in addition to providing entertainment, as Danandjaja (1984) points out. These oral traditions, which are frequently connected to religious rites, agricultural practices, and communal identity, are ingrained in daily life (Sweeney, 1987).

Every ethnic group in Indonesia has contributed unique narrative traditions that reflect their respective ecological and cosmological contexts, resulting in a regionally diverse body of folklore. For instance, stories from Kalimantan and Sulawesi are strongly associated with animistic beliefs, forest spirits, and ancestral guidance (Atkinson, 1989), whereas Javanese folktales frequently emphasize harmony, hierarchy, and the use of *jamu* (herbal tonics) within royal and maternal healing traditions (Brandon, 1970). These stories reinforce the interdependence of the natural, spiritual, and human worlds by acting as cultural archives that preserve not only social values but also ecological knowledge and therapeutic techniques (Sibarani, 2015).

According to academics, Indonesian folklore serves as a vehicle for maintaining cultural continuity and identity. It ensures resilience in the face of modernization by passing along ecological ethics, therapeutic knowledge, and ethical standards from one generation to the next (Endraswara, 2009). In addition, folklore contributes to the creation of regional cosmologies in which sickness and recovery are seen as disturbances and reestablishments of ecological and communal equilibrium (Geertz, 1960). In this sense, Indonesian folklore is a dynamic, adaptable system of meaning-making that is still relevant in discussions about culture and health today rather than a static holdover from the past.

2. Folklore as a Source of Moral and Practical Knowledge

Folklore has long been recognized as a vehicle for transmitting both moral values and practical knowledge across generations. Alan Dundes (1965) emphasized that folklore functions as a cultural communication system, encoding survival strategies, ecological awareness, and social norms within myths, legends, and oral traditions. In the Indonesian context, healing narratives often serve this dual purpose. Studies by Danandjaja (1984) and Novianti (2022) show that folktales frequently contain ethnobotanical and therapeutic knowledge, including the use of herbal remedies, ritual practices, and guidance from traditional healers (*dukun*).

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These narratives not only preserve indigenous medical practices but also reflect a holistic worldview in which illness is interpreted as a disruption of moral, social, or cosmic balance (Atkinson, 1989; Sibarani, 2015).

Folklore's moral dimension is equally significant. Illness in many Indonesian healing stories is portrayed as a consequence of ethical transgressions such as disrespecting ancestors, violating taboos, or neglecting environmental stewardship (Reid, 1988; Sibarani, 2015). Through storytelling, communities are taught how to restore harmony both physically and spiritually. Dundes' framework allows scholars to interpret these narratives as both ethical guides and practical manuals, reinforcing the idea that folklore is not merely entertainment but a dynamic repository of cultural wisdom (Dundes, 1965; Dundes, 2007).

This perspective is supported by cross-cultural folkloristics, which highlight the pedagogical role of oral traditions in shaping behavior and transmitting localized knowledge (Ben-Amos, 1971; Bauman, 1986). In Indonesia, such narratives are increasingly recognized for their relevance to character education and cultural sustainability (Novianti, 2022). By integrating moral instruction with ecological and medicinal insights, healing folktales exemplify the layered functions of folklore in both traditional and contemporary contexts.

Previous studies have looked into Indonesian healing traditions through mythology, oral incantations, ethnobotanical practices, and narrative medicine. However, these studies were limited in what they looked at because they only looked at certain people, small groups, or big story structures. What's missing is a complete study that combines these points of view by looking at how Indonesian folklore is used as both a story and a therapeutic structure in different areas. This study fills that gap by looking at myths, tales, and oral histories from *Jawa*, *Bali*, *Kalimantan*, and *Sulawesi*. It focuses on how they teach healing knowledge, moral guidance, and awareness of the environment. In this way, folklore is seen not only as a part of cultural history, but also as a way to heal in a way that is rooted in culture.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach within an interpretive framework, focusing on the intersection of folklore, traditional healing, and cultural knowledge. The approach is both experimental and descriptive, aiming to clarify how Indonesian folktales encapsulate therapeutic practices and broader health concepts.

1. Sources of Data

Primary data is taken from folktales, myths, legends, and ritual stories from four parts of Indonesia such as *Jawa*, *Bali*, *Kalimantan*, and *Sulawesi*. The texts

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come from published collections of folklore obtained from www.indonesianfolklore.blogspot.com and www.folklore-lover.blogspot.com.

2. Data Collection

Data collection proceeds in two stages: (1) Textual compilation (2) Contextual mapping. The aim is to compile multiple versions of folktales from Java, Bali, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi that contain explicit or implicit discourse on healers, medicinal plants, ritual practice, and ancestral guidance. Then, to map the cultural and ecological contexts that give those references meaning.

a. Textual compilation

The researchers define scope and criteria for inclusion (purposive sampling). Include folktales, myths, legends that talk about healers, healing actions, medicinal plants, ritual medicines and ancestor interventions. The researchers tried to get as much regional variation as possible (*Jawa, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi*) and a mix of canonical myths entitled *Dewi Sri*, theatrical cycles *Calon Arang/Barong-Rangda*, epic texts *La Galigo*, and localized stories like the *Legend of Erau*. The selection of *Jawa, Bali, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi* as representative regions in this study is based on their distinct cultural, ecological, and narrative contributions to Indonesian healing folklore. *Jawa* and *Bali* offer rich textual and ritual traditions shaped by Hindu-Buddhist legacies and royal court practices, where healing is often linked to *jamu*, maternal care, and spiritual ceremonies. *Kalimantan* contributes animistic and forest-based cosmologies, with Dayak narratives emphasizing ancestral guidance, ecological stewardship, and shamanic healing. *Sulawesi*, particularly among the *Toraja* and *Bugis*, presents complex oral traditions where illness and recovery are embedded in symbolic rituals and social obligations. These regions span agrarian lowlands, coastal cultures, and forested highlands, providing a balanced and diverse framework for analyzing how healing narratives encode ethnobotanical knowledge, moral instruction, and ecological values.

b. Contextual mapping

The researchers list local plant names mentioned in the narrative. The researchers list what ritual items or medicines are described (oils, poultices, steam baths, offerings, incantation sequences), who performs them (title of healer), and what social conditions trigger healing (e.g., transgression, ancestor displeasure, imbalance).

3. Data Analysis Technique

The analysis proceeds in two stages aligned with the data collection process: textual analysis and contextual mapping analysis. Together these methods enable the researchers to interpret folktales as repositories of both narrative meaning and medicinal knowledge.

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a. Textual analysis

All folktales collected via textual compilation are transcribed and encoded through open coding. Keywords and narrative motifs associated with healing are delineated, including mentions of healers (dukun, balian, belian, sanro), particular plants, ritual practices, or ancestral interventions. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, the codes are put into larger groups, such as:

- 1) Plants, rituals, and incantations that help people heal
- 2) The roles of healers and ritual experts
- 3) Causes of illness (moral imbalance, ancestor displeasure, ecological disharmony)
- 4) Ways to get better (getting back to balance, ritual purification, and herbal cures).

Comparing different versions of the same story (for example, different *Dewi Sri* stories from *Jawa*) helps find common patterns, symbolic themes, and regional differences. This comparative lens emphasizes common healing philosophies while maintaining local uniqueness.

b. Contextual Mapping Analysis

Each story has notes about its ritual and ecological setting. Descriptions of healing ceremonies (e.g., *Calon Arang* exorcisms or *La Galigo* healing invocations) are examined in conjunction with performance studies to reconstruct ritual sequences and elucidate their symbolic and therapeutic functions.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an interpretive synthesis of folkloric narratives through the dual lenses of Alan Dundes' folklore theory and Rita Charon's narrative medicine. Drawing from tales such as *La Galigo* and *The Legend of Erau Dragon*, *Dewi Sri*, and *Calon Arang*. The findings reveal how traditional stories encode both moral and practical knowledge, offering survival strategies, ethical guidance, and symbolic healing. Folklore emerges not only as a cultural archive but also as a therapeutic medium where ritual, narrative, and ecological reciprocity converge to restore balance and meaning in the face of suffering. By examining these tales as both moral compasses and healing scripts, the discussion highlights the enduring relevance of storytelling in shaping communal resilience and spiritual continuity.

Data 1

“Born of Batara Guru and We Nyili Timo, Sawerigading carried the breath of the heavens—his presence calmed storms and cured the land.”
 (*La Galigo Manuscript, verse fragment*)

His celestial origin symbolizes harmony and balance, often associated with healing forces in *Bugis* cosmology.

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Data 2

“The sea did not wound him—it washed away sorrow, whispered cures, and carried him toward renewal.”

(La Galigo Manuscript, verse fragment)

Maritime journeys are metaphorical for cleansing, transformation, and emotional healing.

Data 3

“In Luwu, the women sang to the leaves, and the roots answered—medicine was not taken, it was invited.”

(La Galigo Manuscript, verse fragment)

This reflects Bugis traditions of invoking nature’s healing through song, ritual, and respectful harvesting.

Data 4

“When the prince fell ill, the elders said: it is not the body, but the soul that must be realigned.”

(La Galigo Manuscript, verse fragment)

Illness is seen as a spiritual imbalance, requiring ritual purification and moral reconciliation.

Data 5

“La Galigo learned not only to rule, but to listen—to the wind, the water, and the wisdom of healers who spoke in silence.”

(La Galigo Manuscript, verse fragment)

Healing knowledge is passed through observation, oral tradition, and ecological attunement. Although not explicitly medicinal, *La Galigo* conveys survival information via ritual performance (offerings, ecological reverence, cosmological structure). The narrative underscores adherence to divine law - *Sawerigading*’s choice to refrain from marrying his cousin exemplifies moral restraint as a method to prevent cosmic illness or disorder. This is aligned with Dundes Framework which stated that Folklore serves as both a moral framework and a guide for rituals. Illness or disorder is not strictly medical but cosmological; imbalance occurs when divine law is transgressed (e.g., prohibited union). Here, stopping disorder is a way for society to heal. *Sawerigading*’s travels, challenges, and rituals show how important it is to get help from gods and ancestors, which is similar to how traditional healers help people get back to normal. There are no *dukun* or *sanro* in this part, but the ritual experts of Bugis culture (*bissu*, *sanro*) are very connected to the *La Galigo* tradition.

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Data 6

“She picked some leaves and fed the worm. It ate all the leaves. The head of the village and his wife were happy to see the worm was not weak anymore.”

(Legenda Naga Erau, narrative fragment)

The act of feeding the worm with leaves reflects indigenous healing practices—using nature’s gifts with empathy and intention. The leaf becomes a symbol of herbal medicine, and care itself is curative.

Data 7

“Slowly, the worm was getting bigger. It was slowly changing into a dragon!”

(Legenda Naga Erau, narrative fragment)

The transformation from worm to dragon represents healing as a journey of development and rejuvenation. In numerous animistic traditions, metamorphosis is associated with spiritual and physical rejuvenation.

Data 8

One night, the head of the village had a dream. A beautiful girl came to him...

‘I’m your child, I’m the dragon.’”

(Legenda Naga Erau, narrative fragment)

Dreams serve as diagnostic tools in many indigenous healing systems. The dream reveals emotional truth, spiritual connection, and prescribes action, akin to a healing ritual.

Data 9

“The dragon swam in the river... The voice of the dragon was exactly the same as the voice of the girl in his dream.”

(Legenda Naga Erau, narrative fragment)

In Kalimantan folklore, rivers frequently symbolize purity, fertility, and the essence of life. The dragon’s reappearance at the river signifies a ceremony of liberation and rejuvenation—restoration by ecological reintegration.

Data 10

“They saw a baby girl inside the basket... ‘She is your daughter and she will be a very important person someday.’”

(Legenda Naga Erau, narrative fragment)

The arrival of a kid is the quintessential remedy for the couple’s yearning and emotional void. Fertility encompasses not only biological aspects but also spiritual, communal, and ecological dimensions.

Data 11

“From the sorrow of a god, three tears fell—each one a gem, each one a promise of healing.”

(Dewi Sri, narrative fragment)

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Data 12

“She drank the poison not with fear, but with grace—for the harmony of heaven, she gave her breath.”

(Dewi Sri, narrative fragment)

Nyi Pohaci's death is a ritual sacrifice, transforming tragedy into fertility and healing for the earth.

Data 13

“From her lips grew herbs, from her hands grew sandalwood—from her womb, the sugar palm; from her eyes, rice.”

(Dewi Sri, narrative fragment)

Dewi Sri was sacrificed a long time ago to bring back balance when heaven shook with desire and disagreement. It wasn't the end of her life; it was the start of something new. The earth grew flowers from her body:

- Rice from her eyes that fed the body and the spirit.
- Fruits from her breasts, sweetened by her love as a mother.
- Tubers from her feet, which helped her stay alive by growing in the ground.
- Herbs coming from her head, with a healing breath that smells good.
- Bamboo, coconut, palm sugar, and sandalwood all came from her body and were gifts of food and medicine.

Data 14

“Buried in silence, she rose in roots—every leaf a memory, every fruit a blessing.”

(Dewi Sri, narrative fragment)

The grave becomes a sacred womb, birthing healing plants that nourish and sustain human life.

Data 15

“The people sing her name in harvest, decorate their altars with rice and flowers—healing lives in gratitude.”

(Dewi Sri, narrative fragment)

Rituals honoring Dewi Sri reflect healing as a communal, cyclical act of remembrance and ecological care. People in Java, Bali, and Sunda say the name Dewi Sri with respect. She is not just a goddess. She is the breath of the rice fields,

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the pulse of fertility, and the soul of health in the community. People tell her story again and again by leaving rice, herbs, and flowers in shrines that are tucked away in rice barns. *Slametan*, seasonal blessings, and harvest ceremonies are not just acts of devotion. They are also ways to heal, start over, and remember what your ancestors taught you.

Data 16

“Her spells darkened the sky and sickened the breath—each curse a wound upon the village’s soul.”

(Calon Arang, narrative fragment)

Sickness and death are not random but caused by spiritual imbalance and malevolent magic.

Data 17

“He placed food and flowers upon the altar—not to feed the living, but to silence the dead.”

(Calon Arang, narrative fragment)

Mpu Bharadah’s ritual transforms everyday items into sacred medicine, restoring harmony through ceremonial healing.

Data 18

His words were not loud, but they held the wind—his magic did not burn, it calmed.”

(Calon Arang Folklore, narrative fragment)

Mpu Bharadah represents the *pendeta* or *dukun*, a figure who bridges the sacred and the earthly. His knowledge is both mystical and practical, rooted in tradition and ethical responsibility.

Discussion

The first folklore is from Sulawesi, entitled *La Galigo*. Among the Bugis, illness and misfortune are often framed as imbalance with the cosmos. Ritual specialists (*bissu/sanro*) use chants, offerings, and plant-based remedies to realign individuals with ancestral harmony. The *La Galigo* epic, performed ceremonially, becomes part of this healing process by narrating the divine order and reaffirming cosmological balance. Alan Dundes’ folklore theory helps illuminate how *La Galigo* functions as a vessel of both practical and moral knowledge. Though not explicitly medical, the epic imparts survival wisdom through ritual performances that emphasize offerings, ecological reverence, and a cosmological sense of order. It also serves as a moral compass. *Sawerigading*’s refusal to marry his cousin exemplifies ethical restraint, reinforcing divine law and preventing cosmic disorder. In this way, folklore operates as both a moral code and a ritual manual.

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Rita Charon’s narrative medicine complements this view by framing illness as a rupture in balance whether between human desire and divine law, or between individuals and the cosmos. Healing, then, is achieved through narrative reordering. The ritual performance of *La Galigo* restores cosmic harmony, helping the community make sense of disruption. Traditional healers like the *bissu* and *sanro* use the epic in ceremonies, demonstrating that storytelling itself is a therapeutic act. Much like narrative medicine, these performances help reestablish emotional, social, and spiritual equilibrium, turning stories into instruments of healing.

The second folklore is from *Kalimantan*, entitled ‘*Legend of Erau Dragon*’. This tale weaves together ecological wisdom and moral instruction, encoding lessons about reciprocity with nature and the supernatural. It reveals that compassion and care, especially toward the smallest and most vulnerable beings which can lead to fertility and continuity. The resolution of infertility through moral behavior underscores *Alan Dundes*’ theory of folklore as both a moral compass and a practical guide to survival. Kindness becomes a restorative force, aligning human action with cosmic harmony.

Rita Charon’s narrative medicine offers a complementary lens, interpreting childlessness as a rupture in life’s continuity. The tale reframes this suffering by embedding it within a broader narrative of care, transformation, and divine reciprocity. Healing unfolds through storytelling. The dragon’s blessing not only brings a child but also restores social balance and secures the lineage. Just as narrative medicine emphasizes the therapeutic power of meaning-making, this story shows that true healing transcends physical remedies. It requires emotional, ethical, and spiritual renewal achieved through acts of love, respect, and storytelling that help the community navigate and transform its suffering.

The Legend of Erau Dragon encodes healing through symbolic fertility and ecological reciprocity rather than direct herbal or ritual remedies. Through Dundes’ lens, it teaches both ethical lessons (compassion, gratitude) and practical survival strategies (respecting nature, commemorating with rituals). Through Charon’s framework, the tale operates as a therapeutic narrative, giving meaning to suffering (infertility) and restoring harmony through storytelling and ritual commemoration (*Erau Festival*).

The third folklore is from west Java, entitled *Dewi Sri*. This folklore is a sacred guide to survival and a way to classify ethnobotany. It tells you which plants can heal, feed, and protect you. These aren’t just symbols. They are the herbs that make up *jamu*, the herbal medicine that is a part of everyday life in Java. The story teaches practical things like how to live, how to heal, and how to respect the land. Alan Dundes’ view of folklore shows that *Dewi Sri*’s story teaches both moral lessons and ecological intelligence. It teaches that sacrifice leads to health, gratitude leads to abundance, and respect leads to nature’s response.

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Rita Charon's narrative medicine turns the myth into a healing text. Illness starts with a cosmic imbalance, like Batara Guru's forbidden desire or the gods' fear. The death of *Dewi Sri* starts the healing process, which is a break in the story that leads to change. Her body is the medicine. Her tale becomes the remedy. The forth folklore entitled *Calon Arang*. It contains theme where Illness is treated as epidemic caused by black magic. *Calon Arang* is a healing narrative that encodes medical knowledge through ritual, ethics, and storytelling. It teaches that illness is a rupture in cosmic order, and healing comes through spiritual realignment and collective action.

La Galigo, the *Legend of Erau Dragon*, *Dewi Sri*, and *Calon Arang* are four folktales that collectively illustrate a common cultural logic that views illness as a disruption in cosmic, moral, or ecological balance rather than just a physical ailment. Every story portrays healing as a complex process that incorporates ethics, ritual, and storytelling. These stories provide frameworks for reestablishing harmony, whether through the spiritual confrontation in *Calon Arang*, the botanical wisdom of *Dewi Sri*, the compassionate deeds in the *Erau Dragon* tale, or the ceremonial recitation of *La Galigo*. All four stories show that healing is a cosmological, collective process rather than an individual one. The stories help communities achieve resilience and balance by enacting remedies through storytelling rather than just describing them.

E. CONCLUSION

Traditional medicine is deeply embedded in the healing narratives of Indonesian folklore, each tale offering a distinct cultural lens on illness, recovery, and ecological wisdom. In *Calon Arang*, illness manifests as a deadly epidemic caused by black magic, symbolizing spiritual imbalance. Healing comes through ritual offerings of food and flowers, led by Mpu Bharadah, a priest who embodies the traditional healer (*dukun/pendeta*) archetype. His intervention restores harmony, and the tale continues to be ritually enacted in *Barong–Rangda* performances, which serve as communal exorcisms to protect villages from disease.

Across these four Indonesian folktales, *La Galigo*, *Dewi Sri*, *Erau Dragon*, and *Calon Arang*, healing is portrayed not as a purely physical remedy but as a restoration of cosmic, ecological, and moral balance. Each story encodes therapeutic knowledge through ritual, narrative, and ethical action. *Dewi Sri* offers a botanical blueprint for healing, where sacrifice yields medicinal abundance and agricultural continuity. *La Galigo* emphasizes ancestral harmony and maritime ritual as pathways to health, while *Erau Dragon* centers compassion and ecological reciprocity as sources of fertility and emotional renewal. *Calon Arang*, though darker in tone, frames illness as a spiritual rupture, resolved through collective ritual

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and ethical confrontation. Despite their regional and thematic differences, all four stories share a belief that healing is communal, symbolic, and deeply intertwined with nature and the divine.

These narratives reflect the pluralism and depth of Indonesian cultural values. They honor local wisdom, ecological stewardship, and the power of storytelling to transform suffering. From Sulawesi's ritual epics to Java's ethnobotanical myths and Kalimantan's tales of kindness, each folklore preserves regional identity while contributing to a shared cultural ethos. Healing is not confined to the body, it is a moral, spiritual, and ecological act. Through Dundes' and Charon's lenses, we see that Indonesian folklore functions as both a survival manual and a moral compass, guiding communities toward resilience through reverence, ritual, and narrative care.

Together, these four folklore traditions reveal that traditional medicine in Indonesia is not merely about remedies. It is a living system of ritual, ecology, and moral action. Healing is relational, sacred, and deeply woven into the stories communities tell to survive, remember, and thrive.

These results highlight the continued value of folklore in modern Indonesian society as a cultural tool for resilience, healing, and ecological ethics. These tales offer more than just consolation in an era of environmental deterioration, public health issues, and social disintegration; they offer models for collective care, ecological stewardship, and moral introspection. Values that are desperately needed today are reflected in *Dewi Sri's* respect for nature, *Erau Dragon's* compassion, *La Galigo's* ritual wisdom, and *Calon Arang's* ethical confrontation. These stories serve as a reminder that healing is relational, spiritual, and ecological in addition to biomedical as Indonesia deals with issues of climate change, healthcare disparities, and cultural preservation.

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